
Ministry Media Matters

An Exploration of a Theological Framework for Ministry Media & Culture

V 2019

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PREFACE

Ministry Media Matters is a synthesis of key media theorists and theologians' concepts and core texts. This compilation offers a distinctly Christian, ministry-focused framework exploring various topics in media theory, the makeup of ministry media ecosystems, and why it is important to make meaningful ministry media.

Matter: The substance of which a thing consists or is composed

Matter: An affair or situation under consideration; a topic

Matter: To be of importance; have significance; meaning

The media makers in mind are those with a specific organizational ministry calling—as opposed to the Christian in the general media marketplace. For example: Should a church community be investing in and creating media? What media matters for the mission of your community or organization? How can your community become better creators of media messages? Is your community thinking theologically about media use/creation?

At the same time, the perspectives here hold “ministry media” in the highest and most idealized view—free of modern biases, business practices, or market pressures. In this way every Christian may be edified to create in pure, unfettered, worshipful, and God-honoring ways regardless of their vocational profession.

Our various cultural expressions, art, communications, and media—from sacraments and liturgies to print media and electronic media to emerging media platforms, as well as our various organizational types from church traditions/denominations to ministry organizations—have all been engaged on different (and sometimes contradictory) communication models. This work seeks to unify all ministry media under one cohesive theoretical and theological framework.

Drawing from fundamental media theorists and critics within the broader academy, as well as Christian thinkers who have contributed relevant work, some parts will be integrative, others an interwoven summary of vital quotes for consideration, and others dedicated to exploratory conclusions.

The voice of this work emerges from beneath an overtly modern, American, mainstream Evangelical Christian dynamic. The choice to highlight certain views, critiques, or solutions should be understood within that context. While the constructive criticisms may be addressed to a specific part of the Church, and there is a clear intent to serve and improve that part of the Body of Christ, the greater hope is that this work provokes thought to help edify and equip gospel communicators in any culture or media landscape.

The current version of this document is a curricular supplement meant to exist in concert with accompanying undergraduate classroom lectures and discussion. Many sections are incomplete without that specific additional content.

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INTRODUCTION

“...and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs...”

~ Exodus 35:31-32

We live in an amazing age. One with techniques and technologies that can reach millions, speak through time and space, walk through walls, transcend language and culture, pass into the very heart of us...and simultaneously we have talented men and women passionate to use media to manifest beauty, emotion, and the human condition to express vividly what we all feel vaguely. Making unseen Truth tangible, and pointing heads and hearts to their Creator in powerful ways. Causing the soul to leap and say, *Yes!...me too...that is exactly how I feel. I thought I was the only one—I am not alone.* Expressive forms that set a mirror to the world and to the human heart. Forcing us to face ourselves, to see and think and feel in new ways. Such a power for cultural change needs theologically trained communicators and media artists.

Theologically trained media artists, communicators, and creative directors are essential for gospel communication. Modern media possess nearly unrivaled influence over an individual's identity and reality. Due to the immense culture making and influential potential of art and modern media, ministry communicators must be among the most theologically trained and biblically grounded. The complexities of crafting theologically accurate messages using classic and modern media should not be underestimated. A robust theology must be entwined with biblically informed media ecology before being applied to communication practices.

For example, the reasons to choose one media form over another due to how a medium, by its nature, changes a message requires skilled caretakers to guide the creative process. To accurately communicate God's story requires fluency in how specific media affects the message and interacts with a particular culture. In order to ensure the intended message is received, one must first understand how to use these powerful tools in a way most glorifying to God. Modern media offers far too much potential to wield them poorly.

God's stories are best told through theologically grounded communicators who, in their fellowship with a living God, understand how to craft authentic messages alongside other ministry practitioners. Hiring technicians to execute a message/vision they do not fully believe in or understand is simply ill-advised. As is merely applying popular techniques or “best practices” without a proper understanding of the context, the message, and the medium.

Perhaps most importantly, to theologically equip creative men and women is to celebrate the heart of a creative God. Unleashing the vision of prophetic voices who are gifted and called to reality revealing creativity. How could we not invest in using creative media arts to glorify God?

A distinct theology of media and accompanying framework for creating ministry media is vital.

PART 1: CONFLICT

*“Reality is a scarce resource. The fundamental form of power is the power to define, allocate, and display this resource. Once the blank canvas of the world is portrayed and featured, it is also preempted and restricted. Therefore, the site where artists paint, writers write, speakers speak, filmmakers film, broadcasters broadcast is simultaneously the site of **social conflict over the real**. What’s more, a critical theory of communication must affirm what is before our eyes and transcend it by imagining, at the very least, a world more desirable.”*

~ James W. Carey

COMMUNICATIONS AS CULTURE

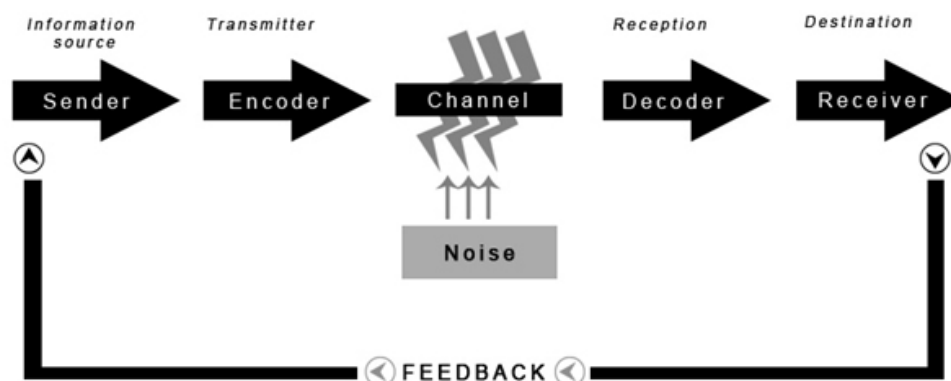
Do you want to be a communicator? Do you have something to say? Do you want your communication and media to matter? If you’re a Christian, you must at least want to communicate the Good News well, right? If so, can you explain how communication takes place? Do you have a functioning model of communications, media, and culture? A case could be made that no one is communicating anything without one.

At very least, as natural communicators, everyone has a model for or perspective on communications and culture whether they recognize it or not. This perspective is shown in what you make. When it comes to communications and culture we can easily see how theory shapes actuality.

To begin, we must first revisit our fundamental understanding of what communications is and how it “works” or “happens.” Most of us have been raised within and directly taught a singular view of communications. One, as it turns out, while not necessarily wrong is woefully inadequate.

The Transmission Model:

At some point in most everyone's western education they have been schooled in the “transmission” (a.k.a transportation) model of communications; “sender-to-receiver” should sound familiar. A message is on a train (the medium) leaving the station (the sender) and on its way to the intended destination (receiver) is a familiar metaphor. It’s drawn like this:



The transmission model breaks down as follows:

- **Sender:** This is the person, group, or organization that needs to communicate. They start with an idea that needs to be delivered to another person.
- **Message:** This is the “idea” that is being communicated. It may be very simple—“Fire!” or it may be complex—“I think, that maybe, it is best if we had some time apart from one another.”
- **Receiver:** The person or group or audience who “gets” the message. They may or may not be the intended audience.
- **Medium:** (Channel) The way the message is delivered—or the tool that is used. Messages can be delivered by letter, by smoke-signal, by billboards, by phone, by a shrug...
- **Noise:** Anything that interferes with the successful delivery of your message.
- **Feedback:** Lets you know if the audience received the message, if they understood it, and what they thought of it.
- **Miscommunication:** When we talk to one another it does not always go smoothly; example, the “telephone game.”

This is the Shannon-Weaver model published in 1948 in *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* by American mathematician, Claude Shannon.¹ The title of the publication, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, alone should alert us to the limits of this model. This view of communications is an overt product of an era obsessed with reducing everything to techniques and efficiencies. As if communication can be reduced to an equation that merely needs to be applied. Since its inception, this model has been widely criticized for being far too simplistic, yet it nonetheless took root in post-war (WWII) education and cultural mindsets. The transmission “model” was quickly extrapolated into a transmission “view” that began to define media practices.²

Not only should this model sound familiar, but a little reflection can help us easily see the outworkings of this communication theory within the modern Evangelical church (itself still significantly influenced by 1950’s American culture). We have constructed most of our Sunday mornings, groups, and media around this grasp on communication. Unfortunately, this means much of our ministry media is another adventure in missing the point.

Insight from Christian communications scholars Robert Fortner and Quentin Schultze (Calvin College) and Charles Kraft (Fuller Theological Seminary) will help navigate the lessons and limits of the transmission view:

The transmission view of communications “provided a seductive set of assumptions for those who sought to proclaim or preach a message designed to convert or convince an audience . . . It was a convenient model of communication within the evangelical tradition. Its seduction has continued for those who use media as a vehicle for delivery, fed by myths of propaganda and the effectiveness of advertising campaigns that use persuasive techniques. But, like the mathematical theory, this approach is both basic and insufficient” (Fortner 54).

If communication is merely a mechanical process in which formatted messages are churned out largely to fill the air (of churches, street corners, or radio frequencies) for the purpose of evangelism, then perhaps Christians are accomplishing their task—so long as no one looks too closely at the art. But if communication is more than that—and I am suggesting it is—then Christians must reconsider how they fill the air and who will encounter the air that they fill, and what others will make of what they encounter in that air (Fortner 157).

¹ [See the original publication here:](https://goo.gl/hW4fB6) <https://goo.gl/hW4fB6>

² It is highly unlikely that Shannon ever foresaw or intended his mathematical model (designed to explain telecommunications) being taken so far as a communications theory.

Ironically, when Protestants began devising systems for mass evangelism they often focused on the impact of human technique instead of on the power of God. Especially during the Great Awakening of the mid-eighteenth century, mass evangelists such as George Whitefield refined dramatic techniques and rhetorical strategies that would “guarantee” conversions. They viewed “soul winning” as a human-oriented enterprise. In the process, Protestant evangelists inadvertently advanced a secularized view of communication (Schultze 52).

This system perhaps peaked during the rise of the “speaking pastor” in the 1980’s and 1990’s. A trend particularly popular among Generation X. Suddenly, many would-be pastors were training to primarily be public speakers—as opposed to relational ministers. Believing, in the most well meaning way possible, that perhaps if they could just reword and deliver the orthodox teaching they were raised on in new, exciting, pop-culturally relevant, and technically excellent ways, then revival would happen. A vibrant Christianity would spring forth if they could just maximize their guru-like eloquence. The accompanying ministry media and church models exemplify the limits and potential pitfalls of a transmission bias.

If our theories of communication tempt us to assume that proper techniques properly applied usually ‘work,’ not only have we failed to see God’s enormous effort to communicate, but we have also been willing to assert that our job is merely to present the orthodox message and challenge people to see its truth. The result has been a preoccupation with the content of the messages—an intense concern for what we communicate and insufficient attention to how and with whom we communicate. (Fortner 66) “Our own eager embrace of possibilities for efficient and massive increases in the flow of information has eroded our expectations of communication (Fortner 78).³

The Making of Meaning:

For our communications, media, and art to have any hope of ministering to others it must be meaningful. It must matter. Our messages cannot be reduced to raw information. We want to make meaningful messages. We want to be meaning makers. Therefore, to make meaningful ministry media that matters we begin by becoming students of how meaning is made—how it gets into us, into our communities, into our culture, and into our media.

This is a challenge for everyone, especially our media artists. Even grasping the concept of “meaning” seems to evade our language. We know when something is “meaningful” because the experience is at the core of what is to be human. However, how that meaning happened is often difficult to explain. This alone reveals the full limits of a transitional posture towards communications and culture.

Meaning: the thing one intends to convey; the thing that is conveyed; a significant quality; the end, purpose, or significance of something; the message inherent in something

When you ask someone to explain why something has significance to them (is meaningful) we immediately find the concept most naturally explored through story—as in the story behind where the meaning came from—and most often this is an explanation of physical and personal interrelationships. This shared human phenomenon of “meaning” teaches us a lot about how communications works, how it happens.

A dictionary can’t tell you what a word means. It can only refer to other words. Unless you experience anger, you can’t understand what it means. The word’s definition is not enough. A dictionary most certainly can’t tell you what an object, sign, symbol, place or persons means to

³ **READ:** *Communications, Media, and Identity* by Robert S. Fortner

you. Meaning then, is an experiential part of our reality.

In parallel, picture two canvases on a wall: One is filled with abstract art that when viewed somehow makes you feel a sense of gloom or sadness or maybe lightness and hope. The other canvas just has the words “feel sad” printed in black letters on a white background. Can the words merely stated (aka transmitted) without narrative context make you feel sad? Not usually. Can color and pattern make you feel something? Most often, yes. Therefore, art communicates meaning in ways words can’t. Art matters because of its ability to make meaning.

The transmission view is also insufficient as a complete model for communication because of its inability to include meaning in the transmission equation or to account for the activities of an actively interpreting audience. Meaning is an aspect of communication that is not fully in the control of those initiating a connection, so it cannot adequately be accounted for in a linear, one-way, mechanistic system.⁴ Yet without the concept of meaning, the very notion of communication is sterile (Fortner 53). Meaning isn’t manufactured (emotional manipulation, maybe).⁵

In fact, Shannon is quite overt about the irrelevance of meaning in his model. Stating in the introduction of *A Mathematical Theory of Communication*: “Frequently the messages have *meaning*; that is they refer to or are correlated according to some system with certain physical or conceptual entities. These semantic aspects of communication are irrelevant to the engineering problem”(Shannon and Weaver 31).

Transmission models based ultimately on manipulation and control leave little room for human and divine creativity...Transmission theories distort our calling to be caretakers of creation. They probably appeal to our urge to dominate our neighbors rather than serve them. (Schultze 53)⁶

The interpretations of the receptors lead to the most important activity that receptors engage in, that of *constructing the meanings* of the messages they receive. Communication theorists have amassed a considerable amount of evidence to indicate that meanings do not lie in words or other symbols that we use, but rather, in the people that use them. Meaning is not transmitted from person to person but constructed by people on the basis of their interpretations of the words and other communicational symbols they receive. Receptors, therefore, are actively engaged at all times in constructing the understandings with which they come away (Kraft 73).

Reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning.

~ C.S. Lewis (*Bluspels and Flalansferes*)

Meanings are in people, [they are] covert responses, contained within the human organism. Meanings...are personal, our own property. We learn meanings, we add to them, we distort them, forget them, change them. We cannot *find* them. They are in us, not in messages. Fortunately, we usually find other people who have meanings that are similar to ours. To the extent that people have similar meanings, they can communicate. If they have no similarities in

⁴ Consider this: If I as a professor just talk “at” someone they will never connect with me (nor I with them). Communications needs some nature of dialogue to be meaningful. An intimate conversation even about trivial matters becomes more meaningful than my best lecture.

⁵ This is not to say that there is no meaning in transmitted messages. What Fortner likely intends to identify is not so much that there is no meaning in the transmission, but simply that it can’t be controlled or measured like in an equation. Nor can we control what the Holy Spirit does with any given message—whether it be sterilized christian media or dark and grotesque media – if God chooses it to move the heart, then it will. All completely independent from the sender's intentions.

⁶ **READ: *Communicating For Life* by Quentin Schultze**

meaning between them they cannot communicate...The elements and structure of language do not themselves have meaning. They are only symbols, sets of symbols, cues that cause us to bring our own meanings into play to think about them, to rearrange them, etc. *Communication does not consist of the transmission of meaning*. Meanings are not transmittable, not transferable. Only messages are transmittable, and meanings are not in the message they are in the message-users (Berlo 83).

The understanding that what messages mean is constructed by the receiver rather than inherent in the message is perhaps the single most threatening insight of contemporary communication theory for Christian communicators (Kraft 92).

No one can simply tell you that something is meaningful. Yet, that is typically how we are preached to and taught. Often there is an expectation of meaning from the sender—one that goes unmet or not as intended. For example, if someone were to hand you a pen and tell you that it should be important to you, would it be automatically? Not likely. However, there might be meaning in the relationship with the gifter and the object then becomes meaningful because of who gave it. It should be the same way with our communication and ministry media (as it was with Jesus).

In this way, and through our own relationships, we can clearly see that even relationally generated meaning is conceived by the receiver and the way they experience a given relationship. For example, what the gifter might hope to have positive meaning might instead become a negative totem in the receiver's life. Meaning can't be controlled—it is more likely to be discovered or brought forth, poesis.

Contrary to popular belief, artists do not usually give form to preconceived meanings, but instead discover meaning in forms. It is through playing and experimenting with materials, be it paint, clay, sounds or computer images, that the artist creates forms which turn out to represent, or allude to the way we experience the world (Brand 124).⁷

C. S. Lewis saw these same challenges in origin of meaning from a theological perspective: "Creation" as applied to human authorship seems to me entirely misleading term. We rearrange elements He has provided. There is not a vestige of real creativity *de novo* in us. Try to imagine a new primary colour, a third sex, a fourth dimension, or even a monster which does not consist of bits and parts of existing animals stuck together. Nothing happens. And that surely is why our works never mean to others quite what we intended: because we are recombining elements made by Him and already containing His meanings" (Letters 203).

"An artist does not tell us what he sees, he enables us to see; he communicates the unutterable identity of what he sees."

~ John Ruskin

It is the search for meaning and its significance to human life that animates creative expression and the exploration of human significance, love, hate, inhumanity (Fortner 20).

The more that meaning has become part of the explanatory apparatus of research, the more difficult it has been to apply statistical (or, some might say, scientific) formulations to explain the relationship of media content to people (Fortner 126).

Therefore, we cannot say that we have preached the message merely because we have put it in

⁷ This is most simply illustrated by drawing a basic circle, which by the addition of two full stops and a semi-circle—presto—transforms into a smiling face.

the form of a three-part sermon, or issued the call to conversion, because this means may not be one that connects with, or is meaningful to, those to whom we attempt to take the word. Otherwise, we are guilty of accepting the questionable effects paradigm, and stuck in a 1950s understanding of communication...If we see the process of taking the word of Christ to people merely as a technique of arranging the right words in the right order—*la technique seulement*—in the right format (the sermon), then we are ignoring the existential reality of our audiences (or, if not ignoring it, not taking it seriously enough). We are paying attention to language, but to language in a vacuum (Fortner 131).

Language apart from its use, its literal appearing, echos Immanuel Kant's Noumenal Realm, the realm of things as they are in themselves. This realm is the realm of Parmenides Sphere ("What Is both must be (or exist), and it must be what it is, not only temporally but also spatially. For What Is to be (or exist) across times is for it to be ungenerated and deathless; and for it to be *what it is* across times is for it to be "still" or unchanging."⁸) Plato's forms, Plotinus's One, Descarte Innate Ideas—really pretty much everyone's general understanding of reality until the 19th century, and then with some stragglers up until the present. The problem with grounding language fundamentally in this sphere is reflected above. After Kant's division of the Noumenal from the Phenomenal realm—the realm of things as they appear to me to be—and his realization that we do not have epistemological access to the Noumenal, grounding language in this immutable realm distances it from language as we know, use and inhabit it. Precisely these three, experiential knowledge, gratuitous use and world constructing inhabitation make language meaningful, for in these is the realization of the way language gives (existential) form to those who live in them, communicate through them. Neither technique nor disinterested language in a spherical vacuum can account for (the way) language matters.

We can recognize the difference between "Wow, that was a really good message/art"—speaking mostly to its technique and delivery. And "Wow, that is the message/art of someone or some people who seem to have/be something different." The first would obviously be more attuned to a specific message or theology being transmitted. The later leaves room for the message/art to be more openly creative because it represents a true version of reality from that person or group's perspective.

To exemplify, think of a Gregorian chant, African song, or the gospel sound of slaves in the American south. Reflect on where they came from and how those sounds and words originated. Cultures are full of undeniably beautiful music and art that can offer powerful and striking contrasts to our own experiences.

A Christianity that produces nothing of the latter has evidenced it has no unique culture. What then are we inviting anyone into? We can not transform culture simply by transmitting over the cultural wall into it from our detached station or ghetto. We must generate meaningful communication and media.

While we have been formally schooled in one view of communications, our experiences can often teach us far more. Through life we realize that messages and meaning come from more than just transmitted sources. That intellectual assent rarely has the largest impact on our beliefs or daily behaviors. That what a person or group represents is far more influential than what they say. That often it is the very doing of something that contains all the meaning independent from the transmitted messages that often accompany the act.⁹ That meaning is

⁸ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/parmenides/>

⁹ Consider the example of family and family traditions: when a family gathers, it matters less what they talk about than the fact that they do it. Typically in a traditional place that also holds meaning. What communicates that they are a distinct family? When new spouses or children arrive, what are they being

complex; and the making of it even more so.

The complexity of interrelationships involved in where meaning comes from encourages and frees us to employ creativity, variety, and discourse in our communications practices. Enlisting incarnate artists over technicians.

Put simply, communications “to” culture is only a part of understanding communications “as” culture. In other words, being “known by our love” (John 13:35) is filled with rich complexity, divine wisdom, and practical truth.¹⁰

The Ritual Model:

To unpack this idea of communications as culture it is helpful to explore a much older (and literally more timeless) view of communications. One that looks to religious ritual and is thus often referred to as the “ritual model” of communications and culture. When held in contrast to the transmission view of communications an important understanding of communications and cultural change begins to take shape.

The ritual view is an academic communications theory outlined by James Carey in his essential text, *Communications as Culture*.¹¹ These concepts were developed as communication theory, not from theology nor by Christians. That said, the implications are remarkably theological in nature.

The ritual view understands the original and highest manifestation of communication not as transmission of intelligent information, but as construction of and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful, cultural world to serve as a control and container of human action (Carey 18).

Ritual Model/View of Comm and Culture

- Maintenance of society in time
- Representation of shared beliefs, missional in nature
- Purpose = sacred ceremony that draws people together in fellowship and community
- Religion: prayer, chant/song, ceremony
- Views media as art, expressive, representational

Transmission Model/View of Comm and Culture

- Maintenance of society in space
- Imparting information
- Purpose = control over geography, attractional to a central source of information or power
- Religion: sermon, instruction, admonition
- Views media as message carrier

This projection of community ideals and their embodiment in material form—externalized as dance, plays, architecture, news stories, strings of speech—creates an artificial though nonetheless real symbolic order that operates to promote not information, but confirmation. Not to alter attitudes or to change minds, but to represent an underlying order of things; not to

invited into? Is it the content of the conversation or that the same family stories are told over and over again as a ritual? Now contemplate the centrality of the family metaphor (and profound reality) to all Christian theology as the family of God.

¹⁰ The love which we are to be known by must be through relationships and the community of the Church. Not only, or even primarily, through our media. The point is less about showing love through our media, but in that how we are known is to be primarily defined by our communal love of one another. Modern culture may “know” us more by our media instead. That this kind of love for one another communicates as culture and to the broader culture what Jesus intended thus provides fundamental framework for meaningful communication as well.

¹¹ **READ: *Communication as Culture* by James W Carey**

perform functions, but to manifest an ongoing and fragile social process (Carey 19).¹²

The connections here to a Kingdom ethic are readily apparent. Let's look at the above statement again with some added parenthetical, contextual emphasis:

This projection of community ideals and their embodiment in material form (on earth as it is in heaven) externalizes as dance, plays, architecture, news stories, strings of speech (art/media) creates an artificial (mediated) though nonetheless real symbolic order that operates to promote not **information**, but **confirmation**. Not to alter attitudes (behavior modification) or change minds (argumentation), but to represent an underlying order of things (general and special revelation); not to perform functions (church roles), but to manifest an ongoing and fragile social process (bear witness).

Communication, then, is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed (Carey 23).

Reality is consistently broken down by people who are lost physically and spiritually due to sin and natural, unceasing decay of the created order; reality therefore must constantly be repaired. Entropy, the natural breakdown of all things, is a powerful and inescapable truth. Everything is in a constant state of decay. Every star in the heavens, every cell in your body, every molecule. Anything not given constant upkeep will eventually crumble. Every building, our bodies, anything left unattended will eventually fall into disrepair.

Why would we think our thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, and identity would be any different? All are facing constant, relentless breakdown both naturally and through untruths both whispered and shouted. We simply forget. The way we combat this breakdown is through our communications and by extension our media. In this way, we produce, maintain, repair and transform the ways we understand and experience reality, countervailing entropy's psychic effect.¹³

Entropy, disorder, the destructive confusion and lawlessness that sin brings with it is to be fought. Christian media artists are called and equipped to expose it for what it is. To engage this conflict of the real, enacting revival, and promoting restoration is possibly best articulated in the rich biblical concept of *shalom*. A beautiful word most simply defined as: Nothing missing, nothing broken.

God's grace in human communication mysteriously steers us away from entropy and toward shalom: all of our successful communication is like a love letter from God (Schultze 35).

Unless every effort is made to stay connected to the audience, to understand it, and take it into account (including people's vocabulary, struggles, needs, values, interests, etc.), and this account is used in every sentence (even in the selection of every word), entropy will quickly

¹² Consider the example of rap music: A form generated by unique cultural experiences. It manifested as an inspired expression of a specific group of people (marginalized urban Americans). Authentic expression is so regardless of the form. "Using" rap music to "reach" those enticed by the popularity and uniqueness of the form is a transmission fallacy. Any "rap" created by these motives will be cheap, inauthentic, and meaningless. It will resemble the form, but be empty.

¹³ I can prove it to you: listen close, I want to tell you something true: You are created, You are known, You are loved, You are seen, You are heard, You are enough...and don't let anyone tell you differently, least of all yourself...Now, more than likely, not only will something inside you squirm and fight the hearing of these words, you will begin to forget their truth even before the end of this line. The voice in your head starts spreading doubt, insecurity and self-destruction. This is entropy at work in your perception of reality.

overcome the process (Fortner 134).

If entropy is not fought a void, vacuum, and lurking chaos is created. We will reach out for signals to ground our identity, meanings, and perceptions of reality in time and space. If no one confronts this entropy of meaning in a way that maintains order and beauty in our lives, we may watch a movie, or play a game, or read a book where any semblance of that is happening. In this way, we engage media as religious texts—as texts that we read and interpret our reality into and through. This makes our religion “Star Wars,” our icons movie posters, and our prayers soundtracks. Therefore, fighting entropy is one and the same as fighting idolatry.

Our attempts to construct, maintain, repair, and transform reality are observable activities that occur in historical time. We create, express, and convey our knowledge of and attitudes toward reality through various constructions of symbol systems such as art, science, journalism, religion, common sense, and mythology (Carey 30).

To regain the strengths of the ritual view of communications we must first discard the view of language as reference, correspondence, and representation and the parallel view that the function of language is primarily to express assertions about the world. **Then, we must substitute the view that language, communication, is a form of action—or, better, interaction—that not merely represents or describes, but actually molds or constitutes the world** (Carey 64).

This is a ritual view of communication emphasizing the production of a coherent world (for Christians this is The Kingdom of God) that then is presumed (lived as if—almost, but not yet), for all practical purposes, to exist. It is to emphasize the construction and maintenance of paradigms rather than experiments; presuppositions rather than propositions; the frame rather than the picture” (Carey 85).¹⁴

The Christian gospel does not call people to give their mental assent to a certain list of correct prepositions, nor does it provide its adherents with a password that will gain them disembodied bliss when they die and the pleasure of confidently awaiting their escape until then. Shalom is a way of being in the world. The Christian gospel invites us to partake in shalom, to embody shalom, and to anticipate its full realization in the coming Kingdom of God (Dark 17).

Thus it is more crucial to understand the nature of communication, including technological media, as a foundational social process...Communication has consequences; it matters. It is not merely a means to entertain, although it does that, and it is not merely a means to transfer information, although it provides the means for that to occur. It is also the means by which people define themselves, organize themselves into organizations, businesses, educational institutions, and so on, and come to common understandings about motives, meanings, and relationships (Fortner 6).

As James Lull (2000, p. 10) puts it (also quoting John Tomlinson, 1999, p. 18): “Through communication we create culture, and when we communicate, we communicate culturally: ‘Culture can be understood as the order of life in which human beings construct meaning through practices of symbolic representation ... [that is] by communicating with each other’ (Fortner 14).

Communication is a dynamic symbolic process by which people in dialogue construct the meanings and share the emotions through which they understand, value, and live in society, and by which they both behave and justify their behavior” (Fortner 18). A more complete

¹⁴ Parentheticals added.

understanding of communication is, in the words of David L. Altheide, “**grounded in the search for meaning, rather than causation or technological determinism**” (Fortner 60).

Ours is the task of asking what is the measure of meaningful messages. Not what are the techniques and technologies that appear to “work.” In this same vein, popularity might not be the best measure of what media matters. Meaning and truth within the frame of reality as revealed by God are at stake.

Reality is a scarce resource. The fundamental form of power is the power to define, allocate, and display this resource. Once the blank canvas of the world is portrayed and featured, it is also preempted and restricted. Therefore, the site where artists paint, writers write, speakers speak, filmmakers film, broadcasters broadcast is simultaneously the site of **social conflict over the real**. What’s more, **a critical theory of communication must affirm what is before our eyes and transcend it by imagining, at the very least, a world more desirable** (Carey 87).

The biblical relevance and theological implications of this view of communications are remarkable. How amazing is it that the academic theorists can see what Christians should already know?

The Church should certainly be a creative force in the “social conflict over the real.” Our communication must be rooted in meaning and adverse of mere technique. Christians should see the limits in the mere transmission of propositions and represent confirmation before information. Affirming the reality of this present experience and transcending it by manifesting the Kingdom of Heaven through our communication and media. Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven both lived and proclaimed.

Binding Space and Time:

The ritual view leads to communications and media better at binding meaning and identity of a specific group of people over time. The transmissional view leads to communication and media aimed at binding people across geographic space. These contrasting views are to at least be used in balance. Not in dichotomy. Ideally, they will help us craft modern synergistic model for communications. However, seemingly as a culture becomes more space binding (transmission) they become less time binding (ritual). And vice-versa. The problem lies with the dominant media:

Time = heavy and durable (persistent and difficult to destroy)—like oral tradition.

Space = light and portable—like digital media.

Ritual: Time Binding

- Connection over vast differences (example of church in Antioch).
- Oral, manuscript, tradition, community, morals, and metaphysics.
- A time binding culture is interested in identity over time—history, connectivity, permanence, contraction:
 - Oral
 - Mythopoetic
 - Religious
 - Ritualistic
 - Communities rooted in place
 - Intimate ties and shared historical

Transmission: Space Binding

- Connection over vast distances (example of telegraphy making democracy possible).
- Print and electronics.
- A culture predominantly interested in space: land, voyage, discovery, movement, expansion, empire. e.g. Denominations and multi-site models of church.
- Products: navigation, engineering, price systems, mathematics, bureaucracies...
- Technique and best practices >> Ellul’s technological society.

- culture (e.g. The Hebrew people)
- Time binding creates diversity of culture and expression.
- Social representation.
- Focused more on the source of meaning, the cultural identity or theological text, and sees the acts of expression as ultimately loyalty to the source.
- Space binding more in tune with technological efficiencies and less about traditions and local identity.
- Space binding creates a homogeneous hub of content and message.
- Social control.
- Focused more on the receiver of the message and sees methods as loyal to the "target audience."

The ancient Hebrews serve as the prime example of the time and identity binding power of ritual communication. The ritual and oral tradition outlined in detail throughout the Old Testament created such a strong identity that nothing—not near extinction and holocaust—can break the Jewish bond and cultural identity. The rituals that defined them as a people and kept their countenance on God were a significant part of the "calling out" of a specific distinct people. If being Jewish was just a concept to agree with or messages in the air it would be easy to lose identity and solidarity.

Our structures of consciousness parallel structures of communication (Carey 123). In other words, your model of church reveals your view of communication (or communication bias).¹⁵ If communication is effective over short distances and weak or attenuated over long ones, we would expect that the units of culture, politics, and the common concern that would emerge would be grounded in place, in region, and local communities (Carey 124).

We see clear exemplification of this throughout the scriptures. Local culture and common concern grounded in a local time and place is the context of the Bible. We see consistent and relentless "building back up" and "engaging in the social conflict over the real." For example, the epistles are letters to local communities that not just address the immediate concerns of those specific people, but are in many ways "course-correction" as Paul must remind them what is true when entropy sets in and they begin to drift into false patterns. Some had seen Jesus personally and heard his words, most had heard the gospel from Paul himself and lived it out with him in community. Yet, even from the beginning that wasn't enough. Seemingly as soon as he was gone, additional concrete communication was needed to build up the witness of those communities. Like all of scripture, these letters (read over and over) serve as our example of meaningful ministry media.

Interestingly, even renowned atheists recognize this nature and value of communication—while, at the same time, Evangelicals continue to pursue the styles popularized by modern "secular" culture. Alain de Botton, in a talk on the aspects of religion that atheists should adopt, calls for an incorporation of "religious forms and traditions that better satisfy our human need for connection, ritual, and transcendence."

"...Another point about education: we tend to believe in the modern secular world that if you tell someone something once, they'll remember it. Sit them in a classroom, tell them about Plato at the age of 20, send them out for a career in management consultancy for 40 years, and that lesson will stick with them. Religions go, "Nonsense. You need to keep repeating the lesson 10 times a day. So get on your knees and repeat it." That's what all religions tell us: "Get on you knees and repeat it 10 or 20 or 15 times a day." Otherwise our minds are like sieves. So religions are cultures of repetition. They circle the great truths again and again and again. We associate repetition with boredom. "Give

¹⁵ Consider this: Discipleship as apprenticing differs severely from discipleship as transmitting.

us the new," we're always saying. "The new is better than the old." If I said to you, "Okay, we're not going to have new TED. We're just going to run through all the old ones and watch them five times because they're so true. We're going to watch Elizabeth Gilbert five times because what she says is so clever," you'd feel cheated. Not so if you're adopting a religious mindset...." ("Atheism 2.0").

Primacy of Relationship:

Transmission models have an extreme bias toward "mechanical" communication—techniques, methods, and best practices. Mass, immediate, and fleeting. This turned the listening public into a reading and listening audience with disastrous consequences for community identity. A public is far different than an audience.¹⁶

"The basic, non-negotiable premise of human communication is that it is dialogical, two-way, respecting the receiver as much as the sender, and able to reverse those roles. In the way that most of our media are presently organized and owned, in and outside the church, that's incredibly difficult to take seriously" - John Bluck (1984, p.8). (Fortner 113)¹⁷

As a contrast, consider the example of great professors who, rather than merely lecturing, are able to blend lecture and dialog in an organic way that involves everyone yet still maintains a common thread and main points of the session. Could not preachers learn to do the same? Could modern technology able to invisibly deliver questions and que dialog be implemented? If the microphone amplified the teacher, could the network equally amplify the listener?

Perhaps our lopsided prayer patterns—when we "transmit" a psychic one-sided monologue to God—are evidence that we misunderstand communication, relationship, and intimacy. We neglect basic dialog, verbalization, and nonverbal posture. Our framework for the amazing, intimate gift of prayer has also been overtaken by a transmission mindset.

Even thinking of people as audiences minimizes their agency—as responsible creatures who, at some point, must choose (see Joshua 24:15); it makes them but passive targets for messages (Fortner 116).

Under [a technical or transmissive] approach, the medium of communication—whether a television signal, an audio cassette, a daily newspaper, an Internet website, a Promise Keepers rally, or an intimate conversation between lovers—is merely one testable element in the process of communication. Does it matter what medium one uses to persuade an audience to adopt a neo-Nazi political stance? Is a technologically sophisticated audience more likely to attend to an evangelistic message delivered over a mass medium (e.g., TV or the Internet) than it is to attend a church service? Is one medium more powerful in proclaiming the gospel (or selling detergent or automobiles) than another? (Fortner 60)

Communication is about more than originators' intentions or their success in having those intentions manifested in the behavior of others who attend to them. It is about more than different means of transmitting messages and judging the success of one means over another by the degree to which intentions are borne out in those who encounter the message in different forms or media. **It is about more than encoding and decoding, transmission and control. It**

¹⁶ A public is when everyone's agency is recognized and respected. It has shared ownership—equal and participatory. Their "existential reality" (see Fortner above) is activated. An audience is in a passive, consumer posture that is spoken to but not included or truly respected.

¹⁷

is about relationship¹⁸ (Fortner 60).

The attention to the great commandment (Matthew 28:16-20)—what we might see as the primary *raison d'être* of the missionary movement—is, from a communications perspective, somewhat skewed in emphasis. It is not the “go” that is so significant here, but the expectation that believers would work to create community and reach out to others in intimacy. After all, we are not merely to go, but to baptize, not merely to baptize, but to teach. And the ultimate goal is obedience: acceptance of the uncompromising centrality and expectation of the Creator. And anyone who has taught knows that it is a long-term proposition. It requires sustained attention to detail, performance, attendance, mastery, and practice. Any teacher not intimate with the details of such matters as they pertain to his students is unlikely to succeed. So it is relationship and intimacy that is the key, not the going (Fortner 66).

A bias toward modern transmission models of communication can lead to “go” being misunderstood and functionally translated as “transmit into.” Unfortunately this does not just lead to woefully inadequate communication, but tragically incorrect theology.¹⁹

It's neater and more manageable to concern ourselves with writing elegant sermons, selecting appropriate hymns, or slewing the antenna in the right direction (or knocking on the door with the right tract at the same time), and leaving it up to the Holy Spirit to do the rest. But it is worth recalling here that trusting the Holy Spirit in that way is actually a poor excuse for lazy communication (Fortner 116): it relies on one of Charles H. Kraft's ten myths of Christian communication²⁰:

1. Hearing the gospel with one's ears is equivalent to “being reached” with the gospel.²¹
2. The words of the Bible are so powerful that all that people need to bring them to Christ is to be exposed to hearing or reading the Bible.²²
3. Preaching is God's ordained means of communicating the gospel.
4. The sermon is an effective vehicle for bringing about life change.
5. There is one best way to communicate the gospel.
6. The key to effective communication is the precise formulation of the message.
7. Words contain their meanings.
8. What people really need is more information.
9. The Holy Spirit will make up for all mistakes if we are sincere, spiritual, and prayerful enough.
10. As Christians we should severely restrict our contacts with “evil” people and refrain from going to “evil” places lest we “lose our testimony” and ruin our witness (Kraft 24).

¹⁸ Physically existing things hold more power and meaning than those projected. They are present, can be held, and can be destroyed. Therefore, meaningful media and communication are costly because in large part relationships are costly. Artists know exactly how creativity is a self-giving, relational, depleting act. Digital fleeting platitudes can never have comparable meaning.

¹⁹ Likewise, this under-interpretation of “go” weakens our understanding of “make disciples.” Consider what “make disciples” means in an oral, apprenticeship based culture; versus what we've made becomes in a literate, transmissional one—one model is “work with me, do as I do.” The other is “read this book, know as I know.”

²⁰ **READ: *Communication Theory for Christian Witness* by Charles H. Kraft**

²¹ Just imagine a group of early Christian's deciding what to do in the newly established gathering. How absurd would it have been for someone to suggest they only listen to his lectures while everyone else stays silent?

²² This should be considered in contrast with Isaiah 55:11: “so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” What is the true meaning of that verse as scripture and in the context of scripture?

Our expectations of communication seem pointed the wrong way. It's a matter of technique, because communication should be happening—and happening well, because that's what we do. But this enables us to be lazy communicators. We only have to work at it in special circumstances, not ordinarily. We can use the standard excuses when it fails: 'that's not what I meant' or 'you don't understand' (Fortner 42).

But if we assumed that communication were hard work, that we should expect it to fail rather than succeed, we would make more of an effort—to understand, to pick the right words, to relate to an audience's situation, convictions, and values, to recognize our own culpability when it goes wrong, and to reflect on it to assure that we wouldn't go wrong again. (Fortner 42) **As long as Christians see communication through the same lens as everyone else, they will practice it, abuse it, and restrict it in the same way as everyone else**²³ (Fortner 120).

Communication is about negotiating messages, not transmitting meanings. An understanding of communication as human negotiation, rather than mechanical transaction and as relationship to be worked out between at least two partners is essential for our basic definition. This "working out" is akin to the "social conflict over the real."

What's more, transmission-centric efforts unintentionally create a "monopolization of knowing" by the extension of technical patterns. A dynamic where experts and scholars are expected to be the ones who actually "know." Perhaps this is where the metaphor of the dimly lit auditorium and the brightly lit stage begins. As if the knowledge is up front and the audience is in the dark. Church gatherings, worship, and theology become more like a machine we attend than something we are.²⁴

Modern preaching, for example, is typically speaker centric—full of technical words only the expert speaker knows and can repeat (likely in part because the congregation has not been taught them). Now, think of the difference in dynamic when verses of song are sung—full of familiar words everyone knows and can repeat—thus creating accessibility, connectivity, and community memory.

Or, put differently, think of all the lectures and sermons you have heard in your life. How many do you remember? Can you remember the content? Can you recall the ones that were meaningful? Now think about how many songs you have heard in your life. Which are your favorites? What are the words?

Speaking (transmitting) is like throwing light in a direction. It pulses, and for a moment people can see it—or think they can— but the darkness (entropy) quickly overcomes it. Presence/witness is a like a constant light on the ground. One that is sometimes too far away for others to see. Media can become a bridge between those two experiences. However, media cannot be the thing itself—only portrayed, aka mediated. An image of a thing is never the thing

²³ Consider the words of Bart Gavan in *Aristotle, Hollywood, and the Craft of Story*: In the last century missionaries to the third world really believed they were the ones who were giving, they were the rich ones. In our century, through the terrible mistakes, which have been many, missionaries have found a humility that almost no other Christians have achieved. All the great missionaries in our century understand that they are bringing the gospel, but they are also learning from the culture. They understand that if they do not enter into a dialog with the culture, they cannot bring the gospel...But I've still had people say to me: 'We now understand the need for dialogue in a missionary situation, but surely here in the first world we can use media to preach?' I'm appalled. Don't you understand? You are in a missionary situation here. You're called to enter into a dialogue with the world.

²⁴ **READ: *Technopoly* by Neil Postman**

itself. "This is not a pipe" as René Magritte's famous *Treachery of Images* proclaims.

The counterbalance for this mediated age might be as simple as the gathering being the oral tradition that maintains a public and resists a mass-mediated culture turning everyone into an audience. A church simply is this without having to try any method or technique to be so.

Role of Orality:

James Carey would decry the effect of transmission techniques this way: "Large numbers are spoken to but are precluded from vigorous and vital discussion. Indeed, audiences are not even understood." Due to enlarged range of reception but narrowed points of distribution through technological means. "Entertainment and information and the knowledge to produce these things of the world become increasingly centralized in certain elites and institutions. (Carey 168)

"Lacking an oral culture, one may easily fall prey to experts who do our knowing for us, who inform us but whose knowledge does not easily connect to our actual experience and to the basic transactions of life" (Carey 165).

The localized church community should be the localized oral culture that provides the ideal counterbalance to any modern transmission biases—countervailing what is lost or limited by electric modes of mass communication and media. In this way, the gathering should work in concert with ministry media messages.²⁵ However, if the gathering is completely co-opted by transmissive views and techniques then its role in complete communication-as-culture is severely diminished and all ministry media suffers.

The implications for the Church are evident. For transmission to truly extend/expand such knowledge we would have to be engaged in an equal and parallel growth in the public sphere of the community and be grounded in tradition. Meaning, that if we expect our transmission of messages to actually change an individual or culture, these messages must be accompanied by locating the individual to the whole of Church history (time-binding). Something a lecture simply cannot do well. Something rituals (such as a local gathering) always have.

When mass media are the conduit of revolutionary ideas, people are much more likely to be demonized, victimized, and exploited. Without orality mass-mediated societies can self-destruct (Schultze 71).

It is a faulty premise trying to make all media and art a slave to technique and/or transmission; to measure and control its production and meanings—a misinterpretation of communication and a misunderstanding of communication as culture.

In the pursuit of meaningful messages, using these concepts expands our definition of media and communications. However, if they are seen as just "better" best practices then the point is lost to the cult of technique.²⁶ It might be helpful to think of *intention over execution*. It's less about the styles, or traditional rituals over new media, but what media matters—as in, which media messages actually matter, which forms, and in what way does media affect our cultural ecosystems.

Much of ineffective and "bad" ministry can be traced to very modern or poor theories of communication. The Evangelical Church has a lot to (re)learn about media matters. Our next step is to understand what comprises "media" and set to better understand the nature of the parts and their interrelationships.

²⁵ This is unpacked in Part 2

²⁶ See Part 3

MEDIA ECOLOGY

Media ecology is best defined by The Media Ecology Association²⁷ in quoting cornerstone thinker, Neil Postman:

“The word ecology implies the study of environments: their structure, content, and impact on people.

An environment is, after all, a complex message system which imposes on human beings certain ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving.

- It structures what we can see and say and, therefore, do.
- It assigns roles to us and insists on our playing them.
- It specifies what we are permitted to do and what we are not. Sometimes, as in the case of a courtroom, or classroom, or business office, the specifications are explicit and formal.

In the case of media environments (e.g., books, radio, film, television, etc.), the specifications are more often implicit and informal, half concealed by our assumption that what we are dealing with is not an environment but merely a machine. Media ecology tries to make these specifications explicit. It tries to find out what roles media force us to play, how media structure what we are seeing, why media make us feel and act as we do.

[Thus, in short,] media ecology looks into the matter of how media of communication affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value; and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival.” (Postman, “What”)

Media Ecology is a tool set that allows us to understand the essential embeddedness of people in times and in spaces by the way they communicate (and thus also think) more than just what they communicate. Once the person’s embeddedness is understood, Media Ecology puts us in a position to understand the cultural artifacts they created.

Media ecology helps us reframe our tools and techniques in a way that enables us to think differently about communications as a part of us—natural, organic, story-like. Having begun to understand our own embeddedness, Media ecology puts us in a position to shape the time and space we live in by offering new or different ways of communicating—new forms of being—that will then change the nature of those we come in contact with and slowly the societies we are a part of. It gives us eyes to see what cultural artifacts would bring about health.

Technological change is not additive; it is ecological...What happens if we place a drop of red dye into a beaker of clear water? Do we have clear water plus a spot of red dye? Obviously not. We have a new coloration to every molecule of water. That is what I mean by ecological change. A new medium does not add something; it changes everything. (Postman, “Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change”)

If contrasting the ritual and transmission views of communication help us better understand the nature of communication and media in our lives, we must then look to the place this nature occupies in our collective culture.

²⁷ www.media-ecology.org

In a heavily mediated age such as ours, media can be more fully understood as a part of our human ecosystem; it is as unavoidably everywhere and natural as any other part of our modern environment. Therefore, at very least, our media frameworks must intentionally include mental and emotional grids to exist with holiness in this new ecosystem. In this age, avoidance of media and a theology of cultural engagement are fundamentally incompatible. Socially speaking, we can scarcely abstain from media any more than we can avoid food.

All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered. The medium is the message. **Any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments** (McLuhan 26).

Embedded in every technology there is a powerful idea, sometimes two or three powerful ideas. These ideas are often hidden from our view because they are of a somewhat abstract nature. But this should not be taken to mean that they do not have practical consequences...To a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail. We may extend that truism: To a person with a pencil, everything looks like a sentence. To a person with a TV camera, everything looks like an image. To a person with a computer, everything looks like data. I do not think we need to take these aphorisms literally. But what they call to our attention is that every technology has a prejudice (Postman "Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change").

Like language itself, it predisposes us to favor and value certain perspectives and accomplishments. In a culture without writing, human memory is of the greatest importance, as are the proverbs, sayings and songs which contain the accumulated oral wisdom of centuries. That is why Solomon was thought to be the wisest of men. In 1 Kings I we are told he knew 3,000 proverbs. But in a culture with writing, such feats of memory are considered a waste of time, and proverbs are merely irrelevant fancies. The writing person favors logical organization and systematic analysis, not proverbs. The telegraphic person values speed, not introspection. The television person values immediacy, not history. And computer people, what shall we say of them? Perhaps we can say that the computer person values information, not knowledge, certainly not wisdom. Indeed, in the computer age, the concept of wisdom may vanish altogether (Postman "Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change").

Every technology has a philosophy which is given expression in how the technology makes people use their minds, in what it makes us do with our bodies, in how it codifies the world, in which of our senses it amplifies, in which of our emotional and intellectual tendencies it disregards. This idea is the sum and substance of what the great Catholic prophet, Marshall McLuhan meant when he coined the famous sentence, "The medium is the message" (Postman "Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change").

Seeing media environments includes seeing media as extensions of ourselves. Our media are not just technical amplifiers, but more like extensions of ourselves, our emotions, our concepts and even our central-nervous systems.²⁸ These extensions exist in subtle, complex interrelationship with both our media outputs and inputs.

²⁸ Consider the five senses (sound, sight, touch, smell and taste) as directly linked to communications, media, meaning, and our perceptions of reality. Mediums that contain meaning trigger these senses. Therefore, sight and sound alone limit our framework for media. For example, the sense of smell being the one most strongly tied to memory—suddenly the use of incenses and fragrances in the Bible and various church traditions makes much more sense as a lost medium. Or, think of the role of taste and smell in the bread and wine (medium) of communion adding to the message and the "remembrance of me." Conversely, what does a sterile environment or cheap, mass produced elements communicate? A study on the psychology of senses and perception is a worthy supplement to communication theory.

Christ followers are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). Not *should* be or *could* be light to the world—*Are!* We cannot “be hidden.” We communicate something no matter what. Our media are extensions of our very selves. Electronic visual media is literally light. Media is a central part of any “city” ecosystem. Global connectivity is the highest of “hills.” This profundity must not be lost on anyone. The forms we shape this light into matter, deeply, and were meant to be used to make a difference in the world.

Seminal media critic Marshall McLuhan was “continually amazed at the reluctance, often the downright refusal, of people to pay attention to the effects of media, and at their hostility to him for what he revealed. They included those, clergy and lay, who enthusiastically embrace the latest technologies without regard for their effects. Such people are blindly eager to make the Mass or the sacraments, or the congregation the content of each new gadget or technology that comes along—in the interest of ‘bringing the Church up to date’ and ‘making the Church relevant.’ They are quite innocent of the power of these forms to transform their users—innocent but not guiltless” (McLuhan *The Medium and the Light* xxiii).

None of us fully understands this world of rapidly circulating sounds, images, and texts that we have created in our quest to conquer time and space. We have technical skill to create technologies and compose messages, but we lack the critical, interpretive ability to make sense of the media world and to guide it toward shalom. In fact, the growth of media empires seems to weaken our ability to understand the world. Just when the cost of our mistakes could be especially high, we are lost in heavy “data smog.” Perhaps we have ingested too much of the “silicon snake oil” that causes us to praise new technologies without assessing whether they can live up to their promise to build community (Schultze 71).

When asked, “As a Christian, have you examined the effects that such a context has on the Church and, more precisely, on faith?” McLuhan answered, “I would prefer that most questions of that sort be dealt with by theologians, but they do not seem to be interested” (McLuhan *The Medium and the Light* 45).²⁹

Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication. The alphabet, for instance, is a technology that is absorbed by the very young child in a completely unconscious manner, by osmosis so to speak. Words and the meaning of those words predispose the child to think and act automatically in certain ways. The alphabet and print technology fostered and encouraged a fragmenting process, a process of specialism and detachment. Electric technology fosters and encourages unification and involvement. It is impossible to understand social and cultural changes without a working knowledge of the media. (McLuhan, *The Medium is the Massage*, 8)

Concepts of truth are intimately linked to the biases of forms of expression. Truth does not, and never has, come unadorned. It must appear in its proper clothing or it is not acknowledged, which is a way of saying that the “truth” is a kind of cultural prejudice (Postman 22). A major new medium changes the structure of discourse; it does so by encouraging certain uses of the intellect, but favoring certain definitions of intelligence and wisdom, and by demanding a certain kind of content—in a phrase, by creating new forms of truth-telling (Postman 27). Only through a deep and unfailing awareness of the structure and effects of information, through a demystification of media, is there any hope of our gaining some measure of control over television, or the computer, or any other medium (Postman 160).³⁰

²⁹ Precisely why MBI’s major in bible and media is so relevant and important.

³⁰ **READ: *Amusing Ourselves to Death* by Neil Postman**

Men are suddenly nomadic gatherers of knowledge, nomadic as ever before, informed as never before—but also involved in the total social process as never before; since with electricity we extend our central nervous system globally, instantly interrelating every human experience (McLuhan *Understanding Media* 472).

The family circle has widened. The whirlpool of information fathered by electric media—movies, Telstar, flight—far surpass any possible influence mom and dad can now bring to bear. Character no longer is shaped by only two earnest, fumbling experts. Now all the world's a sage (McLuhan *The Medium is the Message* 14).

In an electric information environment, minority groups can no longer be contained—ignored. Too many people know too much about each other. Our new environment compels commitment and participation. We have become irrevocably involved with, and responsible for, each other (McLuhan *The Medium is the Message* 24).

Consider the technical reality above in light of the theological reality of 1 Corinthians 12: 12-26:

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

*21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 **If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.***

[Media] are total in their action upon us. It doesn't matter what theory we may have about them: their effect upon us is quite independent of any thought we have about them...It is the same with a work of art. The meaning of a work of art, as the artists of past centuries can tell us, has nothing to do with what you think about it. It has to do with its action upon you. It is a form: it acts upon you. It invades your senses. It re-structures your outlook. It completely changes your attitudes, your wave-lengths. So our attitudes, our sensibilities, are completely altered by new forms, regardless of what we think about them. This is a simple fact of experience (McLuhan *The Medium is the Message* 38).

It is not brains or intelligence that is needed to cope with the problems which Plato and Aristotle and all of their successors to the present have failed to confront. What is needed is a readiness to undervalue the world altogether. This is only possible for a Christian³¹...All technologies and all cultures, ancient and modern, are part of our immediate expanse. There is hope in this diversity since it creates vast new possibilities of detachment and amusement at human gullibility and self-deception. There is no harm in reminding ourselves from time to time that the "Prince of this World" is a great P.R. man, a great salesman of new hardware and software, a great electric engineer, and a great master of the media. It is his master stroke to be not only environmental but invisible, for the environmental is invincibly persuasive when ignored

³¹ See Part 3: Sacred vs Secular

(McLuhan *The Medium and the Light* xxiii).

Environments are invisible. Their ground rules, pervasive structure, and overall patterns elude easy perception (McLuhan *The Medium is the Message* 85).

Failure in perception occurs precisely in giving attention to the program "content" of our media while ignoring the form, whether it be radio or print or the English language itself...they imagine that a more earnest tone and a more austere theme would pull up the level of the book, the press, the movie, and TV. They are wrong to a farcical degree (McLuhan *Understanding Media* 281).

The difficulty that Christians have faced in their efforts to use communications technology to proclaim the gospel is that they have been too eager to see its potential for evangelization and too reluctant to examine its consequences for communication of its impact in the exercise of power. It is convenient to see radio, television, film, or the Internet merely as convenient pipes through which to deliver the word. If they are neutral pipes, so much the better. If they have distorting capability, then sticking to the basics—preaching, Bible-reading, and hymnody—will assure that the word arrives unscathed (Fortner 106).

This perspective only works, however, if Christians persist in seeing communication as nothing more than the delivery of information, available to those who seek it out through the ministrations of the Holy Spirit, and who define the relevant information as a powerful word that people will find compelling. When we begin to demand that Christians practice communication as God would have it practiced—the development of relationship based in knowledge, trust, and compassion, taking into account the situation of an audience to assist in the word in breaking through the obstacles of unbelief, history, tradition, and superstition through adroit exploitation of the possibilities of a medium—the task becomes far more difficult. How does one exploit a technology that stands between and mediates one's efforts to establish and maintain relationship? How does one take account of the power dynamics set into motion by the use of any technology and the perception that use of it implies either a privileged position of power or an apparent attempt to destabilize existing power dynamics in a society? (Fortner 106)

Culture is what nurtures our very sense of what communication is, and how one effectively uses technology to extend its reach. This is...a space-biased monopoly of knowledge, not the time-biased relational activity that God commands us to engage in to extend his kingdom (Fortner 106).

For media, as extensions of our physical and nervous systems, constitute a world of biochemical interactions that must ever seek new equilibrium as new extensions occur. In America, people can tolerate their images in a mirror or photo, but they are made uncomfortable by the recorded sound of their own voices. The photo and the visual worlds are secure areas of anesthesia (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 272).

"Is it not absurd for men to live involuntarily altered in their inmost lives by some mere technological extension of our inner senses?"(McLuhan *The Gutenberg Galaxy* 183).

The appearance of an alternative symbolic universe poses a threat because its very existence demonstrates empirically that one's own universe is less than inevitable (Fortner 106).

Apart from those shaped by the phonetic alphabet, the universal condition of man has been corporate and tribal and family-oriented. The Greek and Roman civis, the private individual equal before a code of written laws, cannot hold up to the new all-involving power of electronic communication or change. For communication is change, and Christianity is concerned above

all and at all times with the need for change in man. St. Paul states his theory of communication everywhere. In Romans 1:21-25, it is:

(21) Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were they thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (22) Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, (23) And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and four-footed beasts and creeping things. (24) Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts. (25) Who changed the truth of God into a lie and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator Who is blessed forever. Amen.

That is, as soon as men identified God with His creation they could also glorify their own handiwork as extensions of God. The initial merging of God and His creatures may have begun with art and technology. It certainly led to much technology and to the clouding of the mind. St. Paul has no more doubt than the Hebrew prophets about the transforming power of technology on the human powers of perception: "They became what they beheld." That Western literate man who rejoices in the unique possession of a private identity should at the same time initiate and innovate beyond all other men, and yet be unable to confront the effects of his own innovations upon his unique psyche—this sounds like a classical or pagan instance of fate and hubris (McLuhan *The Medium and the Light* 128-9).

That is the task of the Christian in the application of technology: to put technology to work for the benefit of the soul, to use it in such a way that God's expectations of us as his people, working on his behalf, will be manifest in what we do and how we do it, in his image, and we dare not try this without fully understanding the implications of the technologies we attempt to use—or we may unreflectively destroy the continuity that we would otherwise work so hard to endorse or enable (Fortner 110).

TECHNOLOGY, SYSTEMS, CULTURE

Communication is an exchange of information and messages. An activity. Communications—a layer of added meaning in the "s" at the end—denotes communication via an intermediary exostatic memory or "media" to store and retrieve information. Mediums are the tools we imbue with at least information and at best meaning.

God made us all to be creative symbolizers who can transform almost anything into a form of communication. Words, images, music, and all of the other means of human communication are part of the tapestry of meaning in our lives (Schultze 42). We, as created and creative, are also mediums—we possess the Imago Dei and we can equally be mediums of our messages.

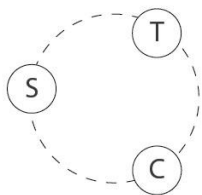
Likewise, we have been gifted with the ability to make most anything into a medium. From a scribbled line, to a global web of computers, to sculpture, to a toy doll. If we can imbue it with meaning that others can later retrieve, then whatever it is can be media.³² Sometimes the

³² Consider the example of the traditional community quilt: Picture walking into a small rural church and noticing the mix of media types—from hymnals, to a paper program, to the recently mounted projector and screen hanging malfit from the ceiling. Now notice the community quilt hanging on the back wall. An artifact made over generations by community members working together and in dialog over fabric that will tell the story of those people in an abstract form. Which medium do you suppose holds the most meaning to those specific people? Which aides the richer recall of stories? Which would be saved first in a fire? If we maintain our respect of tradition and value of ritual forms of media, then we would clearly say the quilt. If we place too high of a value on digital media technology and transmission techniques, then that quilt on

message is retrieved exactly as stored. More often the meaning of the message is affected by the individual receiving the message who is at the same time affected by persistent and interrelated social and cultural forces.

When we we say "The Media" we are usually referring to a much more interconnected concept than just a text. Culturally speaking, there really is no such thing as "the media" in the sense we use the term. If we say, for example, "the media" is corrupting our children, what are we referring to? Are the boxes of plastic and wires and carefully organized sand³³ on the shelf actively warping the viewer? Is the cultural content being acted out via flickering lights in the shape of people and things influencing the mind fixed upon them? Or is it the vast enterprise of business practices, profit motives, and marketing techniques that contracted the creation of the content to be distributed by the box the corrupting force?

In order to understand "the media" we must cease using that phrase and instead learn to see the interconnected parts and complex interrelationships that comprise the concept. Perhaps the simplest breakdown would be into: *technology, systems, and culture*.



- **Technology:** the box (medium) and its biases | classic and modern communication tools: photography, videography, graphic design, fine art, speech, drama, broadcast, and writing.
- **Systems:** the business and its motives | social systems, market systems, legal systems, corporations, institutions, etc.
- **Culture:** the people and their content | shared experiences, values, and expressions

This basic tool will help us begin to see and understand media and culture in interrelationship. Only through understanding these individual parts and interconnections can we hope to understand the full extent of media's social and cultural effects. **Ultimately, the meaning and reality defining power of "media" is not just in the technology, systems, or culture independently but in the interrelationship between them.**

As this pertains to mass media, meaningful messages, and cultural change: To send moving pictures into millions of homes is certainly a neat trick but the true genius would be to use those images in a way that shapes the worldview of countless people.³⁴ To do so requires a sophisticated awareness of the media as interrelationships integral to our social ecology.

In our quest for media that matters it is vital to see how these same interrelationships likely affect ministry media in the exact same way. Messages shaped by the bias of a technology, the pressures of corporate interest and market driven systems, and varying degrees of cultural influence.

Using the Bible again as one of our primary examples (the incarnation of Christ and the Holy Church being the other two): In addition to the Bible as a written medium it is best understood when considering the technology of the written word and the techniques inherent in the spectrum of writing styles, the religious/political/ and theological systems that controlled its creation, and the rich cultures of the peoples, individuals, and actions recorded. It's not just the parts, but the interrelationships that make the Bible a prime example of meaningful media and

the wall becomes a dated, dusty eyesore that needs to go.

³³ <http://xkcd.com/1349/>

³⁴ Read Taking TV's Word For It in the Appendix

communication.

The Bible is inexhaustible in its capacity to reveal meaning—whether you are Jewish or Christian or not, religious or not, whether you are atheist or agnostic. It does not matter. The Bible as a functioning framework for existence, reality, and meaning is undeniable. The lives, societies, and governments of history bear witness to that fact.

How much of the Bible has layers of meaning? All of it. This is why we can fill libraries with books about a single book of the Bible. Any “literal” vs. “figurative” debates over the interpretation of the scriptures is a false dichotomy and denies how meaning works in the first place.

Consider that two-thirds of the New Testament is a quote or direct reference to the Old Testament and half of those references are from the Psalms—aka songs, poetry, creative media. The New Testament itself falls apart if the Psalm references are cut from our interpretation of the meaning in The Message. Psalms were that important for their self-understanding and that critical for their worship and life of devoted obedience to Jesus.

Clearly the New Testament writers saw themselves as living the drama of the Psalter, now brought to a stunning conclusion and giving incredible and unforeseen depth of meaning in the person of Jesus. The Psalms are the soil of the Church's faith. Always have been. Always will be. Ministry media matters!

Now consider that at the center of the cross, at the height of Jesus's suffering, at the moment Christ bore the full weight of our sin, a simple lyric of lament from Psalm 22:1 was cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” That Jesus chose a lyric from the songs of David for this moment of ultimate pain should be enough to reassure us of the importance of media that ministers.

My one desire for those who use mass media, whether electronic or print, would be that they learn to use their media the way God in the Bible uses print. This would involve a considerable reduction in the use of those vehicles that depersonalize and intellectualize the message (e.g. monologue, dead ritual, academic and technical writing) with a corresponding increase in the use of vehicles that increase personal interaction and identification and that stimulate behavior growth (e.g., life involvement, live ritual, drama, biographical case-book writing). In addition, the combination of public or media communication with more personal methods, such as life involvement and small group dialog, can go a long way toward maximizing each technique (Kraft 126).

In this way, Scripture may be closer to a photograph of a mystery than technical manual. Have we taken a manual for creativity and turned it into a manuscript for conformity?

MEDIA AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION

As a central element of our environment, our media (especially when owned and controlled by market forces) functions less as a technological diversion or mere tool and more like a comprehensive whole—more like a social institution on par with family, church, government, economic systems, and schools. As we increasingly interface with the world through media, the amalgamation of those mediated inputs takes a role in conferring meaning, truth, identity, reality, fact, and fiction traditionally reserved for other social institutions.

The media do not of course represent one coherent organization, even if one may talk collectively about the “the institution of media.” Nor can it be supposed that one is talking just about those organizations which are the producers of media material. If one is discussing for example: questions of power; the nature of media influence; media-social relations; the media as public space; then it is important to realize that the media are about more than the sum of their texts. There may be some things inferred about the institution from its texts, but....The production of meaning is about more than the text (Burton 8).

The following concepts link media and society. Meaning that our perceptions of them are symbiotic in nature:

MEDIA <>	Mythologies Ideologies Beliefs and values about power relationships Representations of the world Mediation of experiences and events Discourses Ways of thinking and talking about a subject Conventions of media texts	<> SOCIETY
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**Concepts Linking Media and Society (Burton 9)*

If media is seen as a social institution, then the forces that act on it and that it acts upon can be evaluated similar to other social institutions. In this way our media ecosystem and intrinsic industries, platforms, and creators can be understood accordingly.

Audience Responses (Feedback and Consumption) Political The Law Interventions Market Forces (Economics and Competition) Technical Innovation and Change Regulatory Bodies	>> MEDIA INSTITUTIONS
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** The Media: Power Pressures (Burton 26)*

The key aspects of media's cultural power are:

Attracting and directing public attention Persuasion in matters of opinion and belief Influencing behavior Structuring definitions of reality Conferring status and legitimacy Informing quickly and extensively	<< MEDIA POWER
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** Key Aspects of Media Power (Burton 29)*

The symbolic base of the media's power (as a social institution) and the expression of that power is the media goods/texts which produce meanings and which are the point of contact with the audience. The ideological expression of institutional power is these meanings. This is the focus of possible change. **This is the fulcrum of power. If these meanings change the lives and thinking of the audience in some way which is to the advantage of the institution and to the disadvantage of the audience members, then power becomes real and it matters.** (Burton 27)

Mass media products have meaning, but that meaning is not the same for everyone. And meaning can only come from those products available at any given point in time. That is why understanding the production process, from law to technology to industry and organizational structure to markets and to careers is so important. It is out of this process that the tools are produced for creating the large, complex, post industrial society we live in and, to some extent, for constructing our very identities (Ryan 236).

[Marx] realized that the communication of ideas grounded in real life was an exercise in and the broadcast of social power: Cultural communications could bind people together in action and split classes apart...Communication regulated by the masses and not the ruling classes was revolutionary...Today the mass media produce and enormous flow of cultural symbols that show no respect for any particular community boundaries or traditions. These symbols are simply “out there”...The meta-information produced by the mass media is, in the truest Marxist sense, revolutionary. It gives society information about itself that creates the opportunity for change. Even if we do not unite for purposeful action, the cultural landscape is constantly defined by the mass media (Ryan 27).³⁵

More than at any time in our history, today individual people are left on their own to cobble together a set of cultural symbols that, to them, best represents life...The degree of influence and the specific meaning of mass media messages is regulated by two primary factors: the strength of attachment of individuals to their social groups, and the internal strength and coherence of those group structures. In the absence of strong membership ties to some structures or when those structures are weakened by anomie, then individuals must act on their own to interpret the available symbols...As social structures weaken the power of media should grow. This is because the media become an important direct source of information for individuals (rather than the group or social institutions). But individual autonomy is also increased as structures weaken, therefore autonomy itself becomes a secondary regulating factor of media influence. Thus, the media become more powerful, but their effects become less fundamentally predictable because they are acting on and being interpreted in a less organized, stable and coherent environment...individuals are not the mere dupes of the symbol makers (Ryan 29-30).³⁶

Communications within modern society creates an ethos, an overall climate of ideas. As individuals use ideas to instill their actions with direction and meaning, these ideas become fused with practical purpose and given power. More than that, the ideas become detached from their original purposes and sources...The recombination of culture tends to remove the local or provincial quality of culture; culture becomes more a “mass” culture (or more a “cosmopolitan” and less “provincial” culture depending on your biases). The recombination of culture in modern society has an extended effect. Because of the power of ideas, and even given their purity, becomes lost as they are recombined, we in society lose our ties to physical places and particular institutions...The mass media provide rapid and continuous dissemination of information, they are nonexclusive sources of knowledge, and the media offer meta-information (Ryan 31-32).³⁷

³⁵ Summarizing Karl Marx: (1818–1883) a philosopher, economist, sociologist, journalist, and revolutionary socialist. He published numerous books during his lifetime, the most notable being *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and *Das Kapital* (1867–1894).

³⁶ Summarizing David Émile Durkheim: (1858–1917) a French sociologist, social psychologist and philosopher. He formally established the academic discipline and—with Karl Marx and Max Weber—is commonly cited as the principal architect of modern social science and father of sociology.

³⁷ Summarizing Karl Emil Maximilian “Max” Weber: (1864–1920) a German sociologist, philosopher, jurist, and political economist whose ideas profoundly influenced social theory and social research. Weber is often cited, with Émile Durkheim and Karl Marx, as among the three founders of sociology.

Within the cacophony of media-broadcast symbols, selves will still form, but a paradox surfaces. *Meaning and experience are increasingly individualized (or privatized), even as the sources of meaning derive from a wider, more cosmopolitan, mass-mediated world.* Why? The penetration of the mass media erases the natural commonality of experience within a community. Without a single, unified source of culture, individual selves attach to arbitrary symbols. These “foreign” symbols cannot then be turned into a language community for unifying validation. This process tends to increasingly isolate the self (from community), but the self then emerges as a primary standard against which experience is judged (Ryan 35).³⁸

In the emerging environment, power will lie with those who own the key building blocks of new communication systems, the rights to key pieces of technology and, even more importantly, the rights to cultural materials: the films, books, images, sounds, writings that will be used to put together the new services. The media moguls have a sizable advantage since they already own a formidable range of the expressive assets that are central to public culture (Burton 28).

However, while the ownership of both the media channels and our cultural materials had been amassed by a handful of media companies with a monolithic hold on that cultural power,³⁹ the modern media environment (post 2005) has led to a rapid decentralization and democratization of media tools, access, and distribution, which has substantially changed the institutional and systemic dynamic of our media inter-relationships and environments.

The new media environment is one of the “prosumer” where each individual can be both the producer and the consumer of media. This prosumer exists within a paradox of mass and niche media opportunity—meaning that whatever is produced can be at the same time intended for a small niche audience and be globally available to billions. This niche/mass paradox has a compelling theological parallel in the nature of the Church—both hyper-local and globally connected at the same time.

In one respect, recognizing the continual cultural fragmentation resulting from an increasing availability of channels for information and entertainment, and the polysemy built into the products constructed for these channels, is an acknowledgement of the continuing applicability of Babel—and a confirmation of its truth. Perhaps it is even a divinely crafted wake-up call to the Christian community to work more diligently to reclaim and re-knit society through communication (Fortner 173).

The struggle for media ownership (and subsequently a stake in the social institution of media) is certainly connected to our “social conflict over the real.” Media ownership is cultural power. The fact that these awesome culture making tools are now in everyone’s hands is as terrifying as it is exciting. How much more so should we invest in training ministry media artists (lest we create from ignorance)?

Reality, identity, meaning, culture, ecosystems, time and space. Such massive concepts reliant on our media. To better understand media that matters to culture we must next be rooted in the reasons for the local church community.

³⁸ Summarizing George Herbert Mead: (1863–1931) an American philosopher, sociologist and psychologist, primarily affiliated with the University of Chicago, where he was one of several distinguished pragmatists. He is regarded as one of the founders of social psychology and the American sociological tradition in general.

³⁹ See Taking TV’s Word For It in the Appendix

PART 2: REVIVAL

"Where things are loving, good, right, and true, where things are according to God's law and His will for creation, there is no problem. The Christian will appreciate and actively enjoy and enter into all good things God has made. But where they have been spoilt or warped by sin, then the Christian must show by his life, his words, his action, his creativity what God really intended them to be."

~ Hans Rookmaker

COMMUNITY AS COMMUNICATION

If we are to engage in this activity—writing an essay, making a film, entertaining an audience, imparting information and advice—we must discover models in our culture that tell us how this particular miracle is achieved. **The miracle being that there is nothing in our genes that tells us how to do this; all signs point to community as the integral part of defining communication** (Carey 31).

What our genes fail to tell us is revealed in the Imago Dei. Created in the image of God, we create because we must; creativity is in our nature and activity is our mandate (Gen 1:26; 2:15). That we "create, express, and convey" at all communicates at least as much the content of our messages. That we can't help ourselves but to create says even more.

If community is integral to our definition of communication, the problems of communication are linked to problems of community. The community is both the message and the ritual. This has obvious biblical connections to the local church as familial community. God entrusted His message first and foremost with a community that was to be maintained over time and space (Acts 2).

Long before we were a people of The Book (post Gutenberg and the rise of literacy), we were a people of The Word. The local church (and by extension the Holy Spirit) also has its own type of exostatic memory, functioning as a ritual medium, as the "storage" chosen as God's agent of connection, transfer of meaning, and interpretative guide. The printed Bible is not our only media, and it certainly doesn't fully communicate absent the Holy Spirit and the Church.

"These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." Deuteronomy 6:6-9

Any real theory of communication is a theory of community (Fortner 21). John Dewey explains the tie between communications and community well:

There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge—a common understanding—like-mindedness as the sociologists say. Such things cannot be passed physically from one to another, like

bricks; they cannot be shared as persons would share a pie by dividing it into physical pieces. (Democracy and Education)

The ritual view, then, gives a more firm grasp of how communication not only affects culture, but also how our communication *is* our common culture. Transmission models of communication are the “passing of bricks” while the ritual is the establishing the meaning of the construct. This means Church communities focused appropriately on creating community will be more invested in ritual modes. Not less.

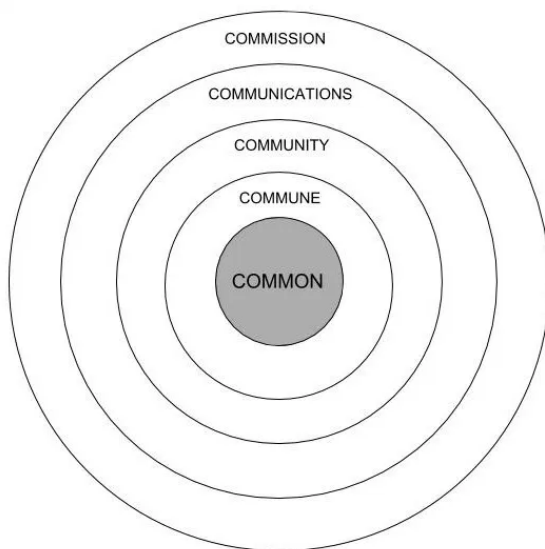
This is the level at which faith communicates, not so much by transmitting concepts or theories, but by inner transformation of people; not by expressing a figure but by participating in the ground of secondary effects that transform life (McLuhan, *Medium and the Light* 145).

Ritual views of communication provide far more insight into the ways media matters in maintaining the identity, commonality, and meanings of a specific group of people over time. That this should appeal to Christians seeking to create ministry media to unify and edify the church should be readily apparent.⁴⁰

Communication is thus the vehicle of communion and for the construction and maintenance of community—all words with their roots in the same notion: to make common. As Christ was the most powerful indicator of his care for humankind, his people—filled with the Holy Spirit—are the continuing indicators of his love, the compasses pointing to God as the author and sustainer of all life. And the means of symbolic communication is God’s gift to his people to carry on this legacy of intimacy and relationship (Fortner 65).⁴¹

We can use the common root to build a framework that flows from Christ:

**Common (Christ) > Community (Church) > Commune (Worship) >
Communications (Media) > Commission (Evangel)**



This is the “Common Model for Communications Theory and Theology”

We come together around what we hold in common. In that, we begin to commune with one another around our common center. From that communion, a community and its identity are formed. When a community begins to express its identity and beliefs, it externalizes in what we know as communications—this is the site where artists paint, writers write, speakers speak, filmmakers film, and the broadcasters broadcast. The communications of any given community have an innate reason for being, a purpose to accomplish—a commission. All flowing from a common center.

⁴⁰ [For a deeper dive, listen to theologian James KA Smith here: https://goo.gl/MiZt8D](https://goo.gl/MiZt8D)

⁴¹ Intimacy creates space for true creativity from a place of vulnerability. Anything less is mere technique.

This Common model helps us align and root our communications theory into our theology:

Common	(Christ)	Christology
Commune	(Worship, Liturgy)	(Ethno)doxology
Community	(Church, Liturgy)	Ecclesiology + Pneumatology
Communications	(Art, Media)	Communicology?
Commission	(Evangel)	Missiology

The Common model can help us better ensure an alignment of our theology and practice. The order must always cohesively be.

Jesus > Bible > Theology > Comm Theory > Communications Practices

The Common model aides in maintaining a theological approach to our communications theory. In this way our communications practices quickly become less about technique and more about the meanings we are commissioned to communicate.

Here is a contemporary example: Virtual reality is about the newest medium there is. Quickly the idea of virtual reality churches is presented and explored. Can virtual church be “church?” If your reaction is “no,” why? “Jesus was incarnate with us so we must be present physically together as His body!” might be the response. In this way we quickly jump from an emerging technology to how our theology of who Jesus is (Christology) should inform the use of that medium. The Common model provides framework a comprehensive approach to theologically trained communications and media artists.

WHY DO WE GATHER?

What is the gathering of the saints for? Why are we not to forsake it (Hebrews 10:19-25)? Why was this localized unit of worship and cultural production chosen as God's vehicle for the gospel message to be lived out? Trusting God's economy, what can this fundamental ritual communicate to us about what God knows we would need and how communication as culture works?

We gather (a ritual) because of what we have in common, Christ, we represent in community, we express from our identity in Christ and His body, and from all of that flows our communication and ministry media to accomplish our Great Commission.

Under this view, the local church gathering becomes the origin point for all our creativity in regards to ministry media. **In all things, the Church is God's chosen agent of change.** Not the brilliant author in a cabin or the most well funded movie producer.

The Church is the tangible context of what we communicate. The engine of the individual. The epicenter of cultural influence. The oral tradition to balance transmission. The manifestation of meaning. The means by which we negotiate meaning via our media messages. Therefore, we must next revisit why we gather. The answer to why we gather is what we are to communicate.⁴²

⁴² For clarity: this section begins its investigation with a distinctly human (even “selfish”), cultural reason

- We gather to confess
- We gather to not be alone
- We gather to be reminded
- We gather to rebuild (reality)
- We gather to "be" (beatitudes)
- We gather to share (testimony)
- We gather to declare Christ as Lord
- We gather to give thanks in worship
- We gather to be located in God's story
- We gather to confront the lies of the age (social conflict over the real)
- We gather to be shepherded in life, emotions, and right thinking about God through Scripture

We gather to express and bear witness to our purest form of identity—to know who we are, to tell others and be told ourselves in exactly the same way the family was intended to impart the truths of identity and meaning.⁴³ The gathering in community is the earthly grounding of our identity and reality—stabilizing us in both time and space.

Our identity is Christ himself. "That the church is the body of Christ means that it participates in Him, draws its life and nature from Him, sharing in all He has done for it and sharing in His very life as the incarnate Son of the Father... It is only through participating and sharing in Christ that the church is to be regarded as His body, as His image, and likeness among mankind, as the expression of His love and truth, as the reflection of His humility and glory, as the instrument of His gospel, as the earthen vessel... Only on the ground of this participation in Christ is the church a community of believers, a communion of love, a fellowship of reconciliation on earth."

~ T.F. Torrance, *Atonement*, 362-363

"In Jesus Christ the full reality of God and the full reality of man became one. Thus, all concepts of reality that ignore Jesus Christ are abstractions."

~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

We gather to be needed—it matters that you are there. Every individual is needed to "re-live" The Story. To find something we can't online—something more than words—visible signs of a tangible reality. Something the fleeting and the digital environments of modern media can't offer us.

We gather as a public representation of corporated/shared confession. To rebuild in the individual and in the collective that which we know to be true. That which takes constant rebuilding amid sin's constant state of decay. To be reminded what is true and that you are not alone creates the binding capital through shared confession, expression and experiences.

We feel lost. We want to feel home. We want explanations of our experiences. We need help in our social conflict over the real. The gathering is to be the exploring of why something, anything, matters. It is the shared quest for explanations, to know what something means.

Shalom, relationships of godly justice and peace, requires us to form communities of memory in which we both share our contemporary life stories with one another and identify with the historic

for why we gather—not necessarily the theological, Christocentric reality.

⁴³ Keep in mind family and church as social institutions and how this is relevant in light of the previous section on media as a social institution.

church. In real Christian community we frame our lives in the historic stories of Scriptures, the richness of a Christian tradition, and the communal bonds of local fellowship. We all need a community that is anchored in its past, not floundering in faddish enthusiasms, material anticipation, and happy feelings. Shalom is never fully achieved through media-inspired consumerism (Schultze 116).

Church gatherings should be defined by unique experiences inside shared collective experience. To accomplish this you need far more than transmitted music or lectures. You need far more than returning to a few classic or modern rituals.

Perhaps the church is a living musical and not a lecture assembly. Reflect on your theology of the church. As fundamental as lectures may be, which is a better vision of the body of Christ and answer to “what is the church”?

This is not to say that all ministry media needs to flow from a local church community, but more that such grounding is essential and the Holy Church itself provides the example/metaphor for complete communication. Local churches don’t need to be transmissional media production houses, but they are meant to be producers of culture and meaning.

The gathering is a living ecosystem being experienced. Not a production or a performance. Not a fantasy or false reality. The Kingdom reality—a better reality being made known. Experiences are what we live. They are what we remember. When we experience together, we remember together (“in remembrance of me” Luke 22:19), we recreate reality together, we rebuild, we countervail entropy.

This is the role of the church as “anamnesis”—meaning, a lived memory. Anamnesis is a liturgical statement in which the Church refers to the memorial character of Christ. It has its origin in Jesus’ words at the Last Supper, “Do this in memory of me” (Luke 22:19). Our community and rituals are a way of vividly repeating, “remember, remember...”

The first items in the press to which all men turn are the ones about which they already know. If we have witnessed some event, whether a ball game or a stock crash or a snow storm, we turn to a report of that happening, first. Why? *The answer is central to any understanding of media.* Why does a child like to chatter about the events of the day, however jerkily? Why do we prefer novels and movies about familiar scenes and characters? Because for rational beings to see and re-cognize their experience in a new material form is an unbought grace of life. Experience translated into a new medium literally bestows a delightful playback of earlier awareness” (McLuhan, *Understanding* 283).

Here again lies the vitality of theologically trained media artists able to help us “re-cognize” our experiences and remember what we know to be true in meaningful ways—to re-vive and reawaken us. The value of the theologically trained media artist is to connect the subject of our faith with the object of our reality. To elevate the minds of believers from the mundane reality of life to the imagined glory of God. In this way, imagination is not “making things up,” but rather it is a prophetic and creative gift.

Likewise, Christian communicators and media artists need to be deeply rooted in community and resist letting technology or their role distance themselves from the immediate experiences of that community.

Such a view leads to communications/media as a celebration of God, salvation, life, and creativity. It establishes us as a people on the move, people who see themselves within a living story, a people of random acts of creative joy who make media that matters. This is the

definition of liturgy: the work of the people.

If you are talking about church production styles, then you are talking about liturgy, and if you're talking about liturgy you are talking about theology before styles. If so, which one, which style? How do we create them? Why do we do what we do? Again, our practices should follow our theology so that those practices represent our theology.

Everything communicates. In fact, the “work of the people” communicates more than any sermon alone can. For example: does your theology teach you that “the least of these” are not just welcome but equal in any community of Christ? If so, consider how many changes a modern local church would need to make in order for the homeless to feel as welcomed and comfortable walking in as anyone else. Is it the nature of the sermon or the nature of the community that might keep them away?

This work, as communication within the context of the gathering, is inside both medium and ritual thereby transcending interpersonal communications or isolated technical execution of media effects. Something truly special is made possible in the ritual communication of the church gathering—something held together and communicated via our liturgy.

LITURGY: THE LANGUAGE OF THE CHURCH⁴⁴

Much of this can be improved. Likely replacing most of this with quotes from James Smith. Or: James Smith video(on BB) at 20 minutes, 34min, others? 37ish min: “Liturgies are rituals of ultimate concern” 44min: “What does it want me to love...:” Liturgy is whether you call it or not. So is ritual. Ex: plugging in your phone.

What the Church decides to “do” on a Sunday morning is simply defined as the Church’s liturgy. Whether it is formal (Anglican, Lutheran) or informal (Pentecostal, non-denominational), every Church has a liturgy. So the question is not whether a church is liturgical, for every church service has a form, order, and pattern to its gathering; the question, rather, is “what will be the structure, style, and content of liturgy?” (Sproul 15)

Since within liturgy is found all forms of a service’s communication (i.e. preaching, worship, public speaking, bulletins, video, audio etc.), it can arguably be the most important form of communication in the Christian faith. Unfortunately, liturgy has been overlooked as Christians focus on specific forms of communication rather than defining the liturgy within which they are found. Liturgy must first be defined.

To define what the Church should do on Sunday, one must first define the purpose of the weekly gathering; the Church’s liturgy is always a direct reflection of the church’s understanding of why she gathers. The liturgy simplifies the question “Why do we gather?” with claiming, “We gather to do this!”

For example, “seeker-friendly-mega-churches” desire to persuade and attract the non-believer; evangelism, therefore, is that church’s reason to gather. The church’s liturgy is consequently evangelistic, apologetic, and influenced by culture in order to make the seeker feel comfortable.

An underground church in China may gather because that is their only opportunity to read Scripture. Their liturgy is thus heavily centered on the proclamation of the Word.

⁴⁴ Written and contributed by Sally Callahan: Callahan, Sally. *Liturgy: The Language of the Church*. N.p.: n.p., 2014. Print.

A charismatic church might define the gathering as an opportunity for individuals to grow in faith and to partake in experiencing the kingdom of God. Therefore, the gathering consists of long, spontaneous worship sets, extensive prayers, healings, and prophecies.

The Parish, a church in Atlanta GA, views the Sunday gathering as a time to further develop Christian community.⁴⁵ Their Sunday liturgy alternates weekly - one Sunday they gather in a church building for communal worship, while the next they gather in various homes to simply eat dinner together. Their liturgy reflects that the Sunday gathering is a time to develop community.

Some would say that the Sunday Gathering is an optional aid created by man in order to encourage and strengthen one's faith. The Sunday service is not a requirement in following Jesus Christ, but is found to be quite helpful for many believers. Therefore if the service isn't helpful in contributing to one's faith, then the believer has the liberty to freely reject the church while creating their own aids. But perhaps gathering provides something far deeper than encouragement and perseverance; perhaps the gathering is inseparable from one's new found identity in Christ.

Following the weekly pattern of time that God has ordered, the Church gathers not monthly or biweekly, but weekly on a special day, a holy day unlike the other six. The Church views this day as the beginning of their week, not the end. Furthermore, the gathering is traditionally in the morning so that it may establish the context and purpose for the rest of the believer's week.

Gathering on a specific day also unifies the global church; as the local church gathers to worship, she knows that churches across the world are gathering simultaneously.⁴⁶ *(Not in totality, of course, given time zones and differing days according to cultural practice)*

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:4-6

While it is true that The Church is far more layered and present than anything that can be confined in just the weekly gathering, there is an important distinction to be made between a gathering of Christians at a Fourth of July cookout and a gathering of Christians on a Sunday morning.

Imagine meeting someone on the train with whom you connect wonderfully and have the opportunity to articulate the gospel of Jesus Christ. This person emphatically chooses to receive the sacrifice of Jesus and to be found in His life, death and resurrection. What should this new convert do next? Do you recommend books and albums that could teach him about God? Do you invite him to play cards on Wednesday night with your Christian friends? Like the mature believer, this new convert must attend the Sunday morning gathering where his identity is found and defined.

As a second illustration, imagine a wife and mother who is out of town for business. Though

⁴⁵ <http://parishanglican.org/who-we-are>

⁴⁶ This is why the church found the Liturgical calendar to be of benefit bringing unity amongst the historical and universal church. For a further study on liturgical calendars read Galli, Mark. *Beyond Smells and Bells*. Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2008.

away from home, she still maintains her identity as wife and mother. However, her identity is best found and reflected when at home with her family.

Such is the nature of the Church; though Christ's Body can be claimed at Fourth of July cookouts, it is best represented on the Sunday, in the Gathering. The Sunday is the diverse, inclusive gathering of believers who come together to intentionally proclaim the identity of God, the God who defines the image of His people. Who is the Church? They are the people of God who intentionally proclaim His identity, which is in turn the identity that they forever share.

Why do Christians gather? They gather because the Church's identity is best found in the Sunday service where the identity of God is intentionally proclaimed, where the believer can develop a better understanding of who he or she is. Therefore, when the congregation gathers to proclaim the identity of God, they consequently proclaim their own identity, being His people. But the identity of the church is far more intimate than just being "His people." Because God fully took on humanity, in Jesus Christ, humanity is found united to Christ and thus brought into the eternal communion of the Triune God. As the Church gathers to proclaim the identity of God, they find that Christ's identity is in fact their identity, who they transform into.

Peter Leithart, president of Trinity House Institute for Biblical, Liturgical, & Cultural Studies, comments on the transformation of identity that takes place in the Sunday gathering:

"It is a fundamental truth of Scripture that we become like whatever or whomever we worship. When Israel worshipped the gods of the nations, she became like the nations-bloodthirsty, oppressive, full of deceit and violence (Jer 7). Romans 1 confirms this principle by showing how idolaters are delivered over to sexual deviations and eventually to social and moral chaos. The same dynamic is at work today. Muslims worship Allah, a power rather than a person and their politics reflects this commitment. Western humanists worship man, with the result that every degrading whim of the human heart is honoured and exalted and disseminated through the organs of mass media...the psalmist writes, 'those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them.'" ⁴⁷

Simply put, the church becomes like the One they worship; this glorious truth propels the body of Christ to not "forsake the assembly, as is the habit of some." (Hebrews 10:25)⁴⁸

THE WORK OF THE PEOPLE

Perceptual reality is the construction of a group. It is also where our reality and God's objective reality can best be aligned. This means that every communications practice or technique should be justified through a localized liturgical grid. On Sunday we all do the same "what" (e.g. worship and instruct) and we do a lot of the same "how" (e.g. music and lecture). Liturgy explains the "why" missing in so much of Church experience. ***Liturgy is the bonding agent and the cellular root of all ministry communication.***

Our liturgy experienced in the gathering of believers is a communal and communication dependent means of affirming our truest identity (Christ).

Christianity based on liturgy was, in the first centuries of the Church, the institutional means of

⁴⁷ Peter Leithart, "Transforming Worship," Foundations 38 (Spring 1997): 27.

⁴⁸ Callahan, Sally. *Liturgy: The Language of the Church*. N.p.: n.p., 2014. Print.

transmitting faith. Today, personal prayer and liturgy (which are inseparable) are the only means of tuning in to the right wavelength, of listening to Christ, and of involving the whole person (McLuhan, *The Medium and the Light* 141).

Without a dynamic living tradition shaped by The Spirit in a particular place, the once tangible expression of the church can find itself organized around static rituals. This happens when traditions become disconnected from everyday realities. Professor Michael Warren goes as far to say: "liturgy as aesthetics is a sham if not bonded to the loveliness of a life of struggle for fidelity" (Sparks 79).

Before we can communicate we must be rooted in context—the individual and collective stories that make up the members of the body of Christ. Through this earthly lens we can decode our stories and receive them in light of the better reality being made known through the in-breaking of Christ's Kingdom as represented by His body in all its diversity.

How different it often seems in contemporary church communication...so often the preacher as propagator of information has replaced the relational pastor. The lecture (we call it a sermon), an efficient means of presenting sizable amounts of information has replaced the participation-centered worship that characterized the early Christian churches. How different might things be if we learned to imitate God's strategy? (Kraft 18)

Locality and recognition of the individual as a coheir of the kingdom (Romans 8:16-17) as a part of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:1-5), is clearly a vital part of communication. *Otherwise, if the gospel was merely words that needed to be heard via a transmission, in an era of mass communication technology, why would we not simply hold a talent contest, select the best to be trained to communicate and relegate the rest to technicians managing the switches? Or have we done exactly that?*

Due to the essentiality of locality and context to the truth of the gospel—that Christ has risen, our sins are forgiven, that we have been adopted into the family of God, and eternal life has been secured (1 John 5:1-2; Col 3). Clearly something about that message can't be simply transmitted. It must be manifested. To do that well we need the strengths of ritual views of communication. We need a creative collective bound together by original sources of meaning. *We need to do this not with cultural relevancy but with relational fluency.*

The community (the church) is supposed to live in reality how all humanity is supposed to live in theory. The church as community gathering around what we have in common is communication as culture engaged in the social conflict over the real. Becoming "real" is the destination. The journey is the message. A manifested reality either to confront the mass mediated reality⁴⁹ or be confirmed by it.

Our commonality means something much different than homogeneity. It makes the gathering less about genre and style, and more celebration of local gifts and global connectivity (both spiritual and now literal).

A proper theology of communication is more than a combination of old and new. More than the best of transmission and ritual. It's a complex interaction of material and immaterial spaces. Of orality and electricity. A complexity made simple by God's perfect model for communication.

The ritual of return to the gathering is the creation of a living memory—something people can

⁴⁹ See Taking TV's Word for It: The Mediated Reality in the Appendix.

only experience by being there—the conscious and subconscious reason we gather. To be apart of a spontaneous story unfolding before us. Every culture loves story. It is how we are wired—with an innate impulse to live and tell a beginning, a middle, and an end. However, heavy transmissional views of communication can sever this time and space binding experience. Turning contributors into attenders.⁵⁰

Pastors are often critiquing that congregants are lifeless in the gathering but will cheer until they lose their voice later in the day for a sporting event. The accusation being that people care more about a game than God. Perhaps, but it could also be that scripted and transmitted is predictable. And predictable is boring. Sport is an example and metaphor for spontaneous story. The outcome is being written. The people bonded by the shared experience. We find instant commonality and belonging by wearing a simple color. The excitement is in being a part of something. This is more communicationally powerful (in the sense of media's reality and identity forming power) than the entertainment reasons for why sport is popular. That Sunday is boring at a church service and exciting at the game may be a reflection of the degree to which we are representing a spontaneous story others are invited into.

Mediated sporting events as a supremely popular and influential form of mass media content can teach us even more:

As models, they are collective rather than private dramatizations of inner life...Games as popular art forms offer to all an immediate means of participation in the full life of a society, such as no single role or job can offer to any man...In games we devise means of non-specialized participation in the larger drama of our time. (McLuhan, *Understanding* 318-319) **...And art, like games or popular arts, and like media of communication, has the power to impose its own assumptions by setting the human community into new relationships and postures.** (324) ...Games (as Mass Media) are situations contrived to permit simultaneous participation of many people in some significant pattern of their own corporate lives. (327)

It's not about creating a better spectacle, but to understand where meaning comes from, and learn how to know if we are and how we can communicate to the fullness of our ability and design.

The Gathering then, is also a fight against the lies and competing realities of the world. In our western context, the consumer zeitgeist—yet many Sunday services simply reinforce its lullaby. Instead, the Sunday gathering should be awakening, reviving people anew each week to the grand purpose they were created for, the ministry of reconciliation they are called to, and the Kingdom reality they are to be about. Not how to go back to mainstream culture and simply "manage" or do better at it, or survive it with morality intact, but to be invited into a New Beloved Community immune from the pressures of the world because of the shared identity and reality they possess in Christ.

Transmission mindsets can lead us to making a spectacle of the real. A performance to be consumed. An entire era of communicating the gospel has been developed/educated on a woefully incomplete model. An exceptionally lazy view of communication and how culture is created. The limitations, complexities, and outright harm of this is readily apparent (not to say modern preaching hasn't still done a lot of good).

What you are (or represent) communicates vastly more than what you say—we know this and

⁵⁰ This understanding may add clarity to why many are leaving "modern" Christianity to belong to something richer or more overtly liturgical.
(www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/why-millennials-long-for-liturgy)

feel it in the despised concept of hypocrisy. It is impossible to effectively communicate to others something that we are not ourselves. The apostle Paul understood this very clearly. In fact, this is the lesson behind why we were called Christians at Antioch in the first place. What the Church represented about deifying the division in the world was vital to the representing and communicating the gospel.⁵¹

Not only are individual persons important vehicles of the messages we seek to communicate, but groups of persons also function as communicational media. The commitment of a group such as the church to the cause of God is the most powerful possible message concerning that cause. The church as a vehicle is, then, God's continuing message concerning God's nature and cause. As such, a church is a message for good or ill. And with respect to groups as with respect to individuals, the message of the personal medium is much more powerful than the message of the words conveyed (Kraft 119).

THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE: COMMUNICATIONS AS PROPHETIC

We engage in the "social conflict over the real," affirm what is before our eyes and transcend it by imagining a better and truer reality more desirable, molding and constituting reality and identity, and countervail entropy through our creative culture and media by speaking truth into a lived existence in this present reality. With all the preceding concepts in mind, the following survey of the venerable Walter Brueggemann's *Prophetic Imagination* as well as additional help for Quentin Schultze adds essential insight into the nature of ministry media messages.⁵²

The formation and sustenance of such a subcommunity require a shared willingness to engage in gestures of resistance and acts of deep hope. These gestures and acts in turn require pastoral leadership that proceeds with an intentional ecclesial focus, namely, a sub community with an evangelical will for public engagement (Brueggemann xvii). Out of this community, itself formed by the Holy Spirit through the community constructive Biblical Narrative⁵³ is created, "prophetic existence...the existence of a person who in faith has been divested of any intent to give himself shape, who makes himself available as matter for the divine action...the 'art of God.'"⁵⁴ The community of those enraptured by the prophetic existence, is the community that engages in prophetic communication.

The cultural situation in the United states, satiated by consumer goods and propelled by electronic technology is one of narcotized insensibility to human reality. It may be, however, that torture and consumer satiation perform the same negative function: to deny a lively, communal imagination that resists a mindless humanity of despairing conformity...numbness does not hurt like torture, but in a quite parallel way, numbness robs us of our capacity for humanity (Brueggemann xx).

Christians should have cleaned their house long before mainstream media had to do it for them. Christian media can be just as strongly priestly, and just as weakly prophetic, as mainstream media (Schultze 132).

⁵¹ See Why The Called Us Christians in the appendix.

⁵² **READ: *The Prophetic Imagination* by Walter Brueggemann**

⁵³ Grenz, Stanley James, and John R. Franke. *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2001. Ch. 3 *Theology's Norming Norm*.

⁵⁴ Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord, Vol. 1*. Edited by John Riches, 2 edition, Ignatius Press, 2009. 35.

The prophets understood the possibility of change linked to the extremities of life. They understood the strange incongruence between public conviction and personal yearning. Most of all, they understood, the power of language, the capacity to speak in ways that evoke a newness “fresh from the word.” ...A prophetic understanding of reality is based in the notion that all society really does spring fresh from the word. (Brueggemann xxiii)

The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us (Brueggemann 3).

To be prophetic is a part of a way of evoking, forming, and reforming an alternate community... (Brueggemann 4). The appearance of a new social reality is unprecedented....the prophetic dismantles politics of oppression and exploitation and counters it with a politics of justice and compassion....The participants of the exodus find themselves involved in the formation of a new social community to match the vision of God's freedom (Brueggemann 6).

Justice is not merely an end we seek but a virtue that motivates our communication...Justice directs our love to people who are oppressed, reinstating their status as full and valued members of society. Philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff says that a society is just “when all the little ones, all the defenseless ones, all the unprotected ones, have been brought back to community” (Schultze 152).

Bringing hurt to public expression is an important first step in the dismantling criticism that permits a new reality, theological and social, to emerge (Brueggemann 12).

[Moses's doxology] is only a poem, and we might rightly say that singing a song does not change reality. However, we must not say that with too much conviction. The evocation of an alternative reality consists at least in part in the battle for language and the legitimization of a new rhetoric. The language of the Empire is surely the language of managed reality...but that language will never permit or cause freedom because there is no newness in it....only where there is doxology can there be justice, for such songs transfigure fear into energy (Brueggemann 18).⁵⁵

Moses was also concerned not with social betterment through repentance of the regime but rather with totally dismantling it in order to permit a new reality to appear (Brueggemann 21).

Covenanting that takes brothers and sisters seriously has been replaced by consuming, which regards brothers and sisters as products to be used. And in a consuming society an alternative consciousness is surely difficult to sustain (Brueggemann 27).

For the prophetic imagination: a royal consciousness committed to achievable satiation. An alternative prophetic consciousness devoted to the pathos and passion of covenanting (Brueggemann 37).

We need to ask not whether it is realistic or practical or viable but whether it is imaginable. We need to ask if our consciousness and imagination have been so assaulted and co-opted by the royal consciousness that we have been robbed of the courage or power to think an alternative through (Brueggemann 39).⁵⁶

⁵⁵ We not only can and do say bolder things through song, but can say them together as exemplified by slave gospels in the American South: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oFcFzJT7Tw>

⁵⁶ The power of the artist lies not in their IQ or their technical skill, but in the strength of their imagination.

The prophet is engaged in a battle for language, in an effort to create a different epistemology out of which another community might emerge. The prophet is not addressing behavioral problems. He is not even pressing for repentance. He only has the hope that the ache of God could penetrate the numbness of history. He engages not to scare or threat but only in a yearning that grows with and out of pain (Brueggemann 55).

Shalom is a language of community that emphasizes harmony among people, God, the physical world, and the individual. The language says to the world, "Here is a foretaste of heaven. Enjoy this foretaste of what people and relationships will be like in eternal life." Shalom reminds us that God is with us, in us, working through us. We echo God's character when we are virtuous people in community, celebrating justice and peace and loving each other as God loves us...Much of communication theory can be summarized in one truth. We embody the community virtues that we savor (Schultze 160).

The task of the prophetic imagination and ministry is to bring people to engage the promise of newness that is at work in our history with God (Brueggemann 59).

The offering of symbols that are adequate to contradict a situation of hopelessness in which the newness is unthinkable. **The prophet only has the means of word, spoken word and acted word, to contradict the presumed reality of his or her community.** The prophet is to provide the wherewithal whereby hope becomes possible again to a community of kings who now despair their royalty. After a time, kings become illiterate to the language of hope.

"But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ." 2 Cor 2:14-17

Hope requires very careful symbolization. It must not be expressed too fully in the present tense because hope one can touch and handle is not likely to retain its promissory call to a new future. Hope expressed only in the present tense will no doubt be co-opted by the managers of this age. **What a commission it is to express a future that none think imaginable!"**

In offering symbols the prophet has two tasks. One is to mine the memory of this people and educate them to use the tools of hope. **The other is to recognize how singularly words, speech, language and phrase shape consciousness and define reality...** (Brueggemann 64).

The task of the prophetic imagination is to bring to public expression those very hopes and yearnings that have been denied so long and suppressed so deeply that we no longer know they are there (Brueggemann 65).

We use the power of symbolic action to create a definition of reality that is in tune with God's Word. As agents of shalom, we are the Creator's ears and voice on earth, symbolic caretakers of a world entrusted to us (Schultze 165).

Speech about hope cannot be explanatory or scientifically argumentative; rather, it must

The ability to see and speak clearly to an alternative way of being – a better way of being.

be lyrical in the sense that it touches the hopeless person at many different points. More than that, however, speech about hope must be primarily theological, which is to say that it must be in the language of a covenant between a personal God and community...Hope expressed without knowledge of and participation in grief is likely to be false hope that does not reach despair (Brueggemann 67).

The prophet must speak metaphorically about hope but concretely about the real newness that comes to us and redefines our situation...But notice the radical, bold, even revolutionary form energizing takes. The prophet employs no gimmicks and no easy meditative steps because the issues are not private, personal, or internal.... (Brueggemann 71).

It is the business of the poet to drive the exiles to a decision about sovereignty because exiles do not want to choose; depressed people do not want to act, and despairing people think it does not matter...Jesus embodies poignant counter-reality—reality always to contrast and finally destroy the dominant reality (Brueggemann 83).

Both prophets and now Jesus after them bring to expression and embodiment all the hurt, human pain, and grief that the dominant royal culture has tried so hard to repress, deny and cover over (Brueggemann 90).

Thus the stories, if seen as radical dismantling criticism, bring together the internalization of pain and the external transformation, The capacity to feel the hurt of the marginal people means an end to all social arrangements that nullified pain by a remarkable depth of numbness (Brueggemann 91).

Quite clearly, the one thing the dominant culture cannot tolerate or co-opt is compassion, the ability to stand in solidarity with the victim of this present order...The old order may be characterized as madness masquerading as control; phony assurance of sustained well-being; a desperate attempt to control and not submit; and a grim system of retribution. Thus each statement of Jesus is a counter-possibility that places all the old ways in question. The passion narrative of Jesus provides ground for poetic criticism (Brueggemann 97).

The formation of an alternative community with an alternative consciousness is so that the dominant community may be criticised and finally dismantled. But more than dismantling, the purpose of the alternative community is to enable a new human beginning to be made (Brueggemann 101).

Institutional reform ought to “spring out of the faith of the Church, and not from the technical competence of a few experts, whether they be Christians or not” (Schultze 172, quoting Jaques Ellul).

It will not do to reason or argue or explain or calculate, for we are in the realm of the lyrical. We are called to doxology, for only doxology can adequately speak about the newness that came in Jesus (Brueggemann 107).

So the speech of Jesus, like the speech of the entire prophetic tradition, moves from woe to blessing, from judgement to hope, from criticisms to energy. The alternative community to be shaped from the poor, hungry, and grieving is called to disengage from the woe pattern of life to ends it fascination with that other ordering, and to embrace the blessing pattern (Brueggemann 109).

This note is concerned with the practice of ministry. Without this note the entire discussion lacks

the concreteness appropriate to discussions of the prophetic. Without precluding peculiar ministries in special places, it is presumed that the practice of ministry is done by those who stand in conventional places of parish life and other forms of ministry derived from that model. We cling to the conviction that prophetic ministry can and must be practiced there, although many things militate against it. The ministry is, first of all, consumed by the daily round of busyness that cannot be ignored; perhaps that daily pressure may be reduced, but it cannot be ignored. In addition, the ministry most often exists in congregations that are bourgeois, if not downright obdurate, and in which there is no special openness to or support of prophetic ministry.

I have tried to say that prophetic ministry does not consist of spectacular acts of social crusading or of abrasive measures in indignation. Rather, prophetic ministry consists of offering an alternative perception of reality and in letting people see their own history in the light of God's freedom and his will for justice. The issues of God's freedom and his will for justice are not always and need not be expressed primarily in the big issues of the day. They can be discerned wherever people try to live together and show concern for their shared future and identity. So these dimensions of prophetic ministry arise from our study:

1. The task of prophetic ministry is to evoke an alternative community that knows it is about different things in different ways. And that alternative community has a variety of relationships with the dominant community.
2. The practice of prophetic ministry is not some special thing done two days a week. Rather, it is done in, with, and under all the acts of ministry - as much in counseling as in preaching, as much in liturgy as in education. It concerns a stance and posture of a hermeneutic about the world of death and the word of life that can be brought to light in every context.
3. Prophetic ministry seeks to penetrate the numbness in order to face the body of death in which we are caught. Clearly, the numbness is more likely to be penetrated by grief and lament. Death, and that is our state, does not require indignation as much as it requires anguish and the sharing in the pain. The public sharing of pain is one way to let the reality sink in and let the death go.
4. Prophetic ministry seeks to penetrate despair so that new futures can be believed in and embraced by us. There is a yearning for energy in a world grown weary: "The age has lost its youth, and the times begin to grow old" (2 Esd 14:10). And we do know that the only act that energizes is a word, a gesture, and act that believes in our future and affirms it to us disinterestedly.

In a society that knows about initiative and self-actualization and countless other things, the capacity to receive in doxology the new world being given is nearly lost. Grief and praise are ways of prophetic criticism and energy, which can be more intentional even in our age (Brueggemann 116).

Prophetic witness is a mind-set. It is a countercultural consciousness of how the community of faith sees all things...all functions of the church can and should be prophetic voices that serve to criticize the dominant culture around us while energizing the faithful (Brueggemann 125).

As stewards of an alternative consciousness, the prophets were committed to speaking the truth to power, or being critical of the systems, processes, and rituals by the powers that be to maintain their current position and standing among the people.

Christians who seek justice should be alert for evidence of oppressive domination and should then find appropriate ways to give oppressed people a public voice. Christians should be whistleblowers, local and international media gadflies, and tireless critics of unjust

communication. In and out of church, Christians are called to give their voices—their talents, technology, and relationships—to those who do not have their own voices in society. Our voices belong to God to serve our neighbors (Schultze 107).

The prophet is a connected critic: someone who is connected to the people she criticizes through shared tradition and group identity. So, critical distance is best measured in inches, not miles (Woods 29).

But God gave communication not only for preaching the gospel; God also intended it for forming and informing culture in ways that promote shalom. (Woods 83). Meanwhile the prophet does not worry about how everything can be implemented, for such questions do not matter until the vision can be imagined (Woods 28).

Media perform a priestly function in that they confirm and exploit what the community wants to believe about itself. The word "priest" is relate to the latin pontifex, which describes the priest role as mediator or bridge builder. Media performs rituals and builds bridges that connects us to our culture broader beliefs (Woods 3).

Our appreciation of a work of art should not depend on whether it happens to share our worldview. Rather, art is about a shared experience of what it means to be human (Brand 146).

The poet, the artist, the sleuth—whoever sharpens our perception tends to be antisocial; rarely "well-adjusted," he cannot go along with currents and trends. A strange bond often exists among anti-social types in their power to see environments as they really are. This need to interface, to confront environments with a certain antisocial power, is manifest in the famous story, "The Emperor's new Clothes." "Well-adjusted" courtiers, having vested interests, saw the emperor as beautifully appointed. The "antisocial" brat, unaccustomed to the old environment, clearly saw that the Emperor "ain't got nothin' on." The new environment was clearly visible to him (McLuhan, *The Medium is the Massage* 88).

It is the artist's job to try to dislocate older media into postures that permit attention to the new. To this end, artists must ever play and experiment with new means of arranging experience, even though the majority of the audience may prefer to remain fixed in their old perceptual attitudes (McLuhan, *Understanding* 340).

The media prophet follows the rhetorical way of Jesus, turning popular wisdom on its head and standing up for the victims of society...Prophets must possess deep personal humility and a strong sense of responsibility to the Christian community. They must serve not themselves but the Creator and their neighbors. True prophets are not self-serving negativists who simply enjoy criticizing others of tearing down established institutions, but states-people who care primarily about the common good. In order to give to their neighbors, prophetic professional communicators become moral agents in society, dedicated to "selfless service...to fellow human beings" and anchoring their actions in "conscience and truth." Media prophets recognize that we are all self-delusional, that power can corrupt the Christian, and that listening to others is a crucial means of evaluating their own rhetoric (Schultze 134).

Whether it was the prophets to kings, Jesus to pharisees, or Paul to Athens, the bible is rich with a precedent of countercultural awakening. The known reality was not as grand as the ruling powers and prevailing wisdom thought themselves to be. What is true of the world may be true for Western Evangelicalism—it's construct (clothes) may not be so beautifully appointed as some may think. We need to listen to the creative voices of our media artists. We need to see and learn to communicate the way things truly are.

The arts are not the pretty but irrelevant bits around the border of reality. They are the highways into the center of a reality which cannot be glimpsed, let alone grasped, any other way (N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*).

New kinds of community being made possible make new kinds of communication and media possible. That is the essence of ministry media.

“Christians were never meant to be normal. We’ve always been holy troublemakers, we’ve always been creators of uncertainty, agents of dimension that’s incompatible with the status quo; we do not accept the world as it is, but we insist on the world becoming the way that God wants it to be. And the Kingdom of God is different from the patterns of this world.”

~ Jacques Ellul

THE VISION OF THE PEOPLE: COMMUNICATIONS AS APOCALYPTIC

Art’s necessary illusions serve to expose the illusory character of the experienced world...artists of necessity refer to the given world, yet to be art their work must imply (refer to) a whole new world of unrealized possibility.

~ James William McClendon in *Witness: Systematic Theology* VIII.

We must reclaim the word “apocalyptic” as it is vital to our biblical view of reality. Without this view of the present and future reality we cannot create ministry media. With an apocalyptic view of reality we are free to sabotage safety and security; take down the trappings of technique and methods, allowing for improvisation and creative courage.

Apokalupsis: *to uncover what you could not see before. A way out of the dark. A Revealing. Laying bare, making naked. A disclosure of truth, instruction. Concerning things before unknown. Used of events by which things or states or persons hitherto withdrawn from view are made visible to all. Manifestation, appearance.*

Living in an apocalyptic reality is to see clearly that all of “this” is coming to an end and something new is being uncovered that we couldn't see before. The unknown is being made known. Being apocalyptic unveils another way of doing things. Apocalyptic awakens. It is the bigger authenticity of a better reality made known.

Our communication should not merely move people or affect change; it should convey the cosmic point of the matter—the way things really are (Schultze 171). Shalom requires trust, and therefore assumes truth telling...but the radical Christian communicator realizes that truth telling is more complex than mere faculty, accuracy, or knowledge. The full truth in any situation is wide, deep, and rich. The gospel truth reflects our real condition, not just the “letter of the law” (140).

When we think of the apocalyptic as an invitation to reimagine reality, the exalted language of Revelation, which describes Jesus as the Alpha and the Omega, is freed to do its work of announcing that the cosmos isn't quite what we think it is. Glory honor, power, and praise are radically different from what we have in mind. The peasant is making all things new (Dark 144).

Apocalyptic, correctly understood, reminds us that the language of ‘The kingdom of God’ isn't

referring to some politically irrelevant eternity of otherworldly existence. To say that it is 'At hand' or near is a directive to 'repent' and enter into a new way of life that aligns itself with the purposes of shalom (Dark 14).

One unfortunate byproduct of religion as a marketing tool is the "Christian" consumer who finds himself embroiled in the psychological nightmare of trying to be good advertising for God...Advertising language is, by definition, fundamentally dishonest and the cognitive dissonance involved in putting on a brave face and learning to like (and act like) "Christian" products is not easily underestimated. Perhaps worst of all, the believer is deprived of his inheritance, within the Jewish and Christian traditions, of an apocalyptic worldview. It is, after all, useless if not applied to the actual world. But in stark contrast to the doctrines of redemption and incarnation, the hapless buyer, trapped in a maze of religious marketing, is trained to view the sweet old world as "secular" which is to say irrelevant to his horrendously sentimentalized, "religious" experience. To a great extent the believer is taught to "give God the glory" by dwelling in a world that God never made (Dark 17).

Such confidence in a new day coming and the biblical imperative of reconciliation aren't based in some optimistic ideology of liberalism. It's an applied faith rooted in the eschatological hope of the new Testament: Jesus' testimony and his way will overcome (Dark 17).

For the apocalyptically minded, such transformations are perpetually in progress whether we go about paying attention or not. The feverish activity of accumulation and mismeasurement by which we order our existence, and which we foolishly call self interest, is exposed as silly and short sighted in light of apocalyptic art that unveils the fact of the matter: the kingdom of the world is becoming the kingdom of God, and it doesn't depend on our acknowledgement or faithfulness to it within our highly-charged present. It's coming anyway. It is and was and is to come. We have the privilege of watching and praying and noticing in the glorious meantime, especially in what appear to be the unlikeliest of corners. To reimagine now is our work and our pleasure. Look harder. It is at hand (Dark 26).

The apocalyptic disposition, committed to the enemy-loving self disclosure, is sustained through prayerfully imaginative receptivity towards options recognized by the reigning and ordinary machinery of social interaction. The action, whether improvised or well practiced, will body forth new possibilities and, in apocalyptic terms, participate in the ushering in of a new world (Dark 148).

The possibility of actually acting differently can be kept at some conveniently impossible distance from our everyday consideration as long as we keep Jesus "spiritual." We can view him as a kind of phantom friend who absolves us of our guilty feelings, expands our territory, and to take our souls to a faraway place when we die, just so long as we ask him into our "hearts" as the savior of our spiritual selves. There is a lot of money to be made in this sort of nonsense, and it certainly has a way of filling up meeting spaces on Sunday mornings. But it doesn't bear any resemblance to any recognizable orthodoxy within the historical Christian faith, it is rather, the almost purposely useless, deliberately short sighted, politically irrelevant religion that will often inspire contempt among honest people (Dark 155).

The apocalyptic believer will be light-heartedly aware of the inadequacy of her even most heartfelt words and expressions, as well as her natural tendency to shrink-wrap the revelation into more easily manageable and digestible forms. This is the healthy skepticism and suspicion that begins with self doubt and extends itself to doubting the be-all-end-all claims of one's own culture. A fully "spiritualized" Jesus will never challenge these claims, but the Jesus of John revelation does and thereby relativizes, without denying, all the lesser beauties that elicit our distracted claims of "awesome." When we read Revelation attentively, we will feel all our

presumptions, idolatries, and shrink-wrap giving way to a newness we cannot control or fully understand” (Dark 156).

In my own debilitating tendency to read the bible as if it says what I already know and believe instead of reading it repentantly with a mind ready to yield to transformation, I need whatever I can get my hands on to better get my head around the meaning of indefatigable, irrefutable, and embarrassingly credible apocalyptic. If it doesn't challenge my preconceived notion in any way it is superlativeness doesn't leave me chastened, I'm probably not looking at it properly. Our inclination to run from the shocking grace that will transform our lives and our world is difficult to overestimate, but the superlativeness, like apocalyptic, is irrepressible. All shall be made alive with laughter. It unveils, before our eyes the not-to-be mastered whole of a world without end (Dark 156).

Ministry media that matters must do likewise. Ultimately the invitation into a better, truer reality is a call to repentance and alignment with God's intended purpose through Christ. The apocalyptic reality, seeing that all "this" is coming to an end, being a part of imaging forth the truer reality of Christ's Kingdom come, is a view to the Christ of this present reality.

We help serve the world by communicating the reality of Christ's life-giving grace. Our symbols can powerfully change people's view of reality and even lead individuals to acknowledge God (Schultze 90).

In fact he enables us not by making us supernaturally strong, but by opening our eyes. The Holy Spirit is that power which opens eyes that are closed, hearts that are unaware and minds that shrink from too much reality (Taylor 19).

The apocalyptic embrace of entropy in view of the Kingdom is the rhythm of the gospel. The Good News that completely undoes everything you thought to be real and simultaneously invites you into a Truth far greater. This is the tempo of culture change itself. All change comes through greater creativity accompanied by an invitation to participation, not critique or deconstruction.⁵⁷

Reconciliation and restoration means not walking away from the world as it is but having the courage to invite God's redeeming presence into it. This means having the courage to expose the darkness as in Ephesians 5:8-14.

"for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

*"Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you."*

⁵⁷ See Part 3: Culture Making

PART 3: RESTORATION

"I suggest that our faith in the Incarnation has an immediate relevance to our art, science, and philosophy. Since the Incarnation all men have been taken up into the poetry of God, the Divine Logos, the Word, His Son. But Christians alone know this. And knowing this, our own poetry, our own power of incarnating and uttering the world, becomes a precious foretaste of the Divine Incarnation and the Evangel. We can see how all things have literally been fulfilled in Christ, especially our powers of perception."

~ Marshall McLuhan

REALITY REVEALING CREATIVITY

Building on this fundamental communications theory and theology we can move beyond the limits of both ritual and transmission views of communication and move toward a ministry model of communications and culture. A view characterized by reality revealing creativity and unfettered invitation: *Confirmation, Imagination, Invitation*.

Ministry: *a person or thing through which something is accomplished; something that serves as an agency, instrument, or means; the spiritual work or service of any Christian or a group of Christians, especially evangelism.*

Minister: *a person acting as the agent or instrument of another.*

Ours is a ministry of reconciliation and restoration. The prefix 're-' indicates going back to an original state. Reconciliation and restoration means not walking away from the world as it is but having the courage to invite God's redeeming presence into it. The practical implications of the intention are legion.

Through Christ we are called to participate in the "in-breaking" of His amazing Kingdom here and now. We must first be reconciled to God and the way we engage others also must be transformed. Accordingly, we are to be active partners with God in reconciling mankind to Him and mankind to one another (Matthew 22: 36-40, Matthew 25:31-46). God intends to image forth the righteousness and justice of His Kingdom through His beloved community: the reconciled and transformed Body of Christ. We are to be the realization of divine love in lived social relation (John 13:34-35). What matters most is that we are willing to open our doors and invite in the hurting and the broken to journey with a community that believes God is at work setting things to rights and restoring his beloved creation.

The Church is so entirely a matter of communication that like fish that know nothing of water, Christians have no adequate awareness of communication. Perhaps the world has been given to us as an anti-environment to make us aware of the word (McLuhan, *The Medium and the Light* xxi).

Scripture is rich with an understanding of communication as dialogue and understands the power of ritual. For example, when Jesus says "do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22) he is completing the relational loop of communication. Do this. Remember me. This act becomes a sacrament, our most deeply held ritual. As such, it is able to maintain the intended meaning and communicate that meaning across cultures for over 2,000 years. Vital and precious meaning kept at a lossless quality without storage mediums, without mass broadcast, and with near zero corruption of the intended meaning. Even with modern media and delivery techniques very little (if anything) has been added to or taken away from this simple, central ritual.⁵⁸ A testament to

⁵⁸ However, the case could be made that communion was to be experienced as a meal. Making

God's design for communications. The reverence we afford communion and baptism has so far protected them from modern spectacle, consumerism, and the cult of technique.⁵⁹

Likewise, in saying "I have been crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2) Paul is not expressing his literal state of being—for he was not crucified on a cross—but is establishing a "me too" moment on a profoundly theological level. One that adds a level of significance to the crucifixion and all it accomplished that bonds its meaning to all else that it communicates to the world. This "me too" statement exemplifies the extent to which he was identifying with the sacrifice of Christ.

What's more, Paul and the Apostles modeled public communication seen as done in dialogue with the individuals and surrounding culture. Theirs were not lectures of information, but a "negotiating of meanings," and an engagement in "the social conflict over the real." Though this occurs frequently throughout the New Testament, it is perhaps most evident in Paul's visit to Ephesus. While visiting the synagogues, he "spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8). Later in the chapter, Paul faces an angry mob that vehemently accuses him of spreading lies that threaten their goddess Artemis. For these Ephesians, their entire paradigm of reality was in jeopardy; for Paul, this was a conflict over the real.

Our custom of preaching is rooted in the church's adoption of the European university lecture (slightly adapted) as the central focus of its communicational activity... it was apparently during the Reformation that Protestants replaced the mass with a monologue lecture (the sermon) as the central feature of the worship service...But our standard English translations of the Scriptures, by using the words *preach*, *proclaim*, and their derivatives so frequently (some two hundred times), mislead us into thinking that this method has been chosen by God as virtually his only ordained method of communication. Are we not commanded to preach?...The Scriptures do not show that John the Baptist, Jesus, the disciples communicated mainly by preaching. Their view of communication was much broader than the concept most English speakers attach to the word *preach*... (Kraft 27). The early church employed the word *kerusso* and its derivatives in an expanded way to refer to a much wider range of communicational activity. It included monologue lecturing but was also used to label interactions that were mainly dialogical, as long as the focus was on the communication of the gospel. It is an interesting confirmation of this fact that John, perhaps sensing the limitations of this word uses the word *witness* (*martureo*)⁶⁰ in its place (Kraft 28).

It is extremely significant from a communicational standpoint that the message we are called to communicate is far more than a verbal message...For in a way that boggles our minds, the God who brings the message is the major component of the message he brings..his goal is a personal relationship with his respondents..Christian life is a personal response to the God who is the message, not simply to the words that proceed from him...God himself is the message, and we respond to a person. It is in relation to the person of God, not to some words about him, that we "live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28)...The ultimate Christian message is a person. An anything that reduces that message to mere verbalization is unworthy of the message...the Christian message is a life message, not simply a word message (Kraft 40-41).

As we move toward a Ministry Model of Communications as Culture, we must first reflect on the intrinsic example and tone of creativity set in scripture and centered in Christ.

communion a mass/large scale event strips it of the relationships, cultural context, and dialog in a normal, familial meal. Thereby depleting meaning.

⁵⁹ However, this is tested by recent outcry over using audience manipulation techniques to raise the percentage of "spontaneous baptisms" at large churches like Elevate in Charlotte, North Carolina: www.wcnc.com/story/news/investigations/i-team/2014/07/04/11102082

⁶⁰ Recall: "...but to manifest an ongoing and fragile social process (bear witness)."

THE GENESIS OF CREATIVITY

Let there be:

“And God said, “Let there be...” (Genesis 1). Why is there something rather than nothing? Simply because God said “let there be.” The story of everything begins with the creative act. A verbal action of manifestation. From word one, we are told that words have power and that actual things can be spoken into existence. Be it a given name or a new idea, our words make space for the existence of the new to be possible.⁶¹ Our process, too, begins with speaking words out loud, insisting that things are true, bringing them into existence—making them possible at all.⁶²

Speech is not the area of theory or concept but of performance and percept. Poetry and Song are major means by which speech is purified and strengthened, and poetry and music are extensions of speech...” (McLuhan, *The Medium and the Light* 125).

Our words, like our silence, can foster life or death. Our symbolic action breathes heaven or hell into the world...When we also breathe life into our communication, we radically serve others and please God...Radical communication requires us to form communities that incarnate the gospel so that all people may taste shalom. Instead of conforming our communication to the world, we should constantly and radically renew it through the inspiration of Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and our community of faith. Radical communicators are symbolic stewards, not individualistic critics with self-serving motives...The love of God and the responsibility to neighbors are the very fabric of shalom. Symbolic freedom is not an end in itself or a license to pursue fame, fortune, and fun. God gives us freedom so that we can act responsibly in and for the community (Schultze 138-139).

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits. Proverbs 18:21

The Word:

“In the beginning was the Word...” (John 1). What is the story all about? How is the story to be told? Simply, The Word (Hebrews 1:2). From the very beginning God told the story with The Word. In The Word all things are held together. Reality itself is bound by The Word (Colossians 1). Inherently, words make up our reality. Would it be any surprise if we come to discover that

⁶¹ Consider a prime example of this sort of media creativity in Malcolm London's Louder than a Bomb competition (youngchicagoauthors.org/blog/ltab). A spoken word event in Chicago that bring marginalized young people together “in ways that are unthinkable in most other settings. A shared love of writing and performing creates bonds where typically there are boundaries.” The competition proclaims to “reimagine and recreate” this city—a literal example of speaking things into existence.

⁶² Consider the example of pastor and civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s *I have a Dream* speech in 1963: In an apex moment of cultural unrest and warring ideas about equality and the nature of humanity, Reverend King said “I have a dream that one day right here in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.” He was speaking this dream of a Kingdom reality of brotherhood and sisterhood into the physical, present Alabama. In response to this, the great evangelist and Evangelical leader, Billy Graham, said “only when Christ comes again will the lion lay down with the lamb and the little white children of Alabama walk hand in hand with the little black children.” Such a reality wasn't even conceivable (although theologically recognized) even to Godly men. It had to be spoken into reality to be made possible at all. After that famous speech cultural change began to accelerate as the conception was made more widely possible by the large audience and broadcast of that speech. Reverend Graham later humbly repented of making that statement.

the mysterious forces of gravity that holds the universe together closely resemble sound waves of the spoken words of "let there be."

In John 14, Jesus proclaims that He is the way, the truth, and the life. The Greek word for "the truth" means "the reality." Jesus himself is the better reality being made known. Not his words, but his person is the The Way. "Reality revealing creativity" is ultimately revealing Christ. If our common center is Jesus, then we need to be making things that point to Him and through that make the Truth known as Jesus Christ himself.

We are not profound. Jesus is profound. Paul iterates this by claiming that his objective was not to exalt the technique, but rather the object of his proclamation: Christ (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). Our lives and messages are to accurately represent that—and that (The Word) is the only story we truly need. The Word is living and universally powerful. But it would be folly if this truth led us to think the same about our own words. All we need is "I was once this, and now I am this, because of Jesus." How amazing is that?

It is Christ Himself, not the Bible, who is the true word of God. The Bible, read in the right spirit and with the guidance of good teachers, will bring us to Him. We must not use the Bible as a sort of encyclopedia out of which texts can be taken for use as weapons.

~ C.S. Lewis

Either God's word is God's word for all peoples in all places, in all times, in all cultures, and all literacy levels or it is not God's word. No more special knowledge is required. We can put an end to attitudes of "if you only spoke Greek" or "if you only knew apologetics" or "only understood early rabbinic culture" then you would really understand. As fascinating and important as these and other fields of study are, they are not where the meaning comes from—or perhaps better put, these insights are not truly "the reason for the hope that we have" (1 Peter 3:13-17). We do not need clever techniques to "unlock" someone with our communications or media.

George Lindbeck, speaking on Christians as "toddlers" and the "religious pretentiousness implicit in the notion that non-Christians are anonymously Christian" states: There is something arrogant about supposing that Christians know what nonbelievers experience and believe in the depths of their being better than they know themselves, and that therefore the task of dialog or evangelism is to increase their self awareness. The communication of the gospel is not a form of psychotherapy, but rather *the offer and the act of sharing one's own beloved language—the language that speaks of Jesus Christ*—with all those who are interested, in the full awareness that God doesn't call all to be a part of the witnessing people (Lindbeck).

At the same time (and perhaps paradoxically to Lindbeck's insight) we connect this message to others via our shared humanity and commonalities: "...we are not programmed to understand our fellow human beings scientifically, as if they were experimental subjects in a laboratory, and social intercourse would be impossible if we adopted such an attitude (Fortner 113). Our ordinary understanding of other people depends upon an assumption of similarity. We need to believe that they possess an inner life of thoughts, feelings, desires, and choices, which, though differing in detail, is not unlike our own (Fortner 147).

Scripture is never veiled in reminding us that we are all not so different, that not one of us is good (Romans 3). For example, 1 Corinthians 6: 9-11, a passage used to justify exclusion and division, is turned on its head with the simple admonishment of "as some of you once were." Where there is brokenness the gospel brings healing. Where there is division, the gospel brings unity.

Unity grounds itself primarily in Christ's speech: "My sheep hear my voice." The true form of possible unity in the Church comes from the ability of the Christian to hear this speech (McLuhan, *Medium and the Light* 207; John 10:27).

Incarnate Communication:

In Jesus Christ, there is no distance or separation between the medium and the message: it is the one case where we can say that the medium and the message are fully one and the same (McLuhan, *Medium and the Light*, 103).

God does not reveal by means of a philosophical system or a moral code or a metaphysical construction. He enters into human history and accompanies his people.

~ Jacques Ellul

The gospel of John records the first instructional words of Jesus's ministry as an unconditional invitation, "come and you will see" (John 1:39). From word one, it wasn't about convincing others to listen, it was about inviting them to see for themselves. Ministry media can function as an unfettered invitation for the world to come and see the Christ we bear witness to.

Scripture shows how Jesus repeatedly used communication to serve some of the most despised and weak people in society. Jesus communed with the shunned Samaritan woman, with tax collectors, with prostitutes, and with the destitute blind man. Christ's ministry was not a quest for celebrity, it did not reflect a yearning for symbolic domination, and it was not a means by which to boost the authority of established social institutions. Jesus did not take symbolic power as much as he gave it to the powerless; his earthly ministry culminated in the cross itself, the greatest symbol of liberation in human history (Schultze 100).

God is asking us to be partners in His Kingdom come, in the ministry of reconciliation, we do this by wading in with Jesus, to be incarnate with others, participating in the unveiling of this better, truer reality made known, and inviting others to join. This must also be done through ministry communication and media.

Our character begins to follow Christ's lead as we interact with people through love. His lead is incarnate. This means we are to live among and rub shoulders with those who need us. We can't love at a distance. You cannot commute to a calling.

We too must become incarnational—entering into the daily reality of others and reflecting the love of God into their lives. Jesus did not attempt to meet every need or delegate every responsibility but instead chose to meet specific people, in specific places, and met specific needs as He came in contact with them. From this flows everything else. Especially our media.

Why is this difficult? The simplicity of Christ's lead is difficult because our old nature is content with indirect ministries and avoids the incarnate. If you have to "do ministry," the old self prefers that you invest at a distance and never really get involved with people. We are keen to keep it to books, radio messages, or the maintenance of institutions. We'll just send checks, get monastic or entertain, but won't get directly involved with people because it's messy, draining and high risk. Our old nature is hard at work blocking incarnate ministry. All manner of rationale and distraction are used to divert people from being involved with others. Fear of the unknown creeps in and we doubt where, when and how to be incarnate. While leaning on our own strength, we feel inadequate and at times intimidated.

Philippians 2:5-11: Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

John 17:17-18: Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

The difference between information and transformation is the presence of Christ in the preached Word. The Word is not text but deeply human and personal. Yet, media as extensions of ourselves, have a bias toward undoing our incarnate presence on earth.

*“When you are on the air you are, in a way, everywhere at once. Electric man is a “super angel.” When you are on the telephone you have no body. And, while your voice is there, you and the people you speak to are here, at the same time. Electric man has no bodily being. He is literally dis-carnate. But a discarnate world, like the one we now live in, is a tremendous menace to an incarnate Church, and its theologians haven’t even deemed it worthwhile to examine the fact” (McLuhan, *Medium and the Light* 50).*

The incarnate example of Jesus means that incarnate ministry solves the paradox of loyalty to source or audience.⁶³ Media artists are that medium and mediator by nature of being Christ followers. Our ministry prerogative aligns perfectly and divinely with the cost of making media that matters. Jesus communicated via intimacy with an obedience to the Father which provided the basis for his communication with us and one of us. It is therefore the basis for our incarnational witness. Jesus was tightly connected with God on one side of the bridge and to humans on the other. So must we be if we are to communicate God’s messages in his way.

In adopting the receptors frame of reference, God entrusts himself to us, becoming dependant on and vulnerable to us. It is our life he lives, our food he eats, our homes in which he sleeps, our difficulties that he shares, our emotions that he feels. He employs our language and culture to get his ideas across to us, agreeing to the meanings we attach to those symbols (Kraft 16).

The scriptures provide us with a communicational model to imitate. We see there is a God who refuses to stay on the other side of an enormous communication gap. He seeks a relationship with us that will elicit from us a commitment to himself and his cause. To bring this about he develops a strategy to assure that he will be understood on our side of the gap. In this strategy he is receptor-oriented, entering our frame of reference in a trusting, dependant, even vulnerable manner to show his love, acceptance, and respect toward us in a way that we cannot misunderstand. God is personal and identifies with us by incarnating himself the message he sends. Furthermore, God assures that his messages come with impact. He develops his credibility, demonstrates what he says, deals specifically with his receptors and the issues that concern them, leads his receptors to discovery, and trusts them to carry on the cause (Kraft 23).

It is the second act of the great commandment that separates Christianity from other religious faiths, for it is the means to bring God back to earth as a relevant and powerful figure in human affairs. It is the human incarnation that mirrors the creation that God entrusted to humankind,

⁶³ Review the columns on page 10. How do we serve, love, and understand our audience above all as well as honoring to God’s revealed truth above all. How do we love God and love others appropriately in our message making?

the means by which God's love is manifested in a hurting world. Communication is the tool of that manifestation; through it, Christians are able to determine the model of God to those who do not know God (Fortner 73).

The way you get meaning into your life is to devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to your community around you, and devote yourself to creating something that gives you purpose and meaning...Goodness is about sharing that purpose and meaning, based in love, with others (Fortner 153). Without meaning in our life we will likely never create meaningful messages. Without love in our lives our messages are mere noise (1 Corinthians 13: 1-7). In practice, our theology should force you to make different choices, even beyond pure ethics; best practices are merely the tool to do what communicators are driven to accomplish.

That is why it is crucial for Christians truly to know those with whom they seek to communicate and why the idea of such communication is dialogue or interaction. This is what makes use of the media so difficult, too, since media has been developed in such a way that media's expectations of listeners or viewers have been largely passive (Fortner 154).⁶⁴ Likewise, the media artist's incarnate relationships with those whose stories are to be shared is equally crucial.

Christ thus completed the creation that Adam had been invited to complete but had failed in Eden to do. He completed it by using the gift of communication to respond to his father with obedience and acceptance and to trust his father to carry out what he had promised. Jesus affirmed the role of communication as an essential tool of relationship with God and forsook the human use of this gift as a means to power, control, and self-definition. May we all be so bold in our use of communication for the sake of our fellow man in the new creation that was begun at that time? (Fortner 255)

Our communication should manifest the love of God, who became fully human for us and for our salvation...we become downwardly mobile to serve others and to avoid the corrupting power of upward mobility. Our communication continues God's redemptive plan when we offer the love of Christ to others. Christians are God's conduits the Creator's eyes, ears, and voice on earth. Our communicative talents belong to Christ, not to ourselves. Human communication is the humbling responsibility demonstrated by the ultimate servant, Jesus Christ (Schultze 102).

We are held together by The Incarnate Word, what we hold in common, that draws us into communion and community. We are bonded by our commonality in Christ, who understands and is with us—a simple fundamental truth of God's design for communication profoundly exemplified in “me too.”

The power of “Me Too:”

Perhaps the most fundamental power of communications, media, and art is the ability to externalize vividly what we all feel vaguely. Causing the soul to leap and say “...yes!...me too...that...that is exactly how I feel. I thought I was the only one. I am not alone.” Few things are more profound to the human condition than the words “me too.” A core component of any ministry model of communications and culture.

Sensationalism, consumerism, and airbrushing⁶⁵ in the church not only fosters entertainment and idealism, but our fear of the mundane and our aspiration to be exciting and cool breaks the

⁶⁴ Consider all the ways modern network-socialized media facilitates a bias toward dialog in a way limited by previous media forms.

⁶⁵ A term borrowed from digital photo manipulation to denote using techniques to make things appear more idea than they are in reality.

“me too” essential relationship between audience and message. Airbrushing in media creates the unachievable ideal and encourages futile aspirations to its achievement—a concept as alive in Evangelical media as it is in popular women’s magazines.

Little is accomplished either in the heart or in the culture without a “me too” moment. This is exactly why oppressive rulers have always known to limit media and public assembly. Movement and cultural change cannot happen if every revolutionary is kept isolated. Not until a group can validate a commonality of belief can things change. Keep in mind, communications that creates culture change must be representative of the here and now as well as imaging something greater. Severing the “me too” power of media turns the listening public into an audience of individuals.⁶⁶ Not only is cultural growth and change severely limited, but so too is individual transformation. This alone may explain many of the struggles larger local churches are facing.

Because church communications has so often focused on answers rather than on questions, Christian orthodoxy has been pushed in the direction of concern for commitment to credal information rather than concern for creative, discovery-oriented, deeply personal interaction with God. Such interaction can be labeled “mine.” Creedal information is always labeled “someone else’s” (Kraft 50).

Artist as pastor of the 21st century:

Throughout history, whenever we see the wave of cultural change swell, at the crest of that wave, at the tip of the foam, is the artist. Every time.

No society has ever known enough about its actions to have developed immunity to its new extensions or technologies. Today we have begun to sense that art may be able to provide such immunity. In the history of human culture there is no example of a conscious adjustment of the various factors of personal and social life to new extensions except in the puny and peripheral efforts of artists. The artist picks up the message of cultural and technological challenge decades before its transforming impact occurs. He, then, builds models or Noah’s arks for facing the change that is at hand...For in the electric age there is no longer any sense in talking about the artist’s being ahead of his time. Our technology is, also, ahead of its time, if we reckon by the ability to recognize it for what it is. To prevent undue wreckage in society, the artist tends now to move from the ivory tower to the control tower of society. Just as higher education is no longer a frill or luxury but a stark need of production and operational design in the electric age, so the artist is indispensable in the shaping and analysis and understanding of the life of forms, and structures created by electric technology...The ability of the artist to sidestep the bully blow of new technology of any age, and to parry such violence with full awareness, is age-old. Equally age-old is the inability of the percussed victims, who cannot sidestep the new violence, to recognize their need of the artist. To reward and to make celebrities of artists can, also, be a way of ignoring their prophetic work, and preventing its timely use for survival...If men were able to be convinced that art is precise advance knowledge of how to cope with the psychic and social consequences of the next technology, would they all become artists? Or would they begin a careful translation of new art forms into social navigation charts? I am curious to know what would happen if art were suddenly seen for what it is, namely, exact information of how to rearrange one’s psyche in order to anticipate the next blow from our own extended faculties (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 95-96).

In such a mediated age, who rejoices with me? Who weeps with me? (Romans 12:15) More and more, people turn to their media artists in times of hurt and doubt. Our media aids us in lament. Our identification with media forms help us confess. When we need counsel we turn to our new

⁶⁶ Recall Communications as Culture Section

holy texts of media artifacts, not pastors. *The artist is the pastor of the 21st century whether we recognize it or not.* To know what is real, to feel something true, the words most cherished, the words most returned to, the words with the most meaning and most staying power remain lyrics, poetry, and lines from great books or film scripts. Theirs is the meaning that matters. The artist is the soul care comforter.

We are suddenly threatened with a liberation that taxes our inner resources of self-employment and imaginative participation in society. This would seem to be a fate that calls men to the role of artist in society” (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 471).

The most important kind of medium used for purposes of communication is the person(s) involved in the communication process. Beyond the person are technological devices that, like all technological devices, extend the person’s ability to control at least to some extent factors such as space and time (Kraft 117).

Our framework for ministry media consistently reveals that the character of the media maker matters greatly. Ministry creatives are no mere technicians and it is folly to see them that way (1 Corinthians 11:1, Luke 10:16). Media as extensions of the individual reflect the importance of the position of the creative media maker in the message making process. *Their character and theology are inextricable from the messages they make.*⁶⁷

Pastor as artist of 21st Century:

Where does this leave our pastors? They remain soul communicators, but they were never to be the sole communicator. What are our preachers? Is preaching immune from our definition of communications or ministry framework? How could it be? Is a sermon art? How could it not be?

Of course, the intent is not to unduly decry the importance of exegetical preaching. We should all gather to listen to lots of it. However: “... as Christian communicators we too easily fall into the culturally approved habit of simply trying to increase the amount of information stored in people’s minds. We have been carefully trained in our educational institutions to value information for itself, and so we continue to dig it out and to pass it on as if God also subscribes to such a value. People, therefore, usually know much more than they can possibly live, yet they feel supported by the church in their belief that if they can only learn more they will be blessed. We often seem to subscribe to the aims of the Athenians who “liked to spend all their time telling and hearing the latest new thing” (Kraft 56; Acts 17:21b).

The Bible seems to focus little or not at all on people’s need for more information. Indeed, there are even indications that certain of those condemned in the Bible might have been better off with less information (John 9:41; 15:22; Luke 12:47-48). Yet the most prominent communication vehicle in Protestant Christianity is the sermon—an information-oriented technique (Kraft 64).

Any insistence to see the Bible as merely an information tome to be used as a source ignores its form as a medium, its message as a story, and its power to be a living word.

The only choice is *not* between explicit preaching and inarticulate or watered-down versions of the gospel. Communicating the gospel artistically does not water it down or reduce its

⁶⁷ Consider the rise of the “speaking pastor.” A generation of talented communicators convinced that if they could just use their talents and communicate biblical truths in their own special, uniquely engaging way then revival would happen. If we could just be “cool” and “relevant” enough. We were convinced better public speaking technique was the key to cultural acceptance and gave these gifted speakers nearly unlimited platform. However, more than revival, we have seen what separating “pastor” from speaker did to the message and how turning a blind eye to character or theology issues in exchange for talent led to the eventual fall of many a megalomaniac, would-be, celebrity pastor.

complexity to the point that the requirements of the Christian life are lost. *Art is not the moral opposite of preaching* (Fortner 155).

Art is the effort we all make to put our meaning into a form that will increase the chances that it will be understood. It's the rationale for gesture, for vocal variety, for dramatization, the use of the film score... (Fortner 148). In this case, the artist has become a communicator. And whenever anyone attempts to communicate using the tools of the artist—whether in performance, presentation via a symbolic medium, or language—that person takes on the guise of an artist. Any storyteller, recording artist, television or film director, radio producer, novelist, and so on is an artist engaging in both artistic expression and communication. (Fortner 150)

Unfortunately, generations of pastors, hampered by transmissional views of communication, have had their vital exegetical charge limited to mere delivery techniques and 3 point sermons. This has created fine outlines, but poor views of ministry communication, and far too much burden on one person for the communications of the community. Preachers are artists whether they know it or not.

Testimony as the playback of the Church:

Not only is the local church an example of the optimal storage medium for ministry media it is also the ideal playback medium for retrieving that media. Again, the local church being where our identity can be most fully realized.

All our ministry communication must generate from our community experience represented in the local church. Our representation is synonymous with what we testify to. Both our corporate and individual testimony. Or in modern appeal: our story.

Truth is better revealed than instructed. Seeing the gathering as our primary ritual, we can then see it as a place where we are re-living experiences together—this has always been exhibited through our sacraments and media. Transmissional postures reduce this reliving of shared experience to a mere retelling by a singular source transmitted to all in physical or digital attendance.

Ritual = reLIVING experiences = STORY

Transmission = reTELLING experiences = NARRATION

It's the difference between being immersed in a living story and listening to a voice-over while going about "normal" life. Therefore the nature of ministry communication should be immersive and multisensory. The classic writing rule of "show, don't tell" must be applied at all levels. We too often ignore this simple guide in ministry media. People will not connect with our media messages if we do not connect with them. The supreme bias toward sacrificial, incarnate love should result in Christians being the best storytellers.

Our lives are like record needles tracking over the ripples in the community recording, pulling out the stored meaning and playing it for all to hear.⁶⁸

When we tell our story, are we simply projecting literal pictures and technical language or are we creating immersive opportunities connecting people to being within 2,000 years of Church history and all of human history? Experiencing is different than explaining. The love of God does not need to be explained; it needs to be experienced.

⁶⁸ Recall from Part 1: "Christ followers are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). Not *should* be or *could* be light to the world—*Are!* We cannot "be hidden." We communicate something no matter what. Our media are extensions of our very selves."

The difference is the way that art can simply change your life by your experience of it—versus literal words merely telling you to change your life. The intangible and unquantifiable communicative power of art far outweighs the technical transmission of concepts.⁶⁹

A bias toward techniques can lead us to creating an event or a stunt out of important messages. Whereas a bias toward ritual allows for more movement and sacrament. For example: Picture an Easter service where each person in attendance is asked to come forward to nail their name to the cross. A powerful exercise, yes? Now picture the time between services when behind the scenes all the names are torn off so the next service can have the same experience/moment. Isn't something lost in the logistics? Now picture an Easter service at a neighboring church where each person in attendance is asked to write a name down of someone they hope to see saved. Then these names are made into a permanent work of art as a fixture on the wall of the church. Something is gained in the creation of meaning and movement. Our media is to be about movement over moments.

Consider the church “potluck” as a ritual. Is this traditional meal not communion? Could you not pause a potluck gathering for the “remembrance” ritual with an invitation to continue communing in like service of one another?

“Eating together and other types of participatory activities can be powerful codes for conveying meanings such as fellowship, concern, willingness to sacrifice, desire to be together, and the like. There seems to be a widespread (even cross-cultural) tendency for people to interpret eating together as invested with a kind of sacramental significance. This fact makes the Lord's Supper probably the most potentially meaningful of the codes regularly employed within Christianity, at least when it is practiced as meal...When, however, the Lord's Supper is practiced (as in most Western Christianity) as a skeleton ritual with precious little resemblance to a participatory meal (or any other part of real life), the communication value is radically altered” (Kraft 115).

Authentic beats profound or professional every time (and it's cheaper): Being clever is overrated. So is trying too hard to be “relevant” or producing slick images. Particularly within the upcoming generation authenticity is all that matters—and they are not easily fooled. Be brutally authentic and by that you will be profound. What's more, it is vastly easier and less costly to craft such messages. Testimony is organic, natural, and often simply needs to be recorded and shared.⁷⁰

Our communication need not always be fancy or costly, but it should be well done. Big budgets and slick pitches do not guarantee that our communication will have lasting value, but well-crafted communication can please God and witness for the joy and harmony of shalom...In the developed world, we often wrongly equate extravagance with quality, but the truth is that some of the most expensive communication is also the worst. Technological extravagance, in particular, is hardly a virtue: It is often a vice that leads to sloppy and superficial communication...Modern media create in us an appetite for products that are flashy, impressive, and stimulating, and meeting these criteria often requires large production budgets. But flashy presentation does not guarantee that producers have a worthwhile message or that they express their message well. Sometimes a simpler, more profound, and more compelling message is less expensive to present (Schultze 84).

Each of us lives in a particular place and time. We cannot redeem the world overnight, but we

⁶⁹ Recall the words of Marshall McLuhan: “It is the same with a work of art. The meaning of a work of art, as the artists of past centuries can tell us, has nothing to do with what you think about it. It has to do with its action upon you. It is a form: it acts upon you. It invades your senses. It re-structures your outlook. It completely changes your attitudes, your wave-lengths.”(McLuhan, *Medium and the Light* 38)

⁷⁰ See “Ministry Media Matters Workshop” in the appendix.

can invite others to join us in creating communities of shalom. We can help to breathe life into our local communities, beginning with our families and congregations. Shalom does not emerge in a crazed media frenzy but in the orality of our daily lives. God equips us with communication gifts and with the Holy Spirit. In communities of grace we overcome some of the symbolic ambiguity of our lives, we live the truth of the gospel, we discover and exercise our communicative gifts, and we balance the various media forms as we pursue tangible peace and justice (Schultze 72).

CULTS AND CULTURE MAKING

Cult: a misplaced or excessive admiration for a particular person or thing; beliefs or practices regarded as strange or sinister deviations.

ANYTHING in competition with our identity in Christ can be an idol, anything other than Christ himself can be a cult = the belief in something that will save us (other than Christ Himself).

In our attempts to create media there are multiple communication cults of practice we can fall into. The two most influential have been the cult of technique and the cult of sensationalism. Both are an insulation from the gospel. These beliefs lead to the most damaging communication forms of propaganda and kitsch. Our culture making depends on us rejecting these cults of practice.

The Cult of Technique

is characterized by an obsession with techniques, methods, measurables, efficiencies, best practices, and analysis. It looks to modern society for its tactics and measures. Much has already been said on the limits of a technical model of communication. Still, in a technological society⁷¹ such as ours it is difficult to even conceive of alternative ways of thinking much less creating.

Technique refers to any complex of standardized means for attaining a predetermined results (Ellul, *Technological* vi). Technique is not “bad,” but rather neutral. As such it can be taken too far. Our pursuit of creativity and meaning become controlled by our own void assurances of guaranteed result. We are steered by metrics of what “works” or conceptions of “success” (e.g. popularity). Our churches, organizations, and ministry media become a “Frankenstein creature” of best practices. Unfortunately, having all the right parts is not the same as making something great with them.

Technique, as the universal and autonomous technical fact, is revealed as the technological society itself in which man is but a single tightly integrated and articulated component (Ellul, *Technological* x). An understanding of our technological society is essential to our understanding of media ecology and of media environments.⁷²

Genuine human communities are suppressed by the technological society to form collectives of “mass men” incapable of obeying any other law than the statistical “law of large numbers” (Ellul, *Technological* xvi). Technique is every bit as responsible for the formation of our mass society as media is. To see outworkings of this we can look to large homogenous churches and uniform mass Evangelical culture.

⁷¹ **READ: *The Technological Society* by Jacques Ellul**

⁷² See Part 1: Media Ecology

The ideal for which technique strives is the mechanization of everything it encounters (Ellul, *Technological* 12). It is not hard to sense the misalignment of the cult of technique with creativity and art.⁷³

Technique no longer rests on tradition, but rather on previous technical procedures; and its evolution is too rapid, too upsetting, to integrate the older traditions (Ellul, *Technological* 14). The cult of technique rapidly moves “beyond” and pushes aside tradition and ritual forms of communication—and with them their meaning. Again, we can look to the large digital fleeting warehouse churches for these effects.

In fact, nothing at all escapes technique today. There is no field where technique is not dominant—this is easy to say and is scarcely surprising (Ellul, *Technological* 22).

Technique itself, *ipso facto* and without indulgence or possible discussion, selects among the means to be employed. The human being is no longer in any sense the agent of choice (Ellul, *Technological* 80). Most creative professionals know exactly what this means and how this feels as their work is often put on the rails of market viability or current trends. The cult of technique is to let the “machine” of best practices do the work of creativity for us which, as with all areas of life, makes us lazy and dependent on the techniques for productivity. We get mass produced messages that come out as cheap and plastic as other generic assembly lines of production.

The Cult of technique is obsessed with metrics and the measurable. This creates blinders as it convinces us there is nothing beyond the veil of the observable metrics. Contrarily, not all things are measurable. Many more things have yet to find measurability. If we are not careful, we become baited into endless discussions about exploiting the narrow band of the measurable—looking to and loyal only to those numbers and techniques for our solutions; leaving us ignorant of all the richness of meanings and media that lies beyond our measurable field of view.

What’s more, “data driven” biases are by nature always behind the curve of cultural change simply because it takes time to generate data and act on it. Years (if not decades) are spent waiting for data to provide reassurances on effective methods to employ. Thereby leaving that ministry communications in the realm of technique and not the arts. This severs our media from the waves of cultural change always led by artists.

Modern men are so enthusiastic about technique, so assured of its superiority, so immersed in the technical milieu, that without exception they are oriented toward technical progress. (Ellul, *Technological* 85).

All the peoples of the world today live in a cultural breakdown provoked by the conflicts and the internal strife resulting from technique (Ellul, *Technological* 122). How often do we construct technical complexity and then endlessly debate those self imposed complications? Be it in the preciseness (and assumed superiority) of our theological language or ways of doing things. They will know us by our love, not our exactitude.

⁷³ Technique can be subtle. For example: consider visual methods like the well-worn sin/casm/cross diagram. This depicts the gospel as us on one side of a casm labeled “sin” with God on the other and the cross bridging the gap. Unfortunately, this is still moralism and works based faith on how we “get” to God from a literate culture seeking sequential steps and methods. When, in contrast, everything about the gospel and the storyline of the Bible is how God came to us—and then a group of misfits proclaimed that Good News animated by the Holy Spirit, which is still God moving toward us, and a continuation of God with us.

Technique is a means of apprehending reality, of acting on the world...technique, moreover, creates a bond between men. All those who follow the same technique are bound together in a tacit fraternity and all of them take the same attitude toward reality (Ellul, *Technological* 131). Evangelicalism's many faces and fractures exemplify the dangers of this point in full. While media techniques can be vastly uniting, the cult of technique is ultimately divisive.

With the final integration of the instinctive and the spiritual by means of these human techniques, the edifice of the technical society will be completed. It will not be a universal concentration camp, for it will be guilty of no atrocity. It will not seem insane, for everything will be ordered, and the stains of human passion will be lost against the chromium gleam. We shall have nothing more to lose, and nothing to win. Our deepest instincts and our most secret passions will be analyzed, published, and exploited. (Ellul, *Technological* 426).

Ministry media must never exploit people via techniques. As with much of our discussion, this relates both to our media content and our media methods—two things we have learned are inextricably intertwined.⁷⁴

Culture watchers sometimes talk about the “silver bullet” theory of Christian influence—the dream that someday, someone will write “the perfect song” that will, in four minutes of pure inspiration, bring about a wave of repentance and conversion in our land. This is treating a song like a device. It is turning music into a technology...The biggest cultural mistake we can indulge is to yearn for technological “solutions” to our deepest cultural “problems” (Crouch 60).

We tend to believe that only through the autonomy of techniques (and machinery) can we achieve our goals...When a method of doing things becomes so deeply associated with an institution that we no longer know which came first—the method or the institution—then it is difficult to change the institution or even imagine alternative methods for achieving its purposes (Postman, *Technopoly* 142 -143).

Many would-be communicators pay primary attention to the technical preciseness, accuracy, and truthfulness of the words and phrases they use to construct their messages. Yet the choice to use precise, technical language, especially with popular audiences, usually increases rather than decreases the possibility of misinterpretation. The drive toward preciseness does not take account of the fact that much of what goes into effective communication is outside the control of the communicator (Kraft 32). Technique encourages the illusion that precision of language is possible. We need to learn why it is not and what to pursue instead.

God's way is to use ordinary, highly communicative language to convey spiritual truth (Kraft 33).

The enthusiastic acceptance of various techniques and technologies can sever or make impossible various natures of the communal experience. The pursuit of technical excellence or style can strip media of its meaning.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ To be clear: It is the obsession with technique and reliance on it that is being called into question. Not a rejection of techniques in and of themselves. It is our “love” of technique that has led to suspect media. Let's not confuse excellence with technique as that would be the very problem in the first place.

⁷⁵ As a practical example: Consider wedding photography. Images that should be full of meaning. There is a difference between a wedding themed photograph and wedding photography. To treat a couple like models working for the photographer—positioning them, posing them, interrupting the flow with piles of equipment/technique to ensure the shot the photographer has in mind is guaranteed—may create magazine worthy images...but they won't be “their” images. They will be stripped of meaning by the intrusion of the photography itself. All that is left is vanity. Find the photographs that mean the most to you. Then describe why they hold so much meaning. Odds are you won't mention a thing about the

It is a fact that God doesn't necessarily make things easy for his receptors to understand. He, rather, entices us, leading us to discovery rather than insulting our intelligence by pre-digesting his messages and laying them out on a platter in a form that is fully obvious. He acts and speaks and then allows us to struggle with what these actions and words mean. When we have discovered the meaning, it is truly ours and has a greater impact than if he had done it all and made it easy for us...God's method is to raise questions that have to be wrestled with rather than simply to provide answers that have little value because they come too easy. And he is apparently more concerned that we exercise our creative powers to arrive at meaningful answers than that we all come to the same answers. He seems to respect us and our ability as learners more than contemporary educational techniques would seem to when they encourage teachers to merely develop and pass on their conclusions rather than help students struggle toward their own understandings (Kraft 21-22).

Blind obsession with technique leads to empty excellence. Hollow beauty. Spaces, messages, media and even community that may be beautiful, but ultimately not useful—not meaningful. We end up with a "great show" but life change doesn't happen (can't happen) because the show doesn't help with actual life.⁷⁶

The Cult of Sensationalism

is characterized by consistently creating media that is shocking or exciting to the extent that it presents an unreal environment. Or worse, actively airbrushes the truth to make it seem more ideal, shocking, exciting, or explicit (black&white). The cult of sensationalism plays on emotion and sentimentality to move audiences. It uses big dramatic moments and lives in the high extremes of the human condition, fears the mundane, and thereby breaks the "me too" bond.

The sensational puts the most destitute child on the cover and selects only the most dramatic conversion testimony for public telling. Perhaps the most prevalent form of sensationalism in past Evangelical media is in creating a sterilized or "PG" version of life. Unreal and idealized media can be hidden as "safe" but warp perceptions of reality all the same.

Mixed emotions. Loose ends. The Bible is like this because life is like this. And if life is like this, then our art had better reflect it too. *God does not need us to be his spin-doctors* (Brand 77).⁷⁷

technical excellence. It is the moment, the faces, and the timing. A good photographer will gladly sacrifice a degree of technical perfection to protect the moments that are uniquely the subjects'.

⁷⁶ Consider this statement by popular author Rachel Held Evans: "What [people] find is, when they bring their pain or their doubt or their uncomfortable truth to church, someone immediately grabs it out of their hands to try and fix it, to try and make it go away. Bible verses are quoted, assurances are given...With good intentions tinged with fear, Christians scour their inventory for a cure...But there is a difference between curing and healing, and I believe the church is called to the slow and difficult work of healing. We are called to enter into one another's pain, anoint it as holy, and stick around no matter the outcome...The thing about healing, as opposed to curing, is that it is relational. It takes time. It is inefficient, like a meandering river. Rarely does healing follow a straight or well-lit path. Walking with someone through grief, or through the process of reconciliation, requires patience, presence, and a willingness to wander, to take the scenic route...But the modern-day church doesn't like to wander or wait. The modern-day church likes results. Convinced the gospel is a product we've got to sell to an increasingly shrinking market, we like our people to function as walking advertisements: happy, put-together, finished—proof this Jesus stuff WORKS!. At its best, such a culture generates pews of Stepford Wife-style robots with painted smiles and programmed moves. At its worst, it creates environments where abuse and corruption get covered up to protect reputations and preserve image...The truth is, the church doesn't offer a cure. It doesn't offer a quick fix. The church offers death and resurrection. The church offers the messy, inconvenient, gut-wrenching, never-ending work of healing and reconciliation. The church offers grace."

⁷⁷Spin doctor: a spokesperson employed to give a favorable interpretation of events to the media,

How often do we act ashamed of the Bible and of the gospel as if God is lucky we are there to reinterpret His revelation in a way more palatable to our culture.

In a world of image management, imagine an environment where if you were abused, you had freedom to talk about those experiences. If your life is normal and mundane, you are free to show and even celebrate that—no more sensationalizing or hiding! Imagine a community in celebration of the real and the true as beautiful.

Refusing Reactionism:

So much of evangelical thought, theology, and media is reactionary in nature. It reacts (usually in a defensive posture) to cultural trends. It looks to what the culture has deemed popular or cool and sets out to copy it. It looks for “best practices” and designs its techniques and sensational messages in turn.

When so called “christian” movies, music, or other media are simply knock-offs of popular media it looks like cheap, inauthentic, cultural pandering. We end up offering nothing close to the new reality the Church is meant to represent. No answers. No leadership. No hope.

We breed a generation that prefers facsimile to reality, simplicity to complexity (for cultural copying, almost by definition, ends up sanding off the rough and surprising edges of any cultural good it appropriates), and familiarity to novelty. Not only is this a generation incapable of genuine creative participation in the ongoing drama of human culture making, it is dangerously detached from a God who is anything but predictable and safe (Crouch 94).

I wonder what we Christians are known for in the world outside our churches. Are we known as critics, consumers, copiers, condemners of culture? I’m afraid so. Why aren’t we known as cultivators—people who tend and nourish what is best in human culture, who do the painstaking work to preserve the best of what people before us have done? Why aren’t we known as creators—people who dare to think and do something that has never been thought or done before, something that makes the world more welcoming and thrilling and beautiful? (Crouch 97-8)

Reactionism is a cultural problem. It is a posture of conformity and fear. Reactionary media is the art of a bankrupt culture with nothing to offer. It feeds on the worst of both technique and sensationalism demanding that the creative “play it safe,” “fit in” and “get it right.”

Think about what the pressure to “get it right” does to communication. Communication is not solving an equation. No magic combination of words or gestures create a relationship. Perhaps the reason why Christians don’t always represent the best messages is they are trying too hard to rely on transmitting something “pre-approved” by some recognized “celeb” of their tribe. Fear of getting something wrong should be fueled only by disobeying God, not what some self-elected tribal group might write on their blogs. It’s hard to be inspirational when you’re concerned with getting it right.⁷⁸

Art that tries to fulfill other people’s Christian’ expectations may turn out to be no art at all (Brand 163).

especially on behalf of a political party.

⁷⁸ Considering Christians used to get killed or excommunicated as heretics when they got too creative within their tribe. This fear of novelty is bred deeply within our tradition. We have a long history and an even deeper seated culture that makes creativity feel dangerous. Although, most are probably acting more out of basic human tendencies toward conformity.

Reactionary pressures ultimately repress risk taking, truth telling, and prophetic expression. “One creates not necessarily what one wants to create, but what sells, what is being published, what is fashionable. The concern is to present something that will gain peer approval rather than what one really believes” -Gene Veith (Brand 81).

We cannot make art apart from the time in which we live. We must know what is going on, and understand our environment if we want to understand anything of relevance to our times. We must also know the spirit of the times in order to know where it is wrong and should be challenged and fought...We can never just follow the past: the battle and means of creativity was theirs, for their own situation. And God, in placing us in another period, has given us our own calling: to be “salting salt” today, to hunger and thirst for righteousness in the here and now (Rookmaker 245). Reactionism stays on the well worn path and as a result lags far behind culture and actual experiences.

Reactionism is unwarranted cowardice in our communication. The culture knows integrity when they see it. “Equally they sense when something is not right—when art strikes a pose, moralises or borrows a fashionable form that does not fit. The world is hungry for integrity and is not as easily fooled as some might suppose (Brand 148).”⁷⁹

One more thing is sure. The world wants stories, not one big one, but many small ones. Stories in which we recognize our own lives, narratives rooted in personal experience and a real, earthy, gritty, world; anecdotes and metaphors and illustrations that illuminate small-t truth, rather than lectures that demand allegiance to capital-T Truth (Brand 177).

If there are no Christ-believing artistic ground breakers, then as a Christian community we are not truly doing what God calls us to do. As God’s image bearers, we are called to form culture, not simply follow on behind (Brand 186).

Refusing Church Marketing:

Combine all of the above and you get modern marketing practices and products. The marketing of belief, belonging, and identity are modern heresies. *Marketing language has no place in ministry media that matters*. If it has to be advertised, you don’t need it. Church marketing is using a medium people don’t trust to sell them something they don’t want. Or worse, successfully selling them something—and cultural buy-in is far from belief. *Ministry media must be wholly apart from anything resembling marketing technique*. To occupy the same space as marketing is to betray the meaning of our message. It is to join the cults of technique and sensationalism. Marketing, by nature, ruins everything.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Christian media can often be guilty of “cultural appropriation” instead of cultural exchange. Cultural appropriation is the adoption of elements of one culture by members of a different cultural group, especially if the adoption is of an oppressed people’s cultural elements by members of the dominant culture. When we “use” X style to “reach” we may inadvertently put on the “face” of a subculture without actually being engaged with it. Whereas cultural exchange is the pursuit of mutual understanding. Christians of a dominant culture creating media that appropriates every subculture it comes across is insulting, dumb, and indicative of a weak culture with nothing original to offer the world. This is transmission, reactionism, and the cult of technique all at play. (Recall the footnote in Section 1 on using rap music.)

⁸⁰ This is a slogan of sorts in the marketing industry—used as an internal jab at how marketers know they jam and cannibalize whatever the new market is and then have to move on to the next one once all the users move out because of marketing/ads. They ruin their own business and the spaces or platforms as they chase eyes around the media spaces. Users generally move on once marketing gets too saturated and the cycle repeats itself. Think banner ads, email deals, Myspace, what happened in cities like Sao

Propaganda and Kitsch

The power of "me too" is severed mostly by the two poles of misaligned communication:

1. *Propaganda: the ultimate expression of technique.*
2. *Kitsch: the ultimate expression of sentimentality.*

Technique typically wants to change the existing culture (as opposed to creating better culture) Sensationalism generally wants to "spin" reality (as opposed to unveiling Reality). Modern media has the potential to either amplify or dissolve both propaganda and kitsch.

If propaganda is the manipulative fabrication of a false reality, sentimentality is the willing denial of reality. Mass influenced (homogenized, generic) Christian communication generally fails by being either hiding (airbrushing) something or sensationalizing something (often both used together).

Propaganda

is a form of communication aimed towards influencing the attitude of a population toward some cause or position.⁸¹ The word propaganda was originally used in the sense of propagating (spread and promote) the faith. Quickly the word came to denote information of a particularly biased or misleading nature.

A deeply disturbing amount of Evangelical communication and media amounts to nothing more than propaganda. When efficient and effective techniques are reached for, propaganda soon overcomes. *Propaganda is the anti-seed to the life giving intent of Christian communication and media.* Instead of reality revealing creativity we get identity warping control. The twin cancers of Evangelical messaging are moralism and propaganda. We must rid our media messages of both.

Techniques perfected by masterminds such as Joseph Goebbels (Reich Minister of Propaganda in Nazi Germany), influenced by the founder of American advertising and public relations, Edward Bernays (nephew of Sigmund Freud), and normalized by decades of consumer culture has made modern propaganda techniques ubiquitous. As a result, we scarcely recognize this form of communication anymore in absence of any contrast—it's simply the pattern of western culture.

Propaganda as a communications outworking of a technological society is part of our media ecosystem. Keep in mind that media environments evade perception.⁸²

Propaganda must become as natural as air or food. It must proceed by psychological inhibition and the least possible shock. The individual is then able to declare in all honesty that no such thing as propaganda exists. In fact, however, he has been so absorbed by it that he is literally no longer able to see the truth. The natures of man and propaganda have become so inextricably mixed that everything depends not on choice or free will, but on reflex and myth. The prolonged and hypnotic repetition of the same complex of ideas, the same images, and the same rumors conditions man for the assimilation of his nature to propaganda (Ellul, *Technological* 366).

Paulo. Now doubly true as savvy audiences have grown tired of the game and tactics of the industry.

⁸¹ **READ: *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* by Jacques Ellul**

⁸² Recall Part 1: Environments are invisible. Their ground rules, pervasive structure, and overall patterns elude easy perception (McLuhan, *The Medium is the Massage* 85).

Propaganda is a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization (Ellul, *Propaganda* 61).

Step by step the propagandist builds the techniques on the basis of his knowledge of man, his tendencies, his desires, his needs, his psychic mechanisms, his conditioning, and as much on social psychology as on depth psychology (Ellul, *Propaganda* 4).

Very frequently propaganda is described as a manipulation for the purpose of changing idea or opinions of making individuals 'believe' some idea or fact, and finally of making them adhere to some doctrine—all matters of the mind. It tries to convince, to bring about a decision, to create a firm adherence to some truth. This is a completely wrong line of thinking: to view propaganda as still being what it was in 1850 is to cling to an obsolete concept of man and of the means to influence him; it is to condemn oneself to understand nothing about propaganda. The aim of modern propaganda is no longer to modify ideas, but to provoke action. It is no longer to change adherence to a doctrine, but to make the individual cling irrationally to a process of action. It is no longer to transform an opinion but to arouse an active and mythical belief (Ellul, *Propaganda* 25).

Propaganda, as it is traditionally known, implies an attempt to spread an ideology through the mass media of communication in order to lead the public to a desired action. In sociological propaganda even media that are not controllable such as individual art work, films, and writing reflect the ideology allowing for an accelerated penetration of the masses and the individuals within them (Ellul, *Propaganda* 63).

Sociological propaganda is a phenomenon where a society seeks to integrate the maximum number of individuals into itself by unifying its members' behavior according to a pattern, spreading its style of life abroad, and thus imposing itself on other groups. Essentially sociological propaganda aims to increase conformity with the environment that is of a collective nature by developing compliance with or defense of the established order through long term penetration and progressive adaptation by using all social currents. The propaganda element is the way of life with which the individual is permeated and then the individual begins to express it in film, writing, or art without realizing it. This involuntary behavior creates an expansion of society through advertising, the movies, education, and magazines. The entire group, consciously or not, expresses itself in this fashion; and to indicate, secondly that its influence aims much more at an entire style of life (Ellul, *Propaganda* 62).

Effective propaganda needs to give man an all-embracing view of the world, a view rather than a doctrine...Propaganda must furnish an explanation for all happenings, a key to understand the whys and the reasons for economic and political developments. News loses its frightening character when it offers information for which the listener already has a ready explanation in his mind, or for which he can easily find one. The great force of propaganda lies in giving modern man embracing, simple explanations and massive, doctrinal causes, without which he could not live with the news. Man is doubly reassured by propaganda: first, because it tells him the reasons behind the developments which unfold, and second, because it promises a solution for all the problems that arise, which would otherwise seem insoluble (Ellul, *Propaganda* 146).

Propaganda plays a completely idealistic role, by involving a man caught in the world of reality and making him live by anticipation in a world based on principle. From then on man no longer sees contradiction as a threat to himself or as a distortion of his personality: the contradiction, through propaganda, becomes an active source of conquest and combat. He is no longer alone

when trying to solve his conflicts, but is plunged into a collective on the march, which is always "at the point" of solving all conflicts and leading man and his world to a satisfying monism...it gives man assurances equivalent to those formerly given him by religion. It offers him a simple and clear explanation of the world in which he lives-to be sure, a false explanation far removed from reality, but one that is obvious and satisfying. It hands him a key with which he can open all doors; there is no more mystery; everything can be explained, thanks to propaganda. It gives him special glasses through which he can look at present-day history and dearly understand what it means. It hands him a guideline with which he can recover the general line running through all incoherent events. Now the world ceases to be hostile and menacing. The propagandee experiences feelings of mastery over and lucidity toward this menacing and chaotic world, all the more because propaganda provides him with a solution for all threats and a posture to assume in the face of them (Ellul, *Propaganda* 159).

The psychological effects of propaganda on an individual cannot be ignored. The individual undergoes profound changes while being propagandized mainly the diminishment of personal activity. Propaganda furnishes objectives, organizes the traits of an individual into a system, and freezes them into a mold by standardizing current ideas, hardening the prevailing stereotypes, and furnishing thought patterns in all areas (Ellul, *Propaganda* 162-3).

Technical propaganda manipulation is the creation of an abstract universe, representing a complete reconstruction of reality in the minds of its citizens" (Ellul, *Technological* 371). *This is the anti-prophetic, anti-apocalyptic, anti-incarnate version of reality reconstruction. It is more related to fantasy, willful ignorance, or an unwillingness to engage with Reality. It is an alternate Christianity. A counterfeit managed by the message makers. One "in-touch" in the wrong ways and ultimately irrelevant to Reality.*

Under propaganda people "live on the screen a life they will never live in fact" (Ellul, *Technological*). Here again ideals are presented as achievable and reality becomes mediated.⁸³

I must add that I am much more interested in real men who actually exist than in that ideal Man which has no existence except in image and abstraction (Ellul, *Technological* 397). We may be far too interested in the ideal person and not merely interested enough in the person in front of us that actually exists now.⁸⁴

Human Intelligence cannot resist propaganda's manipulation of it's subconscious" (Ellul, *Technological* 369). If your impulse is to think well of these techniques and their power over "the formation of men's attitudes" makes you eager to use them, then the point of the gospel might be lost.

Trying to maximize a medium or message's power or influence is inferior to facilitating cultural meaning through mediums and messages. "Propaganda ends where dialog begins," said Jacques Ellul.⁸⁵ Modern media enables dialog, but only if we see it that way.

Kitsch is art, objects, or design considered to be in poor taste because of excessive garishness or sentimentality, yet are found pleasing or enjoyable to some. Defined as an inferior form of art, a tasteless or defective copy of an existing piece or style of art. Kitsch tends to take that which is iconic and make it trivial and common with cheap mass-produced objects that are both

⁸³ See Taking TV's Word for It: The Mediated Reality in the Appendix.

⁸⁴ See Taking TV's Word for It: Christian Media Paradox in the Appendix.

⁸⁵ Recall: "The basic, non-negotiable premise of human communication is that it is dialogical, two-way, respecting the receiver as much as the sender, and able to reverse those roles. In the way that most of our media are presently organized and owned, in and outside the church, that's incredibly difficult to take seriously" -John Bluck (1984, p.8). (Fortner 113)

unoriginal and sentimental.

The opposite of kitsch is not sophistication, but innocence. This is because “kitsch art is *pretending* to express something, and you, in accepting it, are pretending to feel.” ...People who appreciate kitsch, I think, do sometimes genuinely feel, not merely pretend. But they are out of touch with the longing that is the foundation of authentic art. They are unaware of the ease by which the mass-produced caricature has replaced this authenticity with sentimentality (Fortner 139).

Kitsch can take many forms. From plastic figurines and bible themed snacks, to poorly chosen hymns, gimmicky liturgies, messages that are more humor than scripture, to technology used for its own sake. Likewise, art that may appear to one person as kitsch might possess far more meaning than initially perceived. It's more a matter of the trite and trivial nature of the sentiment than about the color or medium.

If Christian artists produce art which is shallow, sentimental and low on realism, they not only produce bad art, they also misinterpret the Christian experience of living in a broken, albeit redeemed, world—an experience which may contain more lows than highs...the only way to counter such a [kitsch] trend is to produce more compelling and convincing Christian art which is true, not only to life as people experience it, but also to biblical wisdom (Brand 107).

“Implied by this approach to communication is the recognition of the necessity of mastery. After all, no one wants to wallow in bad art or kitsch. No one should seek to be known as a poor communicator or a poor artist” (Fortner 150).

Ultimately, kitsch is irreverent or even profane to the point of taking the Lord's name in vain.

Culture Making⁸⁶

risers above the cults and pitfalls of modern media techniques to a God honoring creative expression of worship. “Our languages are our media. Our media are our metaphors. Our metaphors are our culture (Postman 15).”

Modern communication and modern art are—in the causes of faith, of incorporation of those without the kingdom, and of reclamation of this portion of the creation under the cultural mandate articulated in the Garden—allies, even sympatric (Fortner 159).

We make sense of the world by making something of the world. The human quest for meaning is played out in human making...making and meaning go together—culture, you could say, is the activity of making meaning (Crouch 24).

So this is what culture does: it defines the horizons of the possible and the impossible in very concrete ways (Crouch 34). There is no withdrawing from culture. Culture is inescapable. And that is a good thing (Crouch 36).⁸⁷

So finding our place in the world as culture makers requires us to pay attention to culture's many dimensions. We will make something of the world in a particular ethnic tradition, in particular spheres, at particular scales. There is no such thing as “the Culture,” and any attempt to talk about “the Culture,” especially in terms of “transforming the Culture,” is misled and misleading.

⁸⁶ **READ: *Culture Making* by Andy Crouch**

⁸⁷ Recall the section on media ecology. Culture's close association with communication and media indicate another reason this concept makes sense: media is culture and culture is inescapable.

Real culture making, not to mention cultural transformation, begins with a decision about which cultural world—or better, worlds—we will attempt to make something of (Crouch 48).

The only way to change culture is to create more of it...So if we seek to change culture, we will have to create something new, something that will persuade our neighbors to set aside some existing set of cultural goods for our new proposal. And note well that there are a number of other possible strategies, none of which, by themselves, will have any effect on culture at all (Crouch 67).

Human nature abhors a cultural vacuum. It is the very rare human being who will give up some set of cultural goods just because someone condemns them. They need something better, or their current set of cultural goods will have to do, as deficient as they may be (Crouch 68).

“Creativity is the only viable source of change” (Crouch 73).

We, on the other hand, always start in the middle of things, working with the raw materials given us by God and by the generations before us. Culture is what we make of the world, not what we make out of pure imagination.⁸⁸ The Hebrew word *asah*, used both human beings and God in the first pages of Genesis, means “make” in this sense” (Crouch 104).

Human creativity, then images God’s creativity when it emerges from a lively, loving community of persons and, perhaps more important, when it participates in unlocking the full potential of what has gone before and creating possibilities for what will come later (Crouch 105).

God’s first and best gift to humanity is culture, the realm in which human beings themselves will be cultivators and creators, ultimately contributing to the cosmic purposes of the Cultivator and Creator of the natural world (Crouch 110).

Indeed, when we look for signs of the criticisms of Jesus, they often have more to do with his deeds than his words. As innovative as his teachings were, his adversaries seem to have been most provoked by his actions. And this should not be surprising to us: it is the embodied practices of a culture that most powerfully enforce what the culture makes of the world. Jesus did not just teach creatively; he lived creatively, and the guardians of the horizons were unsettled by him (Crouch 138).

In the kingdom of God a new kind of life and a new kind of culture becomes possible—not by abandoning the old but by transforming it. Even the cross, the worst that culture can do, is transformed into a sign of the kingdom of God—the realm of forgiveness, mercy, love and indestructible life (Crouch 146).

In feature after feature of Roman culture, Christians, animated by a powerfully different story from their pagan neighbors, were boldly creative. Their lives simply did not look like their neighbors’. But they were not cut off from their neighbors—the culture they created was accessible to all⁸⁹ (Crouch 156).

So we are confronted with a paradox. Culture—making something of the world, moving the

⁸⁸ Recall: “Creation as applied to human authorship seems to me to be an entirely misleading term. We rearrange elements He has provided. There is not a vestige of real creativity *de novo* in us. Try to imagine a new primary color, a third sex, a fourth dimension, or even a monster that does not consist of existing animals stuck together. Nothing happens. And that is surely why our works never mean what we intended: because we are recombining elements made by Him and already contain His meanings.” -C.S. Lewis

⁸⁹ See Why They Called Us Christians in the Appendix.

horizons of possibility and impossibility—is what human beings do and are meant to do. Transformed culture is at the heart of God’s mission in the world, and it is the call of God’s redeemed people. But changing the world is the one thing we cannot do. As it turns out, fully embracing this paradoxical reality is at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian culture maker. (Crouch 189)

Stewardship means to consciously take up our cultural power, investing it intentionally among the seemingly powerless, putting our power at their disposal to enable them to cultivate and create (Crouch 231).

So do you want to make culture? Find a community, a small group who can lovingly fuel your dreams and puncture your illusions. Find friends and form a family who are willing to see grace at work in one another’s lives, who can discern together which gifts and which crosses each has been called to bear. Find people who have a holy respect for power and a holy willingness to spend their power alongside the powerless. Find some partners in the wild and wonderful world beyond the church doors. And then, together, make something of the world (Crouch 263).

What must distinguish Christian communication, then, is a boldness in reclaiming our birthright as creative human agents responsible for creation. And this is to be accomplished by crafting meaning laden communication, with artistic and moral integrity, with which our intended audiences relate and share with others...What it means, I think, is not that we will somehow force commercial purveyors of communication, appealing to the lowest common denominator, or to the basest instincts of humankind, to change their tune, but that we will, by the excellence of what we produce, and what we say, and what we demonstrate in our actions as people of God, provide such a compelling witness and such compelling stories, that people will gather to hear what we have to say (Fortner 156).

The most important discipline here is to resist strategy—to avoid plotting our way to greater cultural influence.⁹⁰ We will have the greatest cultural effect where we already have cultural influence, where we have already cultivated a community that recognizes our ability to contribute something new (Crouch 235).

Every cultural good, whether a new word, law, recipe, song or gadget, begins with a small group of people—and not just a relatively small group but an absolutely small group. No matter how many it goes on to affect, culture always starts small (Crouch 239).

⁹⁰ Consider the consumer media mindset: A combination of reactionism and consumerism. Defined by identifying felt needs of a large population and then promise (or try to be) what fills them. This was reflected most in the rise of the “super-church” or “seeker-sensitive” strategies in the 80s-90s. More than most, the Democratic party and American Evangelicalism recognized the rise of consumer politics. Both groups adopted similar consumer strategies to hold on to cultural influence (or power). For example, suburban voters began to think and behave like consumers, and the only way to win them “back” was to forget ideology and and turn into a form of consumer business—identify personal desires and whims, and promise to fulfill them; follow the consumer rules and people will follow-suit and file in. Sound familiar? This is readily apparent in many styles of evangelical church. *This is effectively the opposite of liturgical grounding, reminding, rebuilding, remembering.* We can see the contrasted rift in congregation styles begin with consumer reactionism. Politics’ ultimate goal was to get reelected. Has Evangelical Christianity chased the same desire to get “reelected” to cultural leadership? Are Evangelical leaders simply running to stay “elected” by the culture? For exceptional insight into this cultural shift see the BBC documentary *The Century of Self*.

Technical efficiencies tempt to skip the small, organic, original beginnings. But while that can still make a message, it doesn't make culture, and rarely meaning.

God's own culture making, for all its universal scope throughout millennia and across continents, flows through absolutely and relatively small groups of people—perhaps because the original creative initiative that is the prerequisite for any human creativity came from an eternal society of three divine persons, united in their loving purpose (Crouch 245).

When it comes to culture making, we are on relatively level ground in this respect: we all will make something of the world with an absolutely small number people, many or most of whom are already intimately involved in our lives (Crouch 246).

Communities are the way God intervenes to offer, within every culture, a different story and better horizon. To be Christian is to stake our lives on this belief: the only cultural goods that ultimately matter are the ones that love creates (Crouch 248).

If the audience for your media is six people, praise God for that! You have been given unique relationships to make that happen. Modern media technology's reversal of media control means that hyper niche localized media that is still quality storytelling is the way to go. That's why you would also have a program that trains as many theologically trained media artist as possible (like The Moody Media Lab). New technology makes all the ideals of communications and media theory possible for the first time—that is, via modern media, all of the benefits and fewer of the drawbacks to technologically mediated communication.

Likewise, if you place an artistic person in a church community and they are inspired to nothing, then that community has a culture problem.

Transmission centric models of communication + The Cult of Technique + Culture of Consumerism = disastrous consequences for our theology of cultural engagement.

Cathedrals As the Language of a Culture:

One of the best ways to understand the interrelated complexities of creativity and culture change is to study architecture. Few fields reveal the intersection of culture, meaning, media, and art so clearly. Christian media artists would do well to study the history of architecture.

The Cathedral was the first man-made immersive media environment. With architecture that drew the eyes heavenward, a construct that inspired awe, acoustic architecture, a home for art, stained glass that told visual stories to illiterate people and served as art to all, arrangements that brought people together as a congregation, and construction that optimized verbal communication. A place where ritual bonding was formulated as media and merged with meaning. A sanctuary.

Yet, if you asked 100 people today where the most meaningful place to them is, how many would pick inside the walls of a church? What does where they would say teach us about how meaning is made? Protestants (and by extension Evangelicals) began to lose this sense of place long ago.

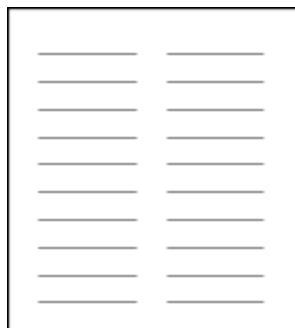
Dr. Read Schuchardt of Wheaton College beautifully unpacks the shift away from Cathedrals in media ecology terms:

“...But by the end of the Reformation another victim of the printing press was auricular confession as more books intervened between sinner and priest, complicating the once simple confessional into a legalistic and Byzantine and contradictory list of sins, punishments and exceptions. And yet

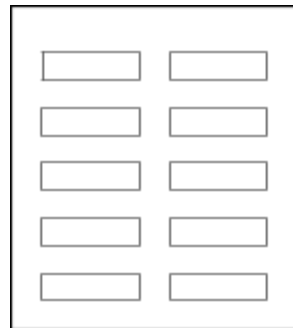
it did not kill listening, because of the relative scarcity of literacy in the early period, the primary result for the mass audience, by which I mean the actual parishioner attending mass, was that the focus of the church service changed from looking to listening. In a Gothic Cathedral the stained glass windows, the statuary, and the paintings, and the side chapels were all places where parishioners walked to, had devotions in groups or clusters, and the church service was much more of an enclosed spiritual village fair, with everyone milling about until the moment of consecration, the priests would raise the host and at that point the crowd would gather together. Otherwise they were standing up, sometimes singing, praying and talking without paying particular attention to the sermon. The acoustics of a Gothic cathedral are fantastic for group singing, they are terrible for group listening. The printing press produced a massive change over that made the focus of the service the sermon itself, and specially, the exposition of Scripture. And this had the two effects of making the service longer, and of for the first time, putting pews inside the building. Before the printing press, most cathedrals had no seating. What few seats or chairs they did have existed for the frail and elderly clergy themselves. After the Reformation almost all Protestant churches could be distinguished by the presence of pews or rows of chairs. The printing press also put an end to Gregorian chants, and to the construction of their acoustic places, the Gothic cathedrals.

This is most eloquently stated by Victor Hugo in his 1831, *Notre Dame to Pere*, in English, the *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, in which he explains the Archdeacon's enigmatic phrase as he looks from the Bible to the building Claude Frollo declares, "This will destroy that, the Book will destroy the Edifice." Hugo continues with these words, "To our minds, this thought has two aspects, in the first place it was a view pertaining to the priest. It was the terror of the ecclesiastical before a new force, printing. It was servant of the dim sanctuary, scared and dazzled by the light streamed from Gutenberg's press. It was the pulpit and manuscript, the spoken and the written word, quailing before the printing press, something of the stupefaction of the sparrow, beholding the Heavenly host spreading their six million wings. The cry of the prophet who already hears the far off roar and tumult of emancipated humanity, who gazing into the future sees intelligence sapping the foundations of faith, opinion dethroning belief. It meant the printing press will destroy the Church. The book of stone, so solid and so enduring that would give way to the book of paper, more solid and more enduring still. One art would dethrone another art. Printing will destroy architecture. Neither Gutenberg or Luther could have seen the unintended consequences of the new medium of print that they had embraced or created for enhancing devotion..."⁹¹ (Schuchardt, *The Reformation As Media Event*)

What we see is a literal arrangement of the church around the printed book and therefore increasingly transmissional postures. Consider these sketches:



It's easy to see this as a sketch of book, is it not? Neatly arranged rows of text on a white page delivered by Gutenberg's press.



If we simply connect a few lines, is it not equally easy to see a sketch of a church with neatly arranged pews in a white walled protestant chapel?

Media ecology suggests that these visual parallels are far from coincidental.

Western Evangelicals have a weird relationship with our buildings. In addition the media ecology influences on architecture explored above, we inherit a tradition that eschewed the opulence of

⁹¹ The entire lecture is a must-listen for this conversation: <https://youtu.be/Y4y6p93PJyY>

Catholic cathedrals in the pursuit of modest stewardship and separation from Catholicism. We then went on to spend far more on electronic lights and media inside of sprawling warehouse churches inspired more by shopping malls. Then, seemingly embarrassed by our own buildings, begin to create media and events inside old cathedrals in an attempt to re-appropriate the cultural significance and meaning of those spaces. Now we are finding ourselves clamoring to get into old cathedrals. At the same time our attempts at “relevant” light shows are lost on many visitors to our services.⁹²

This is perhaps most revealed by another one of our most sacred rituals imbued with holy and eternal meaning: the wedding ceremony. It seems we build buildings no one wants to get married in. Is it any wonder those spaces hold no meaning, communicate little, and are so easily left behind. ***To choose to get married in a beautiful space that is not your church is less an example of personal style, and more a prophetic critique of how far we have come from understanding what media actually matters and where meaning actually comes from.***

We’ve built a culture of market competition (competing to stay central in consumption patterns). Instead we should be building places of rest in an overly connected and busy world. Our messages and architecture should make a countercultural statement. If you build, build a beautiful place of rest with wide open doors and soundproof walls that trigger all senses, and mobile signal jammers, with seats in-the-round and an open forum for discourse as tangible thanks for laws of free speech and religious freedom. Sanctuaries.

Evangelicals need to be reminded that those large empty cathedrals were built that big because they were once full. More importantly, that our spaces matter, they communicate, and as long as the Sunday gathering in a distinct and designated building is a part of our ministry culture, then they too are a significant part of our media.

Sacred vs Secular: Ministry Media as a Desacralizing Force:

Perhaps no conversation in regards to ministry media has been circled more than the question of sacred vs secular media. That this is expressed in a “vs” dichotomy is telling in itself. Is ministry media distinctly sacred? Can media be uniquely “christian?” Can a Christian make secular media? This false dichotomy has plagued Christian communicators for far too long

Part of a reality proclaiming voice and vision, part of combating entropy, part of ensuring our liturgy does not become empty religion, or that our rituals and spaces aren’t ascribed undue powers, is the desacralizing force of ministry communication.

English missionary, Boniface, ventured to pagan Germanic tribes of the Rhineland. He encountered the misconstrued realities the people lived in when they began worshipping sacred oaks upon his arrival. To counteract this sacrilege Boniface was convinced drastic measures were needed, so he boldly struck a blow to the very heart of the local pagan worship. He assembled a large crowd at Geismar, where the sacred oak of the Thundergod was located, and with the people looking on in horror he began chopping down the tree. It was a defiant act, but one that clearly drew attention to the fact that there was no supernatural power in either the tree or the god whom it honored. Boniface was a man with an axe and a desire for reality.

While the brash destruction of a people’s most meaningful places is certainly debatable, the nature of the sacred in relation to the Christian within God’s objective reality needs greater attention.

⁹² For a humorous but real example from Reddit’s atheism group:
www.reddit.com/r/atheism/comments/2pbv7j/parents_forced_me_to_go_to_church_today_wtf_is/

It seems to me, then, that the sacred is relative to three aspects of human life: time, space, and society.⁹³ Finding ourselves in an incoherent, menacing, and incomprehensible space, we set up coordination points. Thanks to the sacred, we define or maintain order in the world. We fix limits and directions. We can establish a framework within which all activity takes place, or fix a center, an *ompalos*, to which we orient everything. As concerns time, there are sacred times that give meaning to time. All days are not alike. In these two cases, the sacred establishes differences that enable us to give order to life (Ellul 51).

The third domain or function is relative to society or the group. The sacred exists only as it is collective, as it is accepted and lived out in common. It produces the integration of individuals into the group. It gives individuals an incontestable place. Since the *tremendum* or the *facinans* is always at issue, the sacred is always incontestable. If it can be challenged, it is no longer the sacred, and with it the whole order of the world disintegrates (Ellul 51).

Above all we should consider the accusations that were brought against the early Christians. In the relevant Roman texts they are regarded not merely as “enemies of the human race” but as atheists and destroyers of religion. For the Romans nascent Christianity was not at all a new religion. It was “antireligion.” This view was well founded. What the first Christian generations were putting on trial was not just the imperial religion, as is often said, but every religion in the known world (Ellul 55).

Biblical creation is totally desacralizing because it is in no way a theodicy. It is not a story of the gods and their adventures as they fight, as with some difficulty they fabricate worldly things, and as they are constantly present in them. The fecund, creative goddess of the waters is always in the waters. Over against this, the polemical biblical story of the biblical creation has an effect of total spoliation. God speaks his word, and things are. This is all. What that means is that God is truly outside the world, that he is totally transcendent. He is not enclosed in any part of this creation. He is beyond it. He has established a Creator-creature relation, but this is a relation of love, not a sacral or religious relation. There is also a presence in this creation of the one who responds to him: man, who is the only mediator of creation to God and of God to creation. Humanity alone is “sacred.” Human life is the only reality that has a status above that of “created things” (Ellul 56).

Thus the spiritual work of the Hebrews is almost completely one of desacrilization (Ellul 57). Almost!...Finally, the mysterious powers of the world are definitively exorcised, eliminated, and vanquished. This is an essential theme. The world contains spiritual powers variously described as thrones, *exousiai*, and dominions, etc. Residing in the world, these powers hide in institutions, people, etc. But they have all been destroyed and extirpated by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this world, then, there is no longer anything supernatural. There is no longer anything mysterious, no longer any world beyond (Ellul 60).

Nor is there any longer a division or partition of the world into the sacred on the one side and the profane on the other. The Christian world is wholly secular...There are in it no particularly sacred times or places, precisely because God is absolutely the Wholly Other and nothing in the world comes close to him or can be the bearer of value, meaning, energy, or even order. The only new energy that Christianity recognizes is the potential presence of God by the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit, too, is incomprehensible, inaccessible, and unexploitable (Ellul 60).

The first Christians had no particular reverence for the place where believers met and where they heard God’s Word and celebrated the sacraments. But once such places became splendid

⁹³ Recall: “Time, space, and society”—three things we have seen throughout this study to be integrally tied to communications.

imperial buildings and the theology of the sacraments changed...these places, now radically different from others were invested with the beliefs that appertained to pagan temples. God was especially present in such places. The sense of the sacred thus reappears. What is more, the church is now divided into two parts like pagan temples. The more profane part is for ordinary believers, the other part, where the religious ceremony takes place, is for priests. This is wholly typical of the recognition once again that certain places are particularly sacred (Ellul 62).

Literally, then, Judeo-Christian desacrilization is cancelled out. The Bible states that the earth is the Lord's, all of it without distinction, but now, in contrast, God is closer, more present more apprehensible, in certain places. Some places are sacred, others are profane. This sacral adoration of certain places will last throughout the church's history and will embrace places where there are beatific visions or healings (Lourdes, etc.) We are here in the presence of the sacred in the pure sense. With sacred places, sacred times also appear again (Ellul 63).

The visible that characterizes the sacred makes a massive entry back into the church, and in this way believers unwittingly take the path of paganism. The visible object is typical of the sacral world and very quickly becomes sacred itself (Ellul 65).

I recall a time when it was a scandalous matter to tear out one or more pages from a Bible. Invincibly the sense of the sacred has invested again the thing that was destined to destroy it (Ellul 66). *To be clear: meaningful, reverent, and respectful are different from sacred.*

We cannot lightly ignore the concern expressed here. The Bible is inspired. It is the Words of God. And as such we want to be careful to treat it as a the special revelation that it is. But we dare not allow our respect for the Bible to devolve into superstition and idolatry. The fact it is inspired should not be interpreted to mean that it is magical or that we can use its words as formulas that convey spiritual power in and of themselves. This is the attitude of pagan superstition, not Christian reverence. We must never forget that the words and concepts of the Bible are but channels through which the inspired messages of the Holy Spirit flow. Those channels are not to be worshiped or regarded as possessing magical power in and of themselves (Kraft 26).

On this basis one could find the sacred everywhere. This path led to the reappearance of persons typically connected with the sacred, such as mediators or priests...The word sacred, which almost never appears in the New Testament, also comes back to current use. We read of sacred chants, sacred music, sacred art, sacred books, and sacred vessels, and a sacred history is taught which differs and is distinct from ordinary world history. This change of vocabulary typifies the change in mentality, in religious conceptions. It marks the reappearance of the sacred, which Jewish and Christian thought had originally combated with living power. This monumental historical setback seems to me to be one of the most flagrant proofs that the sacred is integral to human existence, that the active (I do not say objective) force that constantly leads us to reconstitute a sacred universe is a permanent one. Apparently we can not live in the world unless it is thus constituted. Only the sacred (and not the venture proposed by Christianity) reassures and gives both stability to the universe and a solid objective meaning to life (Ellul 68).

The creation of the sacred immediately creates a space that can be shrunk or grown. It is automatically divisive, creates boundaries and an in or out. Apart from Christ there is no "in"—there is nothing outside of God's; it is all His. Where there is brokenness, we are to bring healing. Where there is division, unity.

The problem comes when the line is drawn *compartmentally* rather than *spiritually*, putting certain aspects of culture inside the Kingdom of God and others outside. Rather we need to

understand the battlelines between good and evil run across *all* aspects of the culture and *every* facet of life (Brand 68).

The religious or secular nature of our cultural creativity is simply the wrong question. The right question is whether, when we undertake the work we believe to be our vocation, we experience the joy and humility that comes only when God multiplies our work so that it bears thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold beyond what we could expect from our feeble inputs. (Crouch 256)

“There is not a single inch of the whole terrain of our human existence over which Christ... does not exclaim, '*Mine!*'” (Kuyper 488)

Media can bring down these walls and deliver the message that all ground is equal before the Lord. In the social conflict over the real, ministry media can be a desacralizing force, combating the reconstitution of a false sacred world, instead reassuring that is Christ and the Cross that give framing and meaning.

CONCLUSION(S)

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."

~ George Bernard Shaw

With nothing less than reality, identity, meaning, time and space, culture, and the gospel itself all under the formative weight of modern media...What conclusions can we draw from this survey and synthesis of key media theorists and theologians? What is our way forward? In sum:

This projection of community ideals and their embodiment in material form (on earth as it is in heaven) externalizes as dance, plays, architecture, news stories, strings of speech (art/media) creates an artificial (mediated) though nonetheless real symbolic order that operates to promote not information, but confirmation. Not to alter attitudes (behavior modification) or change minds (argumentation), but to represent an underlying order of things (general and special revelation); not to perform functions (church roles), but to manifest an ongoing and fragile social process (bear witness).

The site where artists paint, writers write, speakers speak, filmmakers film, broadcasters broadcast is simultaneously the site of social conflict over the real. What's more, a critical theory of communication must affirm what is before our eyes and transcend it by imagining, at the very least, a world more desirable.

- Communications = social conflict over the real.
- Ministry Communications = a greater reality made known.
- Prophetic Communications = this is what is real and true (not that).
- Apocalyptic Communications = revealing what was previously unseen.
- Incarnate Communications = invested and relational media artists.

Confirmation over information; Discourse over lecture; Fluency over relevancy; Reviving over reactionary; Testimony over sensationalism; Story over marketing; Integrity over spin; Beauty over pragmatism; Locality over mass; Invitational over conditional; Immersive over literal; Movement over moments.

A ministry model of communications and culture. A view characterized by reality revealing creativity and unfettered invitation: *Confirmation, Imagination, Invitation.*

**Common (Christ) > Community (Church) > Commune (Worship) >
Communication (Media) > Commission (Evangel)**

This may mean producing material in languages others are not interested in. It may mean creating plots that do not twist in the conventional ways, but rather in ways that honor God and his creation. It may mean that we demand that our narrative be treated not merely as one among many, but as the meta-narrative of humanity. It may mean that we seek ways to achieve interactivity (dialogue, negotiation, involvement) as completely as we can, even when using what are otherwise one-way mass media technologies. It may mean that we avoid the bandwidth-hogging strategies of graphic-laden web pages for the simplicity that can be easily accessed by those with slow speed connections in the developing world. It may mean that when we construct fiction, we love the characters created so that we never stereotype or that we

avoid the humor of demeaning wit. It may mean that our documentaries are truthful, and not merely factual, that our journalism avoids the practice of achieving fairness merely by letting each side have a go at the other (and the chance to respond to the other), and achieves it by looking into whatever claim and charges are made to see what the real truth is. It means that we are neither bleeding-heart liberals nor true-blue conservatives, but in all things ask ourselves “what is the will of God,” without assuming that our favorite politician or preacher has a corner on that market simply because we seem to agree with him or her most of the time. It means that we use communication to build connected, common, communities rather than to exacerbate the “cocooning” of the cellular environment of strangers on the assumptions that rational evaluation of interests is the same thing as deep connectivity grounded in common history (Fortner 245).

Sometimes media leadership means the answer is no. Or even “NO WAY! Get it out!” Understanding the medium and the relationship it will have to the given culture may often mean rejecting various forms. The crux is in our ability to understand the intrinsic interrelationships and make wise decisions accordingly—not in “knee jerk” reactions and rejections of something new nor blind acceptance of new technological forms.

The media director position within a church or ministry organization should be seen more like we do other worship leader positions. A theologically trained and prophetic leadership role with the people. *Not* a technician behind the scenes no one knows or sees. Present, visible, and available message leaders.

Ministry media should be independent and immune from market or consumer forces. Media and art freed to be original, experimental, and bold.

It's the sterilized, untested, comfortable citizens of the world that have the wealth to be so which also gives them access to costly media technology—but it is because of this that they tell boring, inbred, and reactionary stories. Stories of the comfortable. We need to put media in the hands of the impoverished servants that have lived the lives capable of creating the blues.

Sending signals into the air might be a lot of things, but I'm not sure it is communication. We need to create a better culture before communicating. Our communication is our culture. It appears Christians have worn this culture out. We need to say far less to culture and more via the culture we are creating.

The message of Jesus is to be communicated as a living reality. People show up to see that, not to get lectured. The lecture style mass assembly may have seen its day. Communities now have digital access to all the teaching they can possibly consume, but they are still as lonely as ever and hungry for integrity and meaning. We now possess the media tools to capture and share the story of that living reality.

As Christians continue to ponder and publish on the question of how to “use” media the answer is that we already know how. We always have. The world is on fire and listening for a collective chorus of voices...You are loved. You are not alone. You are seen. You are heard. Share my home. I share your pain. Come and see.

The media artist is undoubtedly centrally influential to mission of the Church in a mediated age. What does this look like by way of specific media practices and productions? How is this trained

for? How are those skills and talents cultivated? Well, for that we must look to the living case study of the Moody Media Lab.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ www.MoodyMediaLab.com

APPENDIX

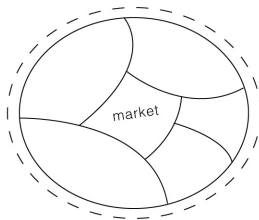
WHY THEY CALLED US CHRISTIANS

Have you ever given much thought to why we are called “Christians?” The early church never called themselves Christians. Jesus never gave a name to his followers. In the Bible the title most often used was “saints.”

The Greek word for saints is “hagios” which means “consecrated to God, holy, sacred, pious.” It is almost always used in the plural, “saints.” Which reflects not just the individual but the connection to a group of people set apart for the Lord and His kingdom (more on that later).

A name is a powerful thing. Beginning with Adam’s first task of naming the animals, throughout human history and even today, the creation of a new name or title is significant and should not be overlooked. A name is embedded with deep meaning drawn from experiences that help define reality in language we can understand.

The early church was called “Christians” by the powers-that-be for the first time in Antioch ([Acts 11:26](#)). “Christian” was the emerging name for those who followed the way of Jesus given to them from the world’s perspective—but why a new word and new name for this group of Christ followers in Antioch? Why, from the perspective of outsiders, weren’t they simply lumped in with all the other variants of the Jewish faith? Some context might help:



Antioch was referred to as “all the world in one city,” where you could see all the world’s richness and diversity in one place...but really, only in the central marketplace. Antioch was designed like most cities of that day: A circular wall on the outside, a marketplace in the center, with the interior of the city walled in way that divided different people groups from one another. That always bring to my mind [this map of Chicago divided by race](#).

Enter Christ followers. Enter the gospel. The Church came to Antioch and began breaking down the barriers that divided people in such a way that generated a unique diversity and an energy that upset the world’s existing categories. People from all parts of the city (Jews and Gentiles) were coming together as new community. This group of people was redefining reality in a way that was previously unknown and so radically that a new definition, a new word, was required for people to categorize what was happening.

What’s extremely important to realize is that without this intrinsic diversity there would have been little need for a new name to be given by outsiders—for example “Jews” would have sufficed as most did not trouble themselves with the intricacies of all the various religious sects within Judaism. Something new that had not been seen in “all the world” was being recognized.

Historically it is thought that the name Christian was given somewhat flippantly or even derogatively by these powers-that-be; a sort of dismissive wave of the hand to those alternative people who follow Jesus as The Christ (Messiah) and were trying to live like He did, those “little christs.” Technically, the ending “-ian” means “belonging to the party of”; thus “Christians” were those of Jesus’ party.

After Acts 11:26 the word “Christians” is used only two other times in the New Testament: in [26:28](#) (by Agrippa, an unbelieving King that applied the name he knew as an outsider) and [1 Peter 4:16](#) (in the context of being oppressed under that given name). The significance of the name, emphasized by the word order in the Greek text, is that people from outside the faith recognized Christians as a distinct group. Something profound and separated from any other pre-existing experience was happening and demanded definition.

In [Galatians 2:11-17](#) we can see just how central the diversity of the Antioch situation was to the definition of what it meant to be a Christ follower, How this experience is built into the meaning of our given definition.

Peter, who had been living side-by-side with Jews and Gentiles, broke the unity of the community when he chose to withdraw from the Gentiles in a kowtow to a group of conservative Jews who had come to town. Peter was “afraid” (vs. 12) of what this group would think or do. This led other Jewish believers to do the same and withdraw from their non-Jewish brethren. Peter has a record of struggling to get his heart to change in line with what he knew to be true. This case was no different.

Paul confronts Peter on this and admonishes him publicly in order to set the record straight (vs. 14)—calling the behavior hypocrisy and not in line with the gospel. Paul is angered with this behavior of conformity and this divisive posture of Peter. Calling him out in public was harsh but the future of Gentile Christians was at stake. This fear of rejection that led to disobedience was not only out of line, but untrue because of the gospel. **No one should neither experience division nor fear rejection because of the truth of the gospel.**

The Gentiles from whom Peter withdrew got the message loud and clear that they were somehow second class because of what they were or weren't, did or didn't do, are or aren't into. Peter knew the truth, but acted against his better judgment and as a result led others to do the same.

Where there is division, the gospel brings unity, where there is brokenness, healing. The racist split Peter caused among the people suggested that the church wasn't really any different from the rest of the world after all—and others could say “so what” to just another belief system. Division along racial lines is not just wrong; it is an affront to the gospel itself and betrays its definitive distinctiveness in the world.

In response Paul declares the unity of the body, the centrality and sufficiency of Christ, and the uniqueness and newness of the new community of those called Christians.

Paul takes the witness of unity/diversity across the world's boundaries extremely seriously—and so should we. Are we living up to our given name? Do our cities look like Antioch? Do our churches? Do our hearts?

Do we defy the world's categories? Does our presence in the world denotatively define a reality where Christ transforms people into a new body of believers where there is no social, economic, racial, or gender division ([Galatians 3:28](#), [Colossians 3:10-11](#))? When the unsaved, in a world full of poverty, division, and oppression, after hearing the gospel ask where they can see that happening are we able to show them such a place without hesitation? Or, do we simply reflect the pattern of the world ([Romans 12:2](#)) in a misguided attempt to “blend” or reach “tribes” and suggest that there is no special meaning to the word Christian.

Perhaps this is why you hear some Christians turning from that name, giving rise to phrases like “I'm a Christ follower not a Christian,” because they no longer like what it means to be Christian from the world's perspective. The world gave that name to us and as such continues to redefine what the word means by its experience of the reality we represent.

According to [John 13:35](#), Jesus says the world get's a vote as to how they will know we are His.

Perhaps it is a stronger choice to take on the challenge of the world's perspective and stand for the name Christian—to reclaim and recover our definitive distinctiveness within culture, to defy the world's categories once again, and to not abandon our name to those who would represent a reality other than the gospel.

How will the world know we are consecrated to God, holy, sacred, pious...Christians?

RESOURCE: MINISTRY MEDIA MATTERS WORKSHOP

Should your community be investing in and creating media? What media matters for the mission of your community? How can your community become better creators of media messages? Is your community thinking theologically about media use/creation?

The issues surrounding media use in ministry have become increasingly complicated and costly (time and money). Few understand why/how various media matter (if at all) and many fall into the trap of using it “just because it is there.” Or, avoid important tools because they seem out of reach. A little bit of theologically informed media theory can go a long way towards demystifying media’s power and simplifying the extent to which media matters to any given cause, community, or context.

For our purposes “media” refers to anything from websites, to online social networks, to video production, to big-screen projectors, to drama, to bulletins, to flannelgraphs, to a community quilt, to fine art...all the classic and modern communication tools. Our goal is to begin crafting a basic framework for making choices about media and tapping into the creativity of your community. Let’s begin with some key questions:

- What types of media are you using?
- How do you decide which media to use in a given situation (e.g. sermon or promotion)?
- How much pressure do you feel to have a strong media presence? Where is that pressure coming from (other media)?
- How do you make decisions about your media investment (budget)?
- How do you make decisions about your media outcomes (final product)?
- Who manages your media (content and quality control)?
- Do you see your media use primarily for bringing people “in” or sending people/stories out?
- What media matters the most to your community?
- Does your community feel charged to share its story via media?

You may notice that the above language focuses on “your community.” Localizing the questions first as opposed to starting with popular trends or emerging technology. As with most things in ministry, looking to the people in your church is always more powerful than googling the latest self professed guru’s advice or chasing perceived “success” strategies of other communities. Some key advice:

Enlist theologically trained media artists and creative directors: Be it internally or via a ministry media group. Do not underestimate the complexities of crafting theologically accurate messages using modern media that have the intended impact. The reasons why you would choose one media form over another or how, say video, changes a message by its very nature requires skilled caretakers of the message to guide the creative process. Find these content creators and problem solvers. Hiring mere

technicians to execute your or someone else's message/vision is ill-advised. Shameless plug: If you're looking for someone like that the Moody Media Lab is full of them.

Authentic beats profound or professional every time (and it's cheaper): Being clever is overrated. So is trying too hard to be “relevant” or producing slick images. Particularly within the upcoming generation authenticity is all that matters—and they are not easily fooled. Be brutally authentic and by that you will be profound. What's more, it is vastly easier and less costly to craft such messages. Testimony is organic, natural, and often simply needs to be recorded and shared.

Share your stories: The world is starved for authentic and prophetic stories of a people on the move. Every community now has the ability to share its gospel journey with the world. No compelling stories? Well, that may be the prophetic power of media speaking back to you. Use that charge to lead more radically and/or invest more deeply in others and no doubt storylines will emerge. All honest and healthy communities have compelling stories of God at work to share.

Use/cultivate the creativity of your community first and foremost: Any creative outpouring, whether media arts or otherwise, is a powerful culture maker and can stimulate a lot of bonding capital and identity within your community. Let the creatives be expressive. You'll find many creatives are prophetically gifted for a reason and the world is hungry for their voice. Media artists just may be the “preachers” of the 21st century.

Draw from the stories and experiences of your community first and foremost: Rather than looking for examples from popular culture (Christian or otherwise) reclaim the power of testimonies and bond it with the power of media. The theme throughout this section is about letting the narrative that God is weaving through your specific space and place to be the driving force behind your media philosophy. This roots your media decisions in the ethos and praxis of your community.

Using media has little to do with keeping up with the times: Resist the urge or pressure to be “with it” or utilizing every possible medium. Don't confuse technological currency with relevancy. Think of the recently rapid turn away from the cold, digital, fleeting media warehouse churches in exchange for more liturgical experiences and a renewed respect for the community hymnal. Cultivating the content is vastly more important. The issue is then is choosing the right medium to communicate the particular story. Media use should be simple and make sense to the community and the world around it. Of course, never do anything simply because some else is.

Do not feed the consumers: Excellence is important, strive for it, but be wary about feeding “consumers.” Within this consumer culture it is easy to fall (even unintentionally) into the business of entertaining the congregants rather than bearing witness through media. As receivers of media it is easy to fall into the traps/habits of merely consuming—diffusing the impact via choosing to be entertained—rather than being open to what God would say to you through the messages. It would be better to have no media in your church than to perpetuate passive consumption patterns.

Arrows out over arrows in: Err to the side of using media to mobilize and share (arrows out) vs. tailoring it to get people to “come to church.” If someone is choosing a community because they like that church's website design they may be doing so for the wrong reasons. If a website brings someone into a space where they hear the gospel preached that is absolutely fantastic. No critique there. However, this about the intent and purpose of the website's content—as a media philosophy it is better to point the “arrows” out. Particularly new media (web/social/etc.) has a nature far more attuned to mobilization over attraction.

On topic: an interview with the Chicago Tribune

A: ...A vital philosophical crux lies in between the lines of your questions: whether the central point of church communications/media is to bring people into a building you “attend” or send people out from a living community whose story you are a part of. Not that it can’t be both.

Let me try to clarify through interaction with your questions...

Q: How long would you say has the web been a part of church communications? Are certain kinds of churches, in terms of size, location, style, and doctrine, more likely to adopt technology than others?

A: The web has certainly been a part of church communications as early as there was a world wide web. I know, because much of the first work I took on as a web developer in the early days (mid-late 90’s) of the www was for churches. Leaders immediately saw the potential to reach a massive audience and “reach” has always been a core value of an evangelistic faith. Western Christians have always been early adopters, be it the printing press, the radio, TV, and web. Specifically, and perhaps primarily, white Evangelical Christians—for many reasons, here are a few pertinent ones...

1. A culture/history of drawing people into the “gathering” or congregation—a growing 20th century desire for large church buildings, large attendance, and a fascination with “technique” onset by the post-industrial revolution culture —as well as inheriting a style of church construction and attendance that had a definitive “front” or “stage” where there are communicators and the communicated to. This leads to a classic communication rule: size changes things. With numbers comes a necessary shift in the type of message and need to be able to communicate with everyone. Technology and technique provides solutions.

So, larger church communities are most likely to be tech adopters out of necessity.

2. I qualified “white” and “western” because of the traditional hand-in-hand requirement of wealth and privilege to be able to afford and adopt new technology. This absolutely brings up the issue of the “digital divide” (a major negative effect). A church whose primary communications strategy involves web based media has made a choice about those who can not afford a computer or advanced mobile phones and may not have the technological literacy to use them.

So, wealthy churches are most likely to be tech adopters out of ability.

3. “Evangelical” is an important qualifier since churches with a theology and doctrine that compels them to get the message of the gospel out will certainly tap into every possible resource to do so.

So, churches committed to the Christian priority responsibility of sharing their faith and stories are most likely to be tech adopters out of mission.

Q: Do you think online marketing and interactions is an effective way for churches to reach out to younger crowds and “dechurched” populations? Will the web help save, in some sense, some churches?

A: Well, I think “church marketing” is essentially using a technique people don’t trust to sell them something they don’t want. So, I remain suspicious of using marketing strategies for church growth.

However, as for online interactions: they are absolutely effective, maybe even necessary as a way to reach out simply because web sites, facebook, twitter, etc. are a part of the communication norms of the emerging generation. Adopting new media trends puts your message inside the experiences and social connectivity of those users.

Will the web help save, in some sense, some churches... If you mean “save” them in the sense of keep their attendance numbers from shrinking....this puts us up against our “crux.” If the assumed reason for “turning focus to digital media, social networking, interactivity, etc.” is to appear cool or relevant enough to get people to “attend” church then I think someone has confused the Christian idea of church.

Q: Are there reasons Christians should be skeptical of churches' reliance on technology? Do you see any negative effects?

A: The idea of technology as a “draw” is probably the number one reason to be skeptical of a church’s use of technology. I am all for using creative media and new tech com strategies with the utmost excellence, but joining a local church community because you like their web site’s color palette or because you can get twitter updates might be a bit suspect.

We teach students to see communications technology as tools with which to leverage their talents and influence in order to engage culture—to communicate the stories of those local communities (i.e. churches) living out lives of love and justice in accordance with the gospel message. We consistently emphasize the message over the medium, compelling content over consumerism, and a methodology of mobilization over massing (that is sending people out rather than drawing people in). Using these new communication channels to connect a community, collaborate on its mission, and communicate the story of that community to the world around it. The social power of new media fits well with the Christian mission and gives every community the ability to engage with all the brilliant opportunities and cultural tools of our time.

New media, like everything else a church adopts, should be to better equip the individual Christian as a part of a local community of believers to “be” the Church. A local community that truly lives out the lives their faith in Christ calls them to will attract more new followers than they could ever fit into one building....whether they are able to share that through new media or not.

I think this popular quote from Greg Laurie is even more interesting in light of questions about media and the church: “Jesus did not say that the whole world should go to church. Essentially He said that the Church should go to the whole world.”

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