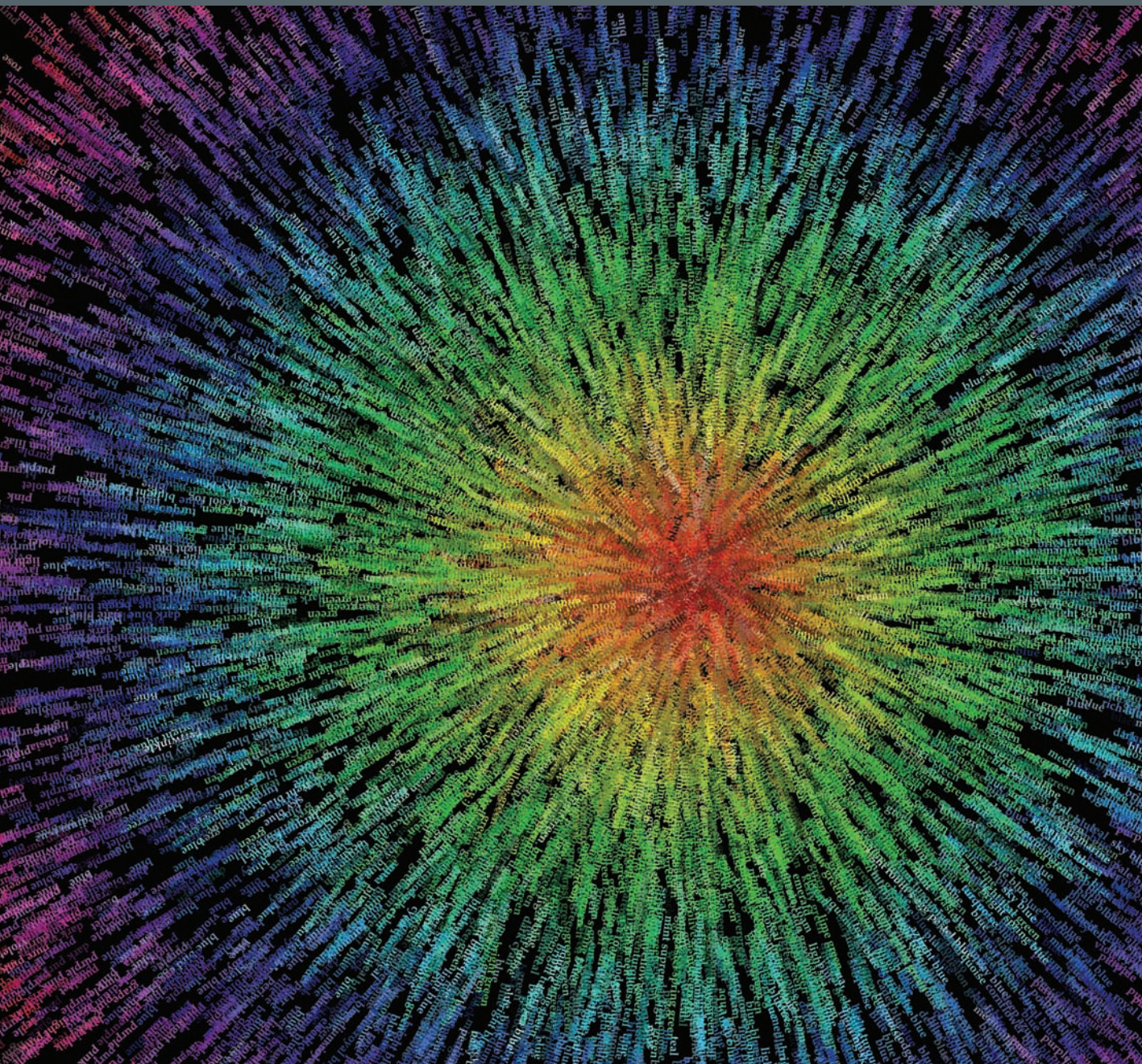


Fall 2011

Reflections

Y A L E D I V I N I T Y S C H O O L

iBelieve: Facing the New Media Explosion



What does all this have to do with church? Nothing – unless the church wants to be relevant to the most powerful cultural change of our time.

– John Brueggemann

COVER ART

“Color Flower”

by Chris Harrison – an image featuring words to reflect the color spectrum

INTERIOR ART

by Rob Pettit – a series of sculptures using recycled cell phones and antennae; also, paintings using images of phones

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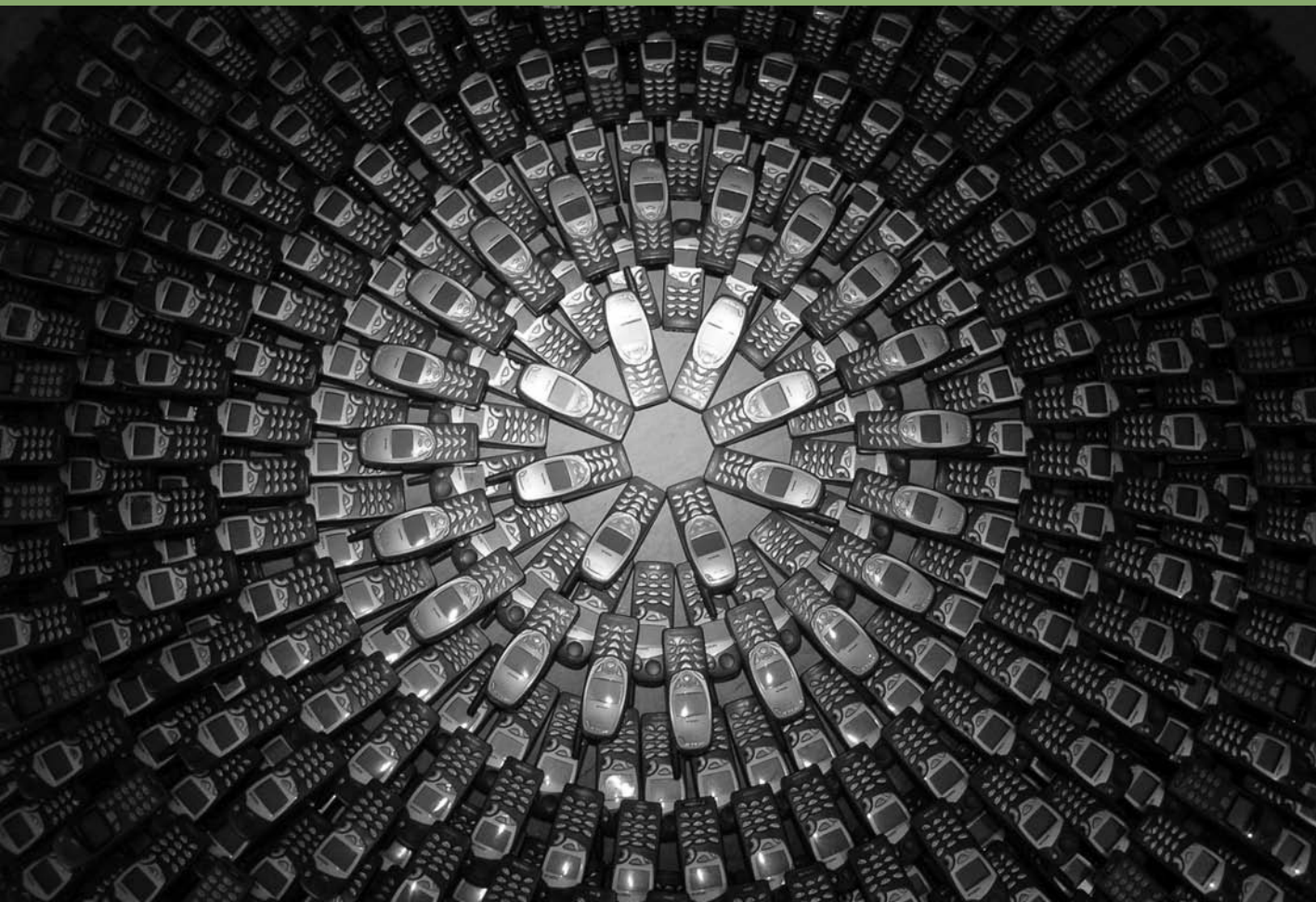
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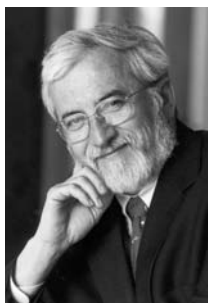
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iBelieve: Facing the New Media Explosion



From the Dean's Desk



Harold W. Attridge
The Reverend Henry L. Slack Dean of Yale Divinity School
& Lillian Claus Professor of New Testament

Those of us of a certain age remember Marshall McLuhan and his provocative book title, *The Medium is the Message*. The Canadian professor focused our collective attention back in the 1970s on the ways and means through which we try to communicate with one another. His effort was timely, but the environment that he faced was far less complex than the reality that envelops us today.

Some of us still read print newspapers and occasionally watch network TV for news and weather, but we may be in a minority on the contemporary American scene. Some of us still read books in their traditional bound paper form, but do so alongside our electronic reading devices: laptop computers (already a bit dated), iPads, Nooks, Kindles, etc. If we thought sound bites on TV during political campaigns grossly oversimplified complex social issues, what are we to think of “tweets” and text-messages? The librarian of the Divinity School, Paul Stuehrenberg, tells me that circulation of our library holdings continues to increase, but the Yale Medical School recently inaugurated a program to equip all incoming students with iPads. Will we be far behind at YDS? Electronic reserves have already largely displaced the cumbersome collections of articles that students used to buy.

Major developments in the history of Christianity were connected with shifts in the media of communication. Part of what facilitated the spread of the faith through the Roman Empire and beyond was the adoption by Christians of the codex, the “book” form with which we have long been familiar. Gutenberg’s printing press gave a major boost to the Reformation. Radio and television served the evangelism and catechesis of twentieth-century preachers and teachers, with varying degrees of

success. Will the new media, social and otherwise, assist the work of the church or hinder it?

Whatever else the new media do, they affect the ways in which we relate to one another. They connect people across vast expanses of the globe, making possible revolutions and breaking down old barriers. At the same time, they provide new avenues for harassment and even degradation, for the rapid spread not only of profound insights but also harmful trash. While they connect they also isolate. What are communities of faith to make of them?

All these issues and more are the subject of this issue of *Reflections*, to which some of our recent alums, all very much involved in the culture of the new media, have contributed. The issues are on the minds of students and faculty at YDS, as they both engage in work of scholarship and learning and as they prepare to lead communities of faith in a rapidly changing world.

On the broader horizon, this unstoppable cultural shift requires significant theological scrutiny from many quarters. It deserves our attention in the church and the academy. Our aim with this *Reflections* issue is to spark a continuing and needed conversation. We thank the many far-flung writers here – theologians, sociologists, pastors, practitioners from many disciplines – who share their thinking and experience to help shape the right questions and the emerging answers.

We hope, as always, that this issue will encourage a wider dialogue about the ways in which current media massage our message.

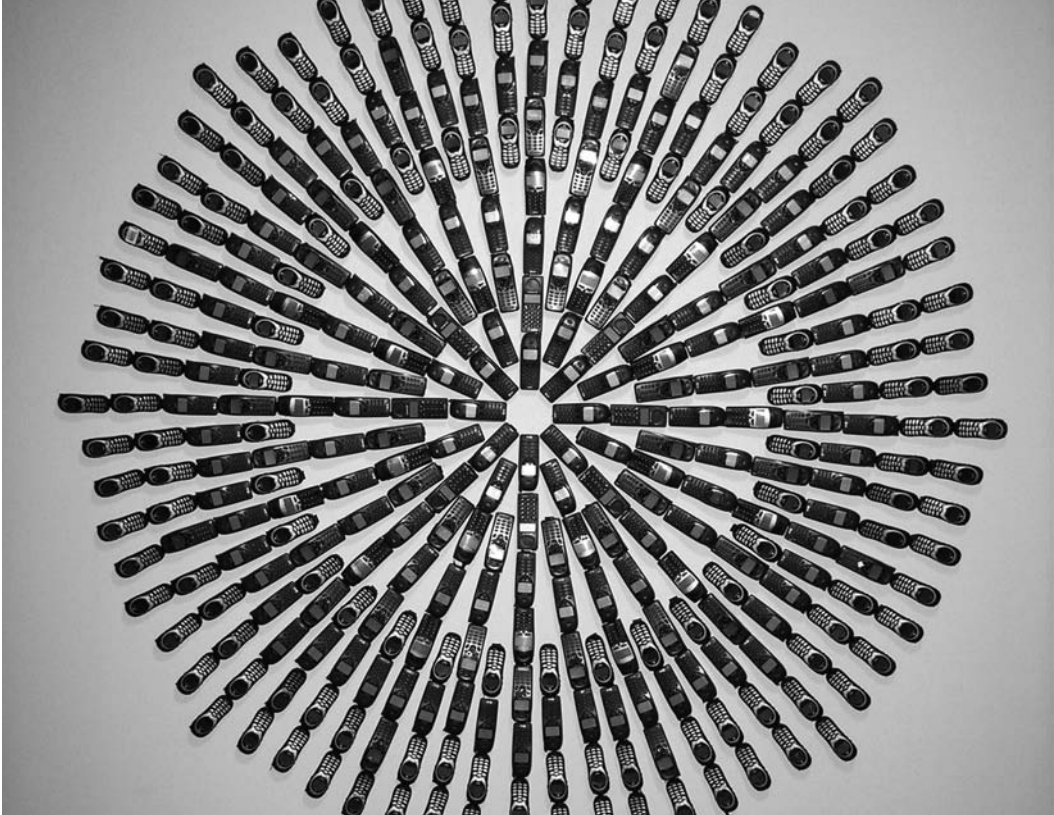
Harold W. Attridge

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Connecting with a Theology of Technology

By Wes Avram

The intertwining of theology and technology in the Christian West has long been a personal interest. Because of the success of new media, this relationship between religious faith and technological change has lately turned more urgent.

A conversation that has percolated for decades and even centuries feels, lately, one-sided or even silenced, as if overwhelmed by the speed and dazzle of the technology. The resulting silence falls like a worrisome shadow over contemporary life.

In the late twentieth century, a group of writers helped us think about that intertwining. Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society*, argued that what Karl Marx saw as the fundamental operation of *capital* in nineteenth century capitalism could be replaced by the operation of *technique* in the late-capitalist, technological society. *Techne* is means, which quickly becomes confused with ends in technological society. Techniques become things we produce, with their efficiency, value, design, and innovation overwhelming traditional notions of purpose, use, tradition, and shared knowledge.

Ellul saw great theological implication in this transformation. Many followed Ellul. Marshall McLuhan, himself a Roman Catholic believer, speculated about the technique of electronic media, coining that famous image of cultural transformation, "the medium is the message." Neil Postman ex-

ogy in an electronic age, our dazzling digital devices becoming for us an impenetrable "black box" upon which we depend. These ideas were explored in the fiction of Vonnegut and others.

Stealing from the Church

In the same tradition and with his own theological commitments, Albert Borgmann helped us see that the radical break between modern technology and pre-modern technology is rooted in the way technological culture steals the promises once held by the church – to heal, to satisfy, to bond, and to give a future. During the early years of internet communication, Sherry Turkle explored what it means to create human identity "on the screen." Susan White and others demonstrated how the history of Christian liturgy in the West has reflected, even tracked, the history of technology.

Further linking theology and technology, Ivan Illich proposed that the very rise of modern Western technological culture can be traced to medieval debates about the mechanism of change in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. In the new media revolution, he suggested, we are witnessing something as culturally and theologically momentous as the invention of "the page" (with accompanying tables of contents and indexes) in eleventh-century monasteries. Those technologies transformed reading, and not just how we read, but what reading is. In every computer screen, Illich saw a bulldozer tearing down the neighborhood of his bookish youth. Our millennium-long sense of identity with the book is now over.

As we moved into this new cybernetic era of computer-based communications, it seemed reasonable to ask divinity students to think theologically about

I learned something there that brought a new set of questions, though few answers. In the acronym FOMO, I found a topic worth a theological wrestle.

amined how the multiplication of media has forced education to give way to entertainment, while Camille Paglia pushed back at Postman in defense of the liberating play that media provide. William Stahl asked about the increasing "mysticism" of technol-

all of this. When I was teaching Yale divinity students in the early 2000s, I did just that. It was fun, and engaging. Students were sharp, and reflective.

The Debate is Over

Now five years out from that teaching and back in parish ministry, I've come to two conclusions about all this. One came early, around 2007. It became clear to me that in the largely white, upper-middle-class community in which I was a pastor, the theological concerns raised by the authors I noted above didn't matter a whit. The debate was over. The new world had begun. There was no way to function without embracing that new world. And so I did – with more and more dependence on software to aid my ministry, with cell phone and email in my pocket, and a nearly uncritical insistence on the need for sophisticated and contemporary design in our vision for ministry.

The second conclusion is that a new watershed has appeared in the last year or so, in the form of

Hasn't religious tradition cherished the experience of deep exploration, of closing off options, focusing attention, and accepting limits?

a new intertwining. This transition is within wired culture itself, with the convergence of social media technology (such as Facebook and Twitter) and “cloud” computing – with the promise that more and more of our data and calendars and correspondence and commerce will be gathered and stored and enacted “out there somewhere.” We are sold miniature portals that promise nonstop, ubiquitous access to a purely external, but never locatable, universal trove of data, a parallel world.

It sounds a lot like what prayer used to promise, but it doesn't feel much like prayer. I knew there was more behind this tech trend than a desire for convenience or productivity or even the shiny brilliance of a screen. But I didn't quite know what.

And then I recently attended a gathering – an ideas festival of sorts. I learned something there that brought a new set of questions, though few answers. It's a new acronym, born of a generation walking this watershed. The acronym is FOMO. In FOMO, I found a topic worth a theological wrestle.

This gathering included a number of young, successful entrepreneurs. Some of them were from Silicon Valley, others from projects in international development, community organizing, education, and public health. They were extroverted, engag-

ing, self-confident, and happy to share their vision of the world. The language of entrepreneurialism dominated in every area, whether business or non-profit, with terms like “capitalization” and “venture investment” ruling the air. The life-work of these young creators seemed to be to get an idea, get organized, get backed, get successful, get bought or get absorbed, and then move on to the next idea on the basis of the reputation they've built from the last one. Everyone was leveraging everything to make connections, get networked, and get known. Social media is not just the tool of choice for them, it is the environment they swim in. Global reach is assumed and a sense of clean break from the past is pervasive.

Where older participants at the event spoke of economic and cultural crisis, these younger folk spoke the language of opportunity and change. They also spoke the language of speed (and they spoke that language very quickly). One woman, maybe thirty years old, declared that the college-educated peers of her generation will experience up to seventeen careers in their lifetimes. I remember the early 1990s, when as a college chaplain I was stunned to hear our campus career counselors telling students that they could expect to have five distinctly different careers in their working lives. I thought that sounded excessive then. Yet it seems now that each one of these young entrepreneurs has already had at least two if not three careers well before they're thirty. Even more interesting, they seem to have three, if not four, positions at once – each of them listed behind their names like we used to list degrees. They take on several projects simultaneously, building from one company or project or campaign or network to the next.

Fast Times in the Zeitgeist

“Fail fast,” we were told, “and move on.” In the economy to come, we were told, we must all “make our own jobs” – maximizing impression, value, and the energy of others to create and leverage our own. It's what sociologist Zygmunt Bowman calls “liquid capitalism” – electronic, mediated, short-term, with high production design and always catchy labels. It was all genuinely impressive, genuinely novel, genuinely curious, and genuinely startling. It is where we are, at least in a certain stratum of society.

What questions must theology pose to all of this? Do we resist it, with the hope of preserving an older memory? Do we harness it, with sure confidence that it is a gift from God? Or do we find ways to critically but realistically engage?

These questions lead me back to FOMO. A conversation at the ideas festival about education

turned to how educators might keep the attention of students in the face of so many distractions in their hyper-mediated world. We spoke of the new normal in the upper middle class: an iPhone in one's pocket, an iPad in one's purse, and a laptop in one's bag all syncing every fifteen minutes with Facebook, Twitter, and whatever one calls an office. Websites and other apps are designed to scour other Facebook pages, websites, newsfeeds, and blogs on our behalf, signaling every time a tailored topic of personal interest appears. Eyes look down to laps instead of up to a teacher, checking a handheld screen for whatever's being "pushed" toward us.

"Why?" one of the old-timers asked. "FOMO!" came the answer, spontaneously, from a couple of voices in their late twenties. They spoke at the same time, as if surprised that the inquirer didn't know the answer. "FOMO?" came the reply right back. And with glances at each other, our young tutors responded in concert again: "Fear Of Missing Out!" I tested the acronym with anyone under thirty I could find; they all knew it immediately.

Prerogative of Youth

FOMO. The idea's nothing new, of course. It has been a hallmark of youth all along: wanting to know what's happening, keeping one's options open, scanning the terrain for what you want. We've always measured youth by energy and experimentation. By contrast, we've always measured maturity by the ability to move beyond grazing distraction in order to make promises, then to mark those promises with commitments, with persevering and building something that lasts. In that sense, the FOMO of youth is as predictable as the stability of age.

Except . . . something feels different about this moment, and not just because FOMO has been promoted to acronym status. I think that something has to do with acceleration and mediation. FOMO is now supported technologically, mediated electronically, and monetized for profit in ways we've never seen. It is becoming the signature reason for wiring in. And that might make it the great underestimated impulse behind social media – more powerful than the desire for association and friendship that we're told stands behind it all. FOMO rules. And when it seems like there is so much more to miss out on these days when we can capture the world on a tiny screen in our palms, FOMO also drives. The fear fuels itself.

So in our churches, our youth groups tweet, blog, upload videos and photos for the church's website or their parents' iPads when on retreat – to assure that no one will miss out. Our friends post what they

had for dinner on Facebook and take a survey of who likes Chipotle Grill better than Baja Fresh – so no one will miss out.

Some of our high schools are now reconsidering their "no cell phone or smartphone in the classroom" policies, because of the anxiety produced by FOMO. Instead, they are incorporating social media breaks into class time, allowing students a moment to check their social media every fifteen or thirty minutes in hopes of allaying their FOMO and regaining their attention. Our universities incorporate options for instantaneous feedback to lecturers, so the teacher may revise her lecture as she gives it. We're not supposed to miss out on our hearers' immediate responses, no matter how hasty or undigested those responses might be. The instant response becomes the most valuable response, and so educators become choreographers of immediacy rather than midwives of a slower wisdom. FOMO.

This new set of expectations has slid into place without much conversation, resistance, or even notice. Yet religious tradition has some questions to ask. For hasn't the religious vision of spiritual maturity always staked at least part of its claim on the value of "missing out"? Hasn't it cherished

Let's resist the temptation to elevate the cloud to the status of heaven, where we once sought God but now seek linkage.

the experience of deep exploration, of closing off options, focusing attention, and accepting limits? Hasn't spiritual wisdom demanded patience, forgiveness, a grace that is shaped (not data-banked) by memory? And haven't the disciplines of restraint, choice, concentration, humility, and focus been essential to the work of prayer? Can these questions be asked today without appearing hopelessly naive?

We're also told that in this new convergence of social media and cloud computing, privacy is an archaic concept – and that FOMO has killed it. We're told that even the notion of a search engine must be reversed in a post-privacy age, that we no longer use Google to search the internet. Instead, the internet now uses Google (and Facebook) to search us – our habits, beliefs, preferences, apparent worth, relationships, weaknesses, future actions, and more. What comes, then, of the theologically rich notion of the private, upon which all possibility of commitment and love through the course of suffering is based? Do not ethics require a healthy distinction between private and public, an orderly way of guarding the eye and deliberately missing

out? And doesn't a healthy soteriology require the same, whereby we allow the One who searches us to be a Loving Other (Holy Spirit) and not a piece of impersonal software.

The Holy Spirit searches us, not to feed our FOMO, but to fill it and so quiet it. The Spirit searches us to know our innermost thoughts, to unearth and reveal to us our deeper, hidden desires, and to shape our desires in ways that might teach us to say "no" as well as "yes," and transform our fear of missing out into a desire for love. What becomes now of that possibility? It isn't gone, but is it changing?

Earlier I mentioned Ivan Illich, who envisioned a bulldozer behind every computer screen, destroying the world of his bookish youth. When he framed that image in his commentary on medieval reading practices, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, he was describing an understanding of truth that has guided nearly a millennium of Christian practice. Adherence to the faith has been imagined as a journey of discovery through shared practices of engagement. These were mediated by logic, metaphor, narrative, and long traditions of interpretation in a culture of gracious learning. It required holding, for the time being, some questions unanswered and some paths untaken, with faith in our capacity to gather greater knowledge by hiking some paths again and again. It was not a wandering. It was a guided, patient exploration.

Bookish faith certainly suffered from a high bar of admission, a certain exclusivity and the occasional sin of arrogance. The democracy of new media, making information more widely available, is a praiseworthy promise of "the cloud." Yet it would still be a mistake to miss Illich's point: consuming data in the form of postmodern "information" has little in common with what a millennium of Western consciousness has understood as "learning." Much is gained today. Yet much is lost. Uncritical celebration of what's coming might be as naive as precipitous rejection. It smacks of FOMO.

So what will happen as we get used to living underneath a social media saturated "cloud"? We need theologically interested thinkers to wonder. We can resist the idea that all knowledge can be "stored," that all ideas and records and music and correspondence and half-finished essays and fully finished gossip can be kept in one huge – timeless – searchable database. We can resist the idea that the only barrier between personal and public is a faintly reliable password. We can resist the idea that access to the cloud will ease this fear put into us of missing out.

We can resist the temptation to elevate the cloud to the status of heaven, where we once sought God but now seek linkage. We can resist such a metaphor. There is no divine Other in this cloud, except the otherness of ourselves. It offers no catharsis for our striving, except in the thrill of speed and the distraction of tweets. It offers interest, convenience, and usable information, but little trace of the love for which faith has always turned toward the heavens. This gnostic promise of saving data cannot, finally, redeem a broken soul.

But it's time to get back to the here-and-now. Despite my questions, I'll still learn social media and encourage my congregation to dive in. I'll be an early adopter of cloud computing, when it is fully unfolded. I'll love the shine, admire the bitten apple. A bit of me will fear missing out. But along the way, I'll keep hoping that those who preach and teach in the church will keep thinking about all of this. I'll believe that a theology of technology is still possible. I'll hope that we can still preserve a pre-internet, pre-cloud memory of a living hope mediated by prayer and not by hyperlink. I'll keep hoping in a heaven that is less gnostic and more incarnational, less digitally powerful and more peaceful, less about access and more about acceptance. I'll keep hoping that we can help a new generation remember something that technological innovation cannot give them, and hope that in so remembering they will find their FOMO healed.

Wes Avram, pastor of Pinnacle Presbyterian Church in Scottsdale, AZ, was the Clement-Muehl Assistant Professor of Communication at Yale Divinity School and the Institute for Sacred Music from 2000-2006. He received an M.Div. degree from Princeton Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. in Communication from Northwestern.

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Living Theologically in a Networked World

By Verity A. Jones

How is social networking changing the practices of religious communities? I hear this question frequently, and with increasing intensity.

When *DisciplesWorld*, the journal for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) that I produced for six years, launched a social networking website in 2009, skeptical church leaders wondered aloud: What is all this new media doing to the church? Are friending and blogging and tweeting all just one big distraction from the gospel?

As I am discovering, sorting out the answers requires both acknowledging past traditions and

The new social media world is not a fad, a temporary disruption that Christian communities must endure while holding on to the essence of faith until all is well again.

leaning boldly into the future. The new digital media world confirms some of what we know already about human need and human nature, while also pushing our theological imaginations toward new horizons – if we are willing to engage the questions.

I recently gained some historical perspective from new-media strategist Ruby Sinreich at Duke, who makes the perfectly obvious point that there is nothing new about social networking (<http://lotusmedia.org/5things>). People have been doing it for ages. We network to raise money for good causes. We network to help a friend find a job. We network to elect people to office. Sinreich says social networks are like rivers – they flow. You can't totally control them, but you can try to understand where they go and why.

Human life is inherently social. We could even say that Facebook didn't create social networking; social networking created Facebook. Communities of faith have thrived on social networking for centuries. Paul was a consummate organizer and networker. His letters, visits, preaching, and teach-

ing gathered together new followers of Christ and connected them to other disciples throughout the Mediterranean world. He sent out Timothys and Priscillas as friends to connect with and mentor new followers.

I was so caught up in trying to save a print journal from being pulled under by the radical and rapid shift to digital formats, that I had failed to appreciate this basic theological point about human life and its relevance for the church. Through my subsequent work with the New Media Project at Union Theological Seminary, I have been privileged to pick up this theological thread once more.

Deeper into Daily Life

Social networking is perennial, but today's new media tools are indeed changing what networking looks like and, to some extent, how networks behave. Social media tools make networking far more visible and easier to follow. Friends of friends on Facebook can see each other and converse. In fact, Facebook's success is tied to how it originally differentiated itself from online tools that encouraged false identities such as video gaming. Instead, Facebook encouraged people to dig deep into their actual, real relationships. In *Time Magazine's* profile of him last year, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg says, "At its core, what we're trying to do is map out all of those trust relationships." Profile writer Lev Grossman explains, "The fact that people yearned not to be liberated from their daily lives but to be more deeply embedded in them is an extraordinary insight."

Further, today's digital social networking reverberates with political and sociological impact. Relationships of the rich and powerful can be studied through interactive web graphs on sites like News.Muckety.com. We talk of "swarms" or "flash mobs" when people connect through Twitter or Foursquare

and gather on the spur of the moment. New media tools also make networking more accessible to those previously left out of power circles (women, poor people, people of color). Mobile technology is closing the gap of accessibility; more and more people who can't afford computer access are using the tools on their smartphones.

Social media tools are enabling new sorts of networks to exist as well. The online Young Clergy Women Project, founded at Yale Divinity School in 2006, is one such network. Clergywomen under the age of forty are few and far between in many parts of the U.S. Without colleagues nearby who are experiencing the same pressures and challenges, young clergywomen can feel isolated and alone. Through

Communities of faith have thrived on social networking for centuries. Paul was a consummate networker.

the Young Clergy Women Project, more than 500 young clergywomen have found life-giving connections on the Project's password-protected blog and public e-zine. Many have never met each other in person, but consider each other close friends. Susie Shaefer, co-chair of the group's board of directors, says, "We exist because face-to-face community is not there" for many young clergywomen. "We can't replicate face-to-face community; we are trying to substitute for it."

God is (Virtually) Everywhere

But the social media revolution is doing more than redefining old, deeply human practices of networking. It is presenting new models for how we might exist as church in the world, how we understand ourselves as creatures of God, and perhaps even how we experience, encounter, and describe the divine. In a recent post to the New Media Project blog, Research Fellow and *Sojourners* Editor Jim Rice explores how the power of digital media to collapse time and space by creating real-time global connections might offer a new model of church. Noting Avery Dulles' statement in *Models of the Church* (Doubleday, 1974) – "In a healthy community of faith, the production of new myths and symbols goes on apace" – Rice argues that digital media give us "vivid examples of the 'universal body of Christ' that never before existed." (See <http://blog.newmediaprojectatunio.org/2011/08/new-models-of-church-in-new-media-world.html>.)

Rice demonstrates how we might learn empathy for geographically distant people by quoting a tweet from a Palestinian student – "Darn. I can hear the

IDF drones overhead. Makes it hard to study for my test tomorrow" – and for online friends who are suffering – "I'm in Tahrir Square right now. The security forces are moving in." Such encounters produce more sympathetic understanding in the body of Christ than facts on the page ever could. Such tweeted or friended connections and pleas can suggest "analogies of God's transcendence and immanence that have the potential to lead to profound new insights and understandings about the very nature of God and God's realm on earth," Rice says. "An abstract theological concept like 'God is everywhere' is somehow easier to visualize now that it feels as if we can be everywhere at once, if only virtually," he adds.

No doubt the question of how we understand ourselves as creatures of God in a networked wireless world is a theological query fraught with uncertainty. Does online life threaten to obliterate religious tradition and memory? What are Facebook, Twitter, and even the online version of *The New York Times* doing to our attention spans, our ability to concentrate, the quality of our worship and reflection, our relation to the corporeal world, and our relationships with people and communities therein? We are right to attend to these questions, but we ought not stop there.

Friending Creation

We should consider the prospect that exposure to networks of people and ideas that educate, encourage, correct, influence, shape, and depend upon us is an essential element of what it means to be fully human, even if some of those networks are digitally based. Not just because digital networks can build empathy across the universal body of Christ, and not just because they might offer us a more tangible means to grasp God's immanence and presence through others, but also because we are created by God to be in relationships, in networks of people and ideas of all kinds. As co-partners with God, stewarding the good gift of creation, we ought to be concerned with the world, its creatures, and all of creation.

If we are properly concerned with God's gift of creation, then why shouldn't we venture into the plethora of ideas and information available online? There we can find educational resources never before available to us – from up-to-date statistics about world-wide hunger to plans for building affordable houses, from user-friendly community calendars to the worship styles of South America. Why wouldn't we want to know all that we can know to be faithful co-partners with God stewarding the good gift of creation?

Of course, we have to discern helpful from harmful information, distinguish ideas that lead to life from those that lead to death. But the very act of exploring this immense abundance of information is not inherently a distraction from things that matter. Networking with ideas and sharing the very best with others can be an essential expression of what it means to be human before God.

Living in a networked world also stimulates new ways of thinking about our experience of who God is. Kathryn Reklis, another New Media Project Research Fellow and a graduate student in religious studies at Yale, recently riffed in a blog post on Karl Rahner's "horizon of our being" – Rahner's description of our "pre-apprehension" of God as a horizon that "grounds our existence in God's existence and draws us toward God in love." But instead of the horizon metaphor, our new media world might offer fresh alternative images of the divine, Reklis says. Though new habits of hyperlinked reading can lead to "surface-surfing" over content, she suggests they might on the contrary lead to digging deeper into topics. "The more we click, the further we go into a web of connections that we experience as having depth," she says.

Reklis asks, "Is God, then, ... not a receding horizon making experience possible, but the thickening web of interconnectivity, the relationships between all other relationships? ... What do we know about ourselves and our world theologically, if the divine possibility of all our knowing can be imagined as the hyperlinked connections of our digital experience" rather than the "horizon of our being"? (See <http://blog.newmediaprojectatunion.org/2011/08/from-horizon-to-hyperlink.html>.)

Trinity Affinities

What would it mean to ask such questions in specifically Trinitarian terms? Could the relational character of the Trinity be imagined as a "thickening web of interconnectivity?" If God in three persons is present where two or more are gathered in God's name, is God also present in the daily lives of people online sharing their prayers and faith activities with friends, people who yearn "to be more deeply embedded" in their "trust relationships," as Facebook's Zuckerberg sees it?

Social networking isn't new to Christian community. But the social media tools many use for networking today are new, and those tools are changing Christian community. The new tools are generating new patterns of behavior that affect not just Christian practice, but also, potentially, patterns of belief. Thinking theologically about living in a socially networked world has become an essential task for the community of faith.

The new social media world is not a fad, a temporary disruption that Christian communities must endure while holding on to the essence of faith until all is well again. How we communicate the gospel in a new age is at stake. The Pew Research Center's 2010 study on Millennials – Americans age eighteen to thirty-nine – says 75 percent of Millennials have created a social networking profile, and fully

If we are properly concerned with God's gift of creation, then why shouldn't we venture into the plethora of ideas and information online?

80 percent have used their cell phone to send text messages in the last twenty-four hours. (See <http://pewresearch.org/millennials>).

The same study reports that these technologically savvy young adults are avoiding church. Millennials are more likely to be unaffiliated with a religious tradition than Generation X was at this age (26 percent vs. 20 percent), and are twice as likely as Baby Boomers were to be unaffiliated at this age (26 percent vs. 13 percent).

Younger clergy in the Millennial age range reflect their generation. A May 2011 survey of sixty-six young clergy by the New Media Project shows that 97 percent have a personal profile on Facebook and 83 percent use Facebook in their ministry. The New Media Project is trying to learn from young clergy and help them reflect theologically about the technology they use with the ease of their generation.

The church can wring its hands about new media. Or religious leaders can recognize the new context in which the church exists today and become a positive interpretive voice in this new public square. But we can't do anything sitting on the sidelines hoping that all will be well.

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Kwok Pui Lan is professor of Christian theology and spirituality at Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, MA. She is a scholar in postcolonial theology and Asian feminist theology and is an active blogger. She was a visiting professor at YDS in 2007.

REFLECTIONS: You have stirred interest in the metaphors “bazaar mind” and “cathedral mind.” How do these challenge society today?

KWOK: I have blogged about how my students got excited when I talked about the “bazaar mind” of our networked society. A bazaar is a marketplace where you shop from place to place. You have no obligation to stay long and no commitment to buy. You are constantly on the go. I borrow the term the “bazaar mind” from author Clay Shirky, and it seems to describe our condition: constantly moving and connected. People surf the web and check Facebook at the same time they do homework. It’s not just the volume of information we face but the way it affects brain function – the clicking from page to page, the new habit of linking knowledge so quickly.

In contrast, the cathedral mind takes patience, learning, concentration, years of training. This metaphor recognizes that the mind is complex, multilayered, with immense depths. We associate someone like Thomas Aquinas with the cathedral mind.

REFLECTIONS: Does cathedral mind have a chance today?

KWOK: It is very difficult, and totally counter-cultural, in our age to produce people with a cathedral mind. It’s more than a style of thought. It’s a humanistic ideal. We want students to see connections between their theological studies and the broader world of humanistic knowledge – literature, art, music, and many other fields. The worry is that people now lack the time and the quiet space to cultivate this ideal. Students are more pragmatic today. They are focused on acquiring professional skills, specialized knowledge. This is partly a matter of the financial pressure they feel in this economic downturn. Twenty-five years ago, we were not under so much pressure. So our question as teachers is, do we give up the cathedral ideal, or do we still aspire to urge it upon students? I do know some students who continue to be very attracted in this “architecture of ideas.” The question is whether they can devote the time needed to cultivate it.

REFLECTIONS: Can the two styles live together?

KWOK: I am reminded that Buddhism has very different images of the mind. The mind that is untrained and wanders around is called the monkey mind. The

aim of meditation is to tame the monkey mind and become conscious of one’s thoughts. After much practice, the mind can become empty and no longer attached to things. I notice that many young people today are attracted to Zen-like meditation or practices of mindfulness. Perhaps this is a way of unloading their minds. I once attended a dharma talk by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh in Boston. Almost 3,000 were present, and many were young people. When Thich asked us to meditate, all were quiet. Perhaps the bazaar mind needs the empty mind.

REFLECTIONS: The internet is credited and blamed for disrupting traditional hierarchies and powers. Is the internet a reflection of the postcolonial world?

KWOK: In postcolonial studies we have been talking about the fragmentation of the self and hybrid identity for a long time. The bazaar mind will accelerate that. Every day we are instantly exposed to multiple perspectives, alternative voices. In the future, an education must be defined to include the ability to synthesize these perspectives and information so that students can arrive at their own integration.

REFLECTIONS: Are theologians confronting the ramifications of new media?

KWOK: The challenge is to understand the new age we find ourselves in. What I hear mostly in my field is discussion about the pedagogical use of new media – the use of online tools for teaching. Less discussed is how the internet is affecting our imaginations. How does this instant access to immense information affect what it means to be an educated person? What new theological re-imagining – what new metaphors for God – will emerge from the digital imagination? Tradition gave us the analogical imagination – God as King of Kings, God as omnipotent. What digital metaphors for God will arise? I don’t have the answers. At this point I am trying to ask the questions.

REFLECTIONS: Are you hopeful about the digital future?

KWOK: As theological educators, we are all digital immigrants. We are learning a language that was not our native tongue. Students today are digital natives. They have grown up with it. It’s their language. This generation is more hopeful and globally connected than any before. Their awareness of events beyond their own lives – in Africa, Asia, the Mideast – is unprecedented. We should not underestimate that. I want to meet them halfway so we can learn to speak a common language.

The New Thing: Faith in the Age of Social Media

By Rahiel Tesfamariam

In recent months, I had two coffee shop encounters that greatly imprinted my thinking about Christianity and culture. In the first, I overheard two men dressed in business suits speak fondly of the Emergent Church and Sojourners founder Jim Wallis. The affectionate pride they took in their subject led them to speak loud enough for me to hear their entire conversation.

As they exited, I sat there thinking about a country and its religions divided along identity lines and how fragile religious convictions are. My fear is that Christianity will be lost on an entire generation of youth, particularly youth of color, who feel no pride in the faith and view the church as disconnected from their lived experiences.

The other encounter took place as I sat next to a woman I thought to be a graphic design artist. Thoroughly impressed by the high-tech 3D visuals that kept driving my attention to her computer screen, I

I am committed to exploring how Christianity can be translated for an emerging generation in need of a faith that speaks to the full complexity of who they are.

inquired about her profession. It turns out that she was a procrastinator exploring an alternative lifestyle as a rock star on SecondLife.com. Described as “a world with infinite possibilities” that allows you to “live a life without boundaries, guided only by your imagination,” Second Life is one of many virtual worlds offering entry into previously unimagined spaces. She reminded me of the power that online communities grant their users to escape, transform, and revolutionize their lives.

These experiences took place at a time in which my passion for social change had been clouded by flawed systems and institutions, and my faith in the church as the greatest movement of the twenty-first

century had nearly evaporated. I was months removed from working with the District of Columbia’s juvenile justice agency on a massive reform effort, and for years I had wondered how churches could learn to better serve disenfranchised communities with an emphasis on social justice.

A God Move: Starting an Online Magazine

During months of intense self-reflection and prayerful solitude, I debated whether I should apply to a doctoral program or launch an institution of my own. But I recognized that I wanted a Ph.D. mostly for validation and security; those three little letters would never amount to the courage I needed to be who God calls me to be. Words a pastor had spoken to me years ago kept echoing in my ear: “Follow your heart; your treasure is where your heart is.” And I made a bold decision.

Traditionally, ministry (Christ) and media (culture) are understood as dichotomous worlds. There is tension between them, if not outright contradiction. While corporate media generally reflects the cultural landscape (and, in turn shapes our societal values), ministry should challenge these conventions and elevate collective consciousness. One works as a conduit; the other should transform. Both shape and compete for our time and our values.

But it was becoming increasingly clear to me that the church must find ways to stay competitive and bring the two worlds of media and faith together – and deliver an authentic message to young people who might otherwise give little thought to the gos-

pel. Growing up in a culturally rich world with writing/journalism as an in-my-bones passion, I tend to play on both sides, wishing the two knew better than to underestimate one another's power and could find a balance. Contemporary corporate media has such momentum of its own that it might not notice if the church became inconsequential once and for all. But the spiritual stakes are too high, and the crowds are still watching.

Through the years, I had always dreamed of having my own magazine, as I think of myself as a lover of language with a Romans 12:2 commitment

We think differently because of our infinite access to information. And we connect to one another differently, as friendship has been reduced to the click of a button.

to cultural criticism and knowledge exchange. But I never envisioned my work would be in the field of digital media. As I sat at my dining room table night after night this past summer building out www.UrbanCusp.com, I knew I was creating the "new thing" that God had been promising me for years and immediately saw how it synthesized everything I had previously experienced.

This new space was to be the hybrid that brought together my passion for liberation theology, freedom struggle, and popular culture. It also serves to reconcile my multi-layered identity: African. American. Immigrant. Elite. Woman. Youth. Thinker. Activist. Global Citizen. Ghetto-bred. Urbane. Pan-African. Cultural Connoisseur. Christian. A Christian who struggles to believe that if Christ's Spirit abides in me, then I too abide in Christ. Everyday now I am putting the dream into motion, producing Urban Cusp's content for my generation and beyond.

A Global Storefront

I could no longer wait for others (mentors, pastors, teachers, friends) to bring forth the vision that God had planted within me. I faced numerous challenges along the way – fiscal, technical, logistical – but newfound relationships kept nudging me further, teaching me the value of "social currency." The village had begun to partake in my dream. I was at the point of no return.

No longer did anyone ask me how I was applying my theological training; they could see that Urban Cusp was God's answer to my prayer for a global ministry. I did not make that connection until site stats showed that it had reached twenty-five

countries in its first week (with 100-plus countries reached within two months). As one minister affirmed, "Urban Cusp is your church. You're building your church and you will reach many, many people." Though we're still a storefront, we're casting our net far and wide.

As I immerse in new media, I begin to worry that the church is not paying close attention to the rampaging cultural changes underway. To underestimate the power of social media as a tool of Generation X or Y would be to ignore the role it has already played in transforming our landscape. As a global community, we will now never know who we would have been without the rise of online communities. We think differently because of our infinite access to information. We act differently because our time is being spent and prioritized in new and sometimes alarming ways. And we definitely connect to one another differently, as friendship has been reduced to the click of a button.

It is going to become increasingly difficult for churches to maintain the attention of believers and to engage non-Christians in a world where emerging online communities seek to clone human intimacy and foster a sense of fulfillment through the allure of a digital Tower of Babel. By logging in to any of the countless online social networking platforms, we feel we are tapping into our innermost desires, creating a profile for the person we wish we were and uploading images of the life we wish we had. By giving millions access to the lives of others, social media constantly compel us to examine ourselves and restructure our public personas either to fit in or stand out (not always consciously). This represents a serious challenge to pastoral care and theology in relation to identity formation, conceptions of attachment, discernment, and development of value systems.

The Call of Hip-Hop

The new media revolution is particularly important to disenfranchised urban communities, as the Hip-Hop generation's relationship to social media is a unique phenomenon itself. Though contemporary Hip-Hop is driven by corporations that offer the masses unlimited access to manufactured forms of black culture, it continues to imprint the identities of young people who only understand it as a musical, ideological, and lifestyle form. Many believe that Hip-Hop, unlike the church, understands who they are and directly ministers to their pain and anger. I think both are missing the mark. Grappling with the horrors of violence, poverty, addiction, mental illness, abandonment, and a host of other social

ills, countless youth and young adults turn to the gods of money, sex, drugs, and power. How will the church compete with (and perhaps even overpower) corporate-driven cultural production in order to reclaim this generation for Christ?

It's a large question. But the church must teach us again how to thank God for our own blessings and cease comparing ourselves to others. When online communities assume we no longer need to be in one another's presence in order to enjoy good company, Sunday worship should continue to encourage us to reach out and touch our neighbor. Perhaps this is the greatest challenge and opportu-

Many believe that Hip-Hop, unlike the church, understands who they are and directly ministers to their pain and anger.

nity for the church – to preserve what's most radical and sacred of all, love for self, God, and neighbor. This is particularly important as it relates to helping youth encounter intimacy with Christ regardless of whether or not it is popular among their peers.

God's Word is more accessible today than any period in history. Many will read the Bible (hard copy) less, but they may come across Scripture throughout the day via Facebook statuses and tweets. This challenges our traditional conceptions of worship, but we must broaden our notions of holiness to make room for an emerging generation that may not find itself adequately represented in the images and ideas we have held for centuries. Ministers have a responsibility to learn the communication tools of young people while teaching them to be critical of cultural trends and maintain a reverence for sacred traditions.

Exponential Ministry

All faith-based institutions, including seminaries, must reconcile their theological commitments with the pace of technology and culture. As a first-year student at YDS, I took a memorable course entitled "Intercultural Pastoral Care." That was only five years ago, yet that arena of theology seems obsolete to me now that our cultural boundaries have been exponentially stretched via online communities. This is not to suggest that we are living in a "post-racial" era devoid of racism and cultural biases, but living in this information age imposes on us a greater responsibility to overcome our own ignorance, which is no longer as excusable as it was in times past.

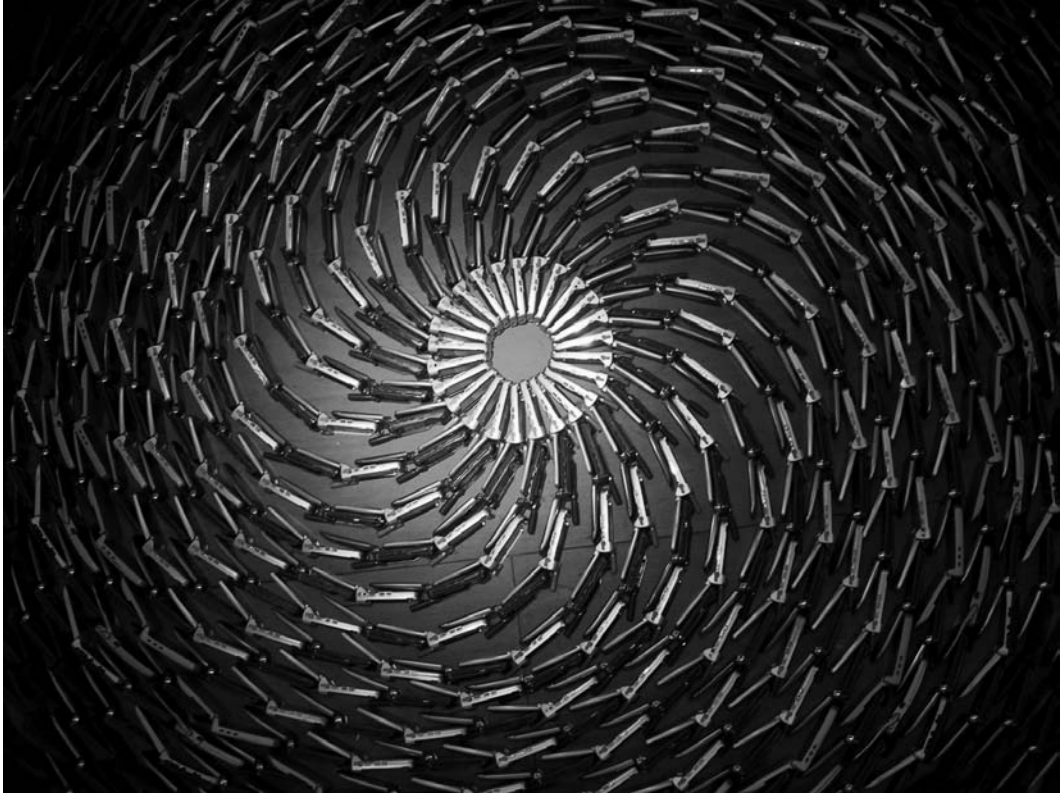
As many writers, artists, and entrepreneurs have humbly learned in the last decade, the web is The Great Equalizer. This year, unlike any other in human history, has taught us that social media might help democracy succeed where it previously failed. Many now credit social media for being the catalyst and medium for their countries' recent revolutions. Ironically, 2011 not only marked the death of poet and musician Gil Scott-Heron, who gave the world a timeless freedom-fighter anthem in *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, but it also marked the year that countless journalists asked if the revolution would be tweeted.

All this leads to the question: what kind of rebirth can Christianity undergo in the age of social media? How can a "theology of media" propel the church into the twenty-first century? Who will be the authors of that theology and what are the stories they are waiting to tell?

I am personally committed to exploring how Christianity can be translated for a generation in need of a faith that speaks to the full complexity of who they are. Though Urban Cusp does not claim to be a solution in itself, it is one piece of a larger puzzle, as well as the genesis of many things to come.

If movements and new media like ours can be a source of knowledge exchange that challenges assumptions and stereotypes, then we will have done a good work. If we can be a catalyst for dialogue to improve communities and offer portals of inspiration that revolutionize contemporary popular culture, then we will have served a useful purpose. And if an emerging online community like ours somehow manages to spill a new form of Christianity out into the streets and makes Christ a concrete reality for a generation that may not otherwise know him, then we will have undoubtedly succeeded in birthing a cultural revolution. In any case, that is our dream. Urban Cusp, meanwhile, remains live.

Rahiel Tesfamariam '09 M.Div. is a writer, social activist, cultural critic, and public theologian. At YDS, she was the first William Sloane Coffin Jr. Scholar. This year, she started UrbanCusp.com, which is described as a "cutting-edge life. style magazine highlighting progressive urban culture, faith, social change, and global awareness." The site profiles inspirational visionaries and artists, offers opinion pieces from diverse perspectives, and serves as an online community for like-minded people.



Redeeming New Media, Reforming Christian Community

By J. Martin Bailey

Several years ago, a long-time friend, a widower, invited me to lunch to introduce me to a woman he had recently met online. They seemed very happy and I told them so. But secretly I hoped I had masked my surprise and shock that they had searched for each other on a singles website. Frankly I was troubled by the almost mechanical, data-driven matching system they described. Now, years later, I can see how “perfect” they were for each other and how well the network had met their needs. Ultimately, the process provided sensitivity, caring, and a confidentiality that is almost pastoral.

I've thought a lot about my friends' experience, wondering whether the vast emerging world of new media could be lifted above the impersonality and isolation of a computer screen and keyboard. Can we somehow overcome the temptations and threats inherent in such media? Can digital networks be shaped to offer a virtual community that is genuine and humane?

I am convinced that the Christian community has a unique role to play as we engage the revolutionary changes in how we communicate. The church needs to be engaged, because I believe we are on the cusp of a sweeping new reformation in the life of the church, brought about in part by new media.

Down through history, Christians have been champions and critics of nearly all forms of communication. Jesus, of course, spoke persuasively to large crowds. Paul mastered the art of letter-writing; all around the Mediterranean his epistles were copied, circulated, and copied again.

Sensing the power of the printing press, Johannes Gutenberg used his movable type to “publish” the Bible, eventually taking it off the lectern and out of the library and placing it into people's hands. The Protestant Reformation spread across Europe because Martin Luther and other reformers used tracts and broadsides to share their convic-

tions. In the New World, John Eliot developed a “grammar of the Indian language” so the native peoples of Massachusetts might learn to read the Christian Scriptures. Courageous abolitionists used their printing presses to help break the bonds of slavery.

With the rise of radio and television in the twentieth century, Christians were never shy to adopt them. In recent decades, pioneering communica-

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tions specialists such as Everett C. Parker of the United Church of Christ and William Fore of the National Council of Churches have sought to hold the electronic media accountable to the human needs of citizens.

Something New Under the Sun

Today a reference to Facebook is only the most visible part of an enormous movement that is sweeping the planet. Prompted by our faith, we must join the conversation about making constructive use of the new forms of digital media. We need to find

new ways to utilize, guide, critique, and in a sense redeem these media.

The scope and pace of change in the media world – historic new levels of connectivity made possible by technology and globalization – are triggering vast political and social consequences, as *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman describes. Mindful of the ways social media were used by protesters in the Arab Spring, Friedman cites Skype, Facebook, Google, LinkedIn, and Twitter for moving the world “from connected to hyper-connected.” This revolution, he says, “is ‘super-empowering’ individuals, enabling them to challenge hierarchies and traditional authority figures – from business to science to government.”

These convulsions are touching the religious world, its denominational officials and structures. The turbulence marking American Christian denominationalism and worship habits for the last fifty years – erosions of authority, tradition, membership, and loyalties – is being accelerated now by the

The turbulence marking American Christian denominationalism and worship habits – erosions of authority, tradition, membership, and loyalties – are being accelerated by the media revolution.

media revolution.

The New Informality

A new form of “connectionalism” is emerging, spawned by the digital networking habits of millions of believers, which threatens old-form hierarchies and church identities. Within denominational milieus, individuals and groups share ideas and information through these media, a challenge to traditional gatekeepers and loyalties. Lay-driven activities and programs are being developed and promoted informally. One result is that most Western religious bodies are becoming more congregational (or local) in style and attitude, if not in polity. Another effect: formerly isolated or independent congregations are increasingly ecumenical and global in their outlook as the internet brings the larger world closer.

One telling, unstoppable trend of this democratization: the great leveling spirit of electronic media encourages (even imposes) a communication style of informality and egalitarianism, which is influencing social norms and congregational life. The new etiquette promotes the use of first names – gone are the days of the formal “salutation” in busi-

ness correspondence “Dear Sir or Madam,” and the “complimentary close” assuring the recipient that the writer is “sincerely, or cordially yours.” The negligible cost of emails and the possibility of near-instant exchanges lead to brief, sometimes curt or even tart responses.

In church life, these trends bear the marks of a new reformation, which is poised to redefine religious identity and connections, leaving behind many of the bureaucratic and theological patterns of the last half century. Few theological voices have yet emerged to define and shape these changes in religious attitudes and structures.

More than a decade ago, when this reformation was in its infancy, I tried an experiment. I invited lay leaders, youth, and clergy from various denominations to grapple online with the issues presented at the New York-based National Council of Churches’ general board. I made position papers available online and summarized the debates during one board meeting. I encouraged individuals to email their comments to members of their church’s delegation as the meeting progressed. That jarring arrangement – the prospect of instantaneous real-time reactions from anonymous rank-and-file members – inevitably alarmed some church leaders. It seemed to change the rules of the game, even the traditional nature of news and information. Today we call it transparency.

By now, in the internet age, denominations seek to make their websites more interactive so viewers contribute their own ideas, blogs, or comments. Some parish ministers now report that their preferred means of communication during the week is the congregation’s Facebook page. We’re in the midst of a rampaging torrent of change.

Body of Christ Reimagined

Thoughtful Christians try to make sense of these media transformations by being mindful of their theological vantage point, experience, and ethical expectations. I personally begin with the assumption that the Pauline image of the body of Christ is an apt metaphor for our cyber-friendships and associations. As “one body with many members,” social networks can help us “rejoice and suffer with each other” across vast distances quickly and often.

In my own experience, the etymology that links the words communion, communication, and community takes on many dramatic and poignant illustrations because of the internet. My wife and I lived in the Middle East for nearly four years after we retired; now, more than a decade later, we nurture our contacts and ecumenical ties online, with

friends and leaders of a wide variety of Christian communities across that volatile region. We do that, and keep informed about the dramatic changes in the Middle East, with relative ease and at virtually no expense.

Here are some other theological convictions that help me frame and grasp the new media landscape:

• **Contemporary communication technologies are a gift of God for the people of God.** I accept that the origins of these powerful media spring from the creative energy of an omnipotent and communicating God. I recall the history of faith as a history of communication. Beginning with the oral tradition, including the teaching ministry of Jesus, and continuing through the formation of the Biblical canon to modern telecommunications, human beings have recorded and shared their faith. We can

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be grateful for the creativity and opportunities that the media present.

• **Contemporary media are not inherently evil or sinful.** As the media dramatically reshape society, Christians need to be cautious and wary of the negative side. Putting energy and creativity into positive expressions will help build a more humane media environment. We can join with other Christians in evaluating our media experiences. We can identify our expectations and anxieties about media, based on our commitments to human rights, justice (including the availability of media to all parts of our society), and the protection of vulnerable persons from exploitation (children, youth, women, persons with special needs, minority groups). We can express our concerns and objections to media providers and responsible public officials, advocating for media improvements and greater accessibility.

• **For Christians, Jesus is both the model of communication and the subject of communication.** I believe persons are most authentic in all their social interactions when they are honest about themselves. We should reflect the spirit of our faith in our internet postings, including a commitment to justice, peace, honesty, and transparency, and with a gracious style. As disciples, we need to be ourselves – our whole selves – when we write or talk about our interests.

• **The Holy Spirit works among us, constantly communicating God's love and often surprising us as all things are made new, including the church, the community, the media.** As the World Association of Christian Communication once pointed out, "it is the Spirit that can change the Babel of confusion into the Pentecost of genuine understanding." Constant development in technologies is now the air we breathe. It's also the environment in which the church is called to communicate the gospel. We must work hard to discern the signs of the times – keeping a certain wariness but also welcoming and allowing room for the Holy Spirit to do its work. I believe "God works in all things for good." To me this means living as modern men and women, witnessing to our faith in the midst of a world where revelation continues to take place through science, invention, social experimentation, moral argument – all in constant conversation with our commitment to gospel values.

It can be easy to regard new media with bewilderment, even dread. They offer so many possibilities – and also present invasive challenges to our present religious lifestyle, threatening, for example, the existence of uninterrupted time for thought and meditation.

But the new media will not disappear; they are omnipresent. We must regard them as potentially helpful. Rather than reject or ignore them, we should focus on the ways we can use them to reflect and express our values and help us provide models of grace, empathy, and patient caring. As we bring purpose to these interesting times, may we participate in the redemption of new media and the reformation of the Christian community.

The Rev. J. Martin Bailey, a retired UCC minister, served as editor of UCC and Presbyterian magazines and was communication director for the National Council of Churches. For several years after their retirements, he and his wife, Betty Jane, worked with the Middle East Council of Churches, based in Jerusalem.

By Soren Gordhamer

How do we live mindfully, purposefully, and wisely in a 2.0 age? No matter how great the technology becomes, no matter how many people we can communicate with around the globe, no matter how many followers we have on Twitter or friends on Facebook, what truly matters most is the quality of attention and the quality of presence we practice when we're communicating.

Our culture is becoming increasingly connected, yet there's a danger we are becoming overwhelmed, distracted, rushed, and hurried. In such a world, children and young people will typically get less attention from their parents, less attention from adults, because adults are constantly distracted.

This will only increase as we move further and further into this technological age if we don't seek inner qualities we know are important for any culture to survive – compassion, awareness, wisdom. Our external technologies will certainly continue to advance. What's uncertain is whether our inner technologies of consciousness will grow along with them. We need to make sure we connect to that place inside us of ease and focus, the creative mind.

For years, the big question of our era was: *How do I live constantly connected?* But I believe we are moving through that experience now and trying to ask a new question: *What does it mean to incorporate a sense of presence, awareness, and wisdom within this new media era of connectedness that engages us all?*

This search for balance between the external and the internal is where the conversation is moving. It's a conversation the culture needs to have. A great myth is technology can make us happy, and the newest technology will make us happier. But basic happiness comes from inner exploration, inner development. If we begin to forget that – forget the importance of solitude, contemplation, stillness – then we'll live increasingly “disconnectedly connected,” where we are connected to technology but totally disconnected from our own heart. The person who is connected all the time through technology, but has no consciousness, no love and no creativity, will miss the potential and wisdom of life.

To me, living wisely and mindfully involves a kind of remembering – remembering who we really are, remembering the value of each moment as we live it, tapping into an intelligence that is available every moment and which is inherent in every individual on the planet.

There are ways of getting access to this. Think of the first hour you are awake in the morning and the last hour before sleep. How should we spend those two hours? First thing in the morning, and last thing at night, are we jumping online and filling our minds with more and more information, or is there a more contemplative way to begin and end the day?

At night, for instance, there are ways to unplug before we turn to sleep. Listening to music, or prayer, or reading a book that has meaning can help the mind and body make the transition. Consider turning off the lights and then lighting a candle. Darkness comes gradually each night with the setting sun. Perhaps it ought to come gradually for our bodies and minds too.

We may trust that such practices will have impact on our days at work, making us more productive, so that our focus is better, our emails a little clearer. The goal is to bring a new sense of presence into our interactions. A clear, focused mind is essential to any creative endeavor.

There are signs that business cultures and individuals are moving in this direction of consciousness. Many are applying techniques and tools – breathing exercises, for instance – that can help people become aware of body sensation and the state of their own thoughts. People are yearning for something that works.

For most of us, there is little question that we will live modern – 2.0 – lives. We will use cell phones, email, and engage on social networks. The real question is, What kind of 2.0 life will we live – Stress 2.0 or Wisdom 2.0? Will we let our devices rule us, habitually answering our cell phone any time it rings, or will we live wisely, focusing on the quality of attention we bring to each moment?

It's not that we need to *create* consciousness but that we *remember* and come back to that place of awareness – and live from that place in the world, trusting that things will unfold the right way as we bring the quality of attention to our days, our work, ourselves.

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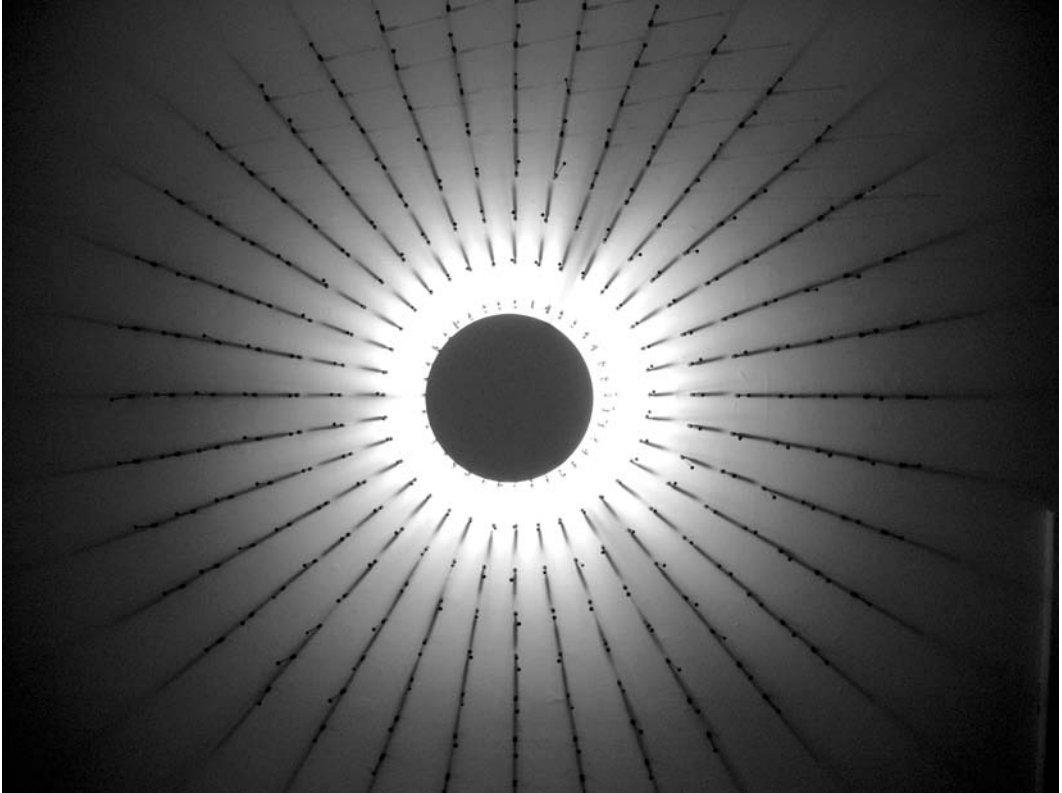
Get all of it. Set up the shots
at every angle; run them online
24-7. Get beautiful stuff (like
scenery and greenery and style)
and get the ugliness (like cruelty
and quackery and rue). There's nothing
unastonishing – but get that, too. We have

to save it all, now that we can, and while.
Do close-ups with electron microscopes
and vaster pans with planetcams.
It may be getting close
to our last chance –
how many

millipedes or elephants are left?
How many minutes for mind-blinded men?
Use every lens you can – get Dubliners
in fisticuffs, the last Beijinger with
an abacus, the boy in Addis Ababa who feeds
the starving dog. And don't forget the cows

in neck-irons, when barns begin
to burn. The rollickers at clubs,
the frolickers at forage – take it all,
the space you need: it's curved. Let
mileage be footage, let year be light. Get
goggles for the hermitage, and shades for whorage.
Don't be boggled by totality: we're here to save the world
without exception. It will serve

as its own storage.



Where Two or More are Gathered: Social Media and Ministry

By Keith Anderson

The explosion of social media presents great opportunities and raises significant, unavoidable questions for ministry practitioners.

Facebook and other social networking platforms make it easier to connect with many people at once, though debate continues about whether and how to enforce boundaries around relationships and time spent. These media greatly increase the avenues for communication, though questions persist about the content of that communication and its ability to engender faith. A vast horizon of potential new relationships unfolds; still, doubts remain about their quality and durability.

These worries have led some to wonder whether ministers should engage in social media at all. However, as I speak with colleagues, I notice that much

Approximately 70 percent of our congregation is on Facebook. Every day I see new connections being made and parishioners interacting with one another.

of the resistance to social media is softening. Over the last year, the sentiment has shifted from asking, “Should we do this?” to saying, “We know we need to do this – our parishioners are telling us we need to do this – but we’re not sure how.”

As the pastor of a congregation that has intentionally integrated social media into its ministry, I have become convinced that social media is an indispensable tool for communicating faith, building relationships, and extending our mission.

I first came to social media in 2006 when I began posting the manuscript of my weekly sermons on a blog. I mostly did it for my own use, an easy way to categorize, archive, share, and search my sermons.

Two years later, just as Facebook was becoming popular, our church council established four strategic goals for our congregation. One goal was to

improve our church communications. At that point we only had a basic website and relied on printed newsletters. A small group of us led this effort. I built our new church website and we pushed into social media, creating a Facebook page, a Twitter feed, and used iTunes, YouTube, Constant Contact emails, and multiple blogs to share not only sermons but podcasts, adult education programs, and the latest news from our congregation.

Still Figuring It Out

I would describe our social media experience as one of *thoughtful experimentation*. Some of our brightest ideas, like a blog with resources on nurturing spirituality, have pattered out, while some things we started on a whim, like our 2 Minute Bible Study on YouTube, have surprised us with how strongly they resonated. All this serves to remind us that social media is still in its infancy. So is its application to ministry. Everyone is still figuring out how this all works. So far, though, it is providing a robust platform to connect members, attract newcomers to our congregation, and share God’s grace.

Soon I found a role for it in my pastoral ministry as well. At heart, social networking is about cultivating a meaningful personal presence, nurturing relationships, and sharing our stories. In this way, ministry in social media does not represent a break with traditional ministry practices. It extends them.

Though these forms of communication are still new to us, they will one day – in fact, very soon – be a way everyone communicates. When I talk to pastors who have started congregations in the last five years, many tell me that they wouldn’t even know where to mail a letter to their members. They don’t have street addresses on file. If they want to contact them, they go to their Facebook profile or text them. This is not a matter of pastoral or congregational

neglect. Rather, this is how their parishioners prefer it. Their parishioners wouldn't want or expect a letter – perhaps because of environmental concern, but also because digital media is now their primary form of communication.

What I have learned is this: digital social media are *real places* where people gather – like a town square or fellowship hall – and we must be present in these places just as we would be present in any of these other physical locales. If a group of my members and friends are gathering to share their lives, wouldn't I want to be there? That's what is happening in these online spaces – and I absolutely want to be there. As a friend recently said, "If we are not there, then we are ceding the space to someone else." I am active on Facebook and Twitter for the same reason that I wear my pastoral collar around town: because my pastoral presence can remind others of and point to God's own presence.

Over these last five years, participation in social media communities has become deeply integrated into my daily ministry.

An Inbox of Struggles and Joys

Simply by having a Facebook profile, I function as a conduit for our members to connect with one other. Approximately 70 percent of our congregation is on Facebook. Every day I see new connections being made and parishioners interacting with one another. Social media ministry is not just about my activity, content, or pastoral relationships. People are also becoming much more aware of one another's lives, their joys and struggles, and they freely offer congratulations and words of comfort. In the words of Paul, they "rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn" (Romans 12:15). When we gather in person on Sunday, then, we have already been in conversation with one another.

Social media is also raising the public profile of our congregation. Through Twitter, I have become more involved and recognized in my local community, staying in contact with leaders from our Library, Boys and Girls Club, and YMCA, as well as community organizers, activists, and neighbors. Because of my activity in social media, I was invited to serve on a panel with the editor of our local digital news outlet and a representative from the largest business in our city to talk about how we use new media. At a time when many churches are receding into the background of everyday life, my participation on the panel made it clear that the church continues to have a strong community role.

The way people enter our congregations has dramatically changed because of the new media.

People used to visit our congregation on Sundays to see what we were about, meet the pastor, receive a visitor packet, and decide whether to come back. It's different now. Through our website and social media presence, people are able to research us, learn our story – not just our history but our rhythm of life, what we hold as important in our life together. They come on Sunday to confirm what they've already seen online. We welcome people with the assumption that they already know a good deal about us. This allows us to forego the all-about-us data dump and focus more on the newcomers themselves.

It is a paradox of social media that people will share very intimate things in such a public forum. Break-ups, divorces, birth and death announcements, health news, and personal location are all shared online. As one of my parishioners recently posted, "For anyone that can't make Mom's services tomorrow. We will be having another memorial service in Woburn this coming Saturday. Sorry, but Facebook is the fastest way to get the word out there."

Social media's very public nature can serve as a good leading indicator when something is amiss with someone. If we can login, pay attention, and listen with heart and mind as people share their

People used to visit our congregation on Sundays to see what we were about. It's different now. They come on Sunday to confirm what they've already seen about us online.

lives, we will become aware of things we would not know otherwise. Depending on the need, we can comment, direct message, email, call, or visit in person. Facebook also makes it easy to mark milestones like birthdays and anniversaries, changes in relationship status, new jobs, moving. People deeply appreciate these digital expressions of pastoral attentiveness and concern.

A New Homiletic

Sermons are inspired by all sorts of things, but, in my own experience, the most successful sermons are those inspired by conversation. Whereas in the past I might only have had a few conversations during the week that would influence my sermon, I'm now connected to hundreds of conversations through social media. And these conversations occur not just with my parishioners, but also with colleagues and friends around the world – people

who share my faith and those who don't. At times, I initiate the conversation by inviting others to post an idea, or I'll share an image that's inspired me, or a sentence I've written for an upcoming sermon. I might post the key Bible verse of the lectionary week or pose a question. Thus, when I preach on Sunday, the sermon is a collaboration of the entire community, not just my own.

On Monday mornings I post my sermons on our blog and the audio podcast on iTunes. In this way, the sermon and the conversation that gave it birth can continue. I get much more feedback on my sermons through comments on my blog, Facebook, and Twitter than I do after church on Sunday morning. Gauging the feedback – how much and from whom – gives me a vivid new way to evaluate my sermons.

Online Ministerium

We are also finding ways to apply new media to traditional study. God knows I've tried to get people interested in studying the Bible, and God knows

Digital social media are *real* places where people gather, and we must be present in these places just as we would be present in any of these other physical locales.

it's not easy. Earlier this year we launched a new kind of Bible Study – on YouTube. I began it on a whim, but it has become our most popular social media content: a short, sometimes funny, hopefully poignant, personal, bite-sized Biblical message. In the 2 Minute Bible Study series, I give a very brief reflection on the upcoming lectionary readings. The videos appear on our church's YouTube channel and website, and we share them on Facebook and Twitter.

Placing all this content on these social media platforms allows our members to easily engage and use it within their own social network. They can share a sermon, 2 Minute Bible Study, or blog post, or RSVP to events, or post pictures, and leave comments. When all these activities are seen by their family, friends, and colleagues, God's grace is shared and our story is extended.

Finally, one of the great gifts of social media to pastors is the ability to stay connected to colleagues across the country and around the world. The ease of keeping up with seminary classmates, following and engaging with church leaders, and getting ideas from people doing excellent ministry all makes

digital media what one friend has called an "online ministerium."

For many pastors, new media represent just "one more thing" to squeeze onto an already busy schedule. I also wonder about the amount of time I spend on it. However, when a homebound member talks about drawing strength from reading my sermon blog each week or a newcomer talks about seeing the 2 Minute Bible Study and that's why she decided to visit our church, it confirms to me that this is authentic ministry and a good use of my time.

This profile of our digital ministry is very much a snapshot in time. Technologies will evolve and our practice will evolve with it. Strategies and content that work today will eventually run their course, and new ones will emerge.

What will not change, however, is the need for our churches and ministries always to respond to the always-urgent question of how we relate to one another. Whatever media that involves, we have to become fluent in its use. Whatever form social media take in the future, they have already profoundly altered how we connect, where we gather, and how we share our lives – all matters of ministry and faith.

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Reginald Bachus '09 M.Div works along two contemporary horizons, addressing two contemporary challenges – faith and technology. He is pastor of the Mt. Ollie Baptist Church in Brooklyn, NY, and is also a partner in www.stayingprayedup.com, a new business that helps religious organizations upload videos and audio files online to extend their ministries worldwide. See more at ReggieBachus.com.

REFLECTIONS: How did you decide on this combination of church and business ministry?

BACHUS: I see society rapidly changing. Until recently, many churches treated websites only as a means to have an online presence, not an online ministry. But there's been a recent shift. Churches are providing more online spiritual resources and supports. This change is reflected in the marketing world, which is far more interactive through Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. It's a new attitude about constituents. So we help churches broadcast weekly services and Bible studies, provide on-demand videos, and social media integration. One goal is to reconnect youth and young adults to church by using social media. If you don't have a megachurch or can't afford a TV ministry, then this gives you a low-cost option. All you need is a camera, a computer, and internet access to launch a broadcast. In September we launched at the National Baptist Convention's annual meeting; forty-five churches signed up.

REFLECTIONS: Are some ministers intimidated by this?

BACHUS: When I talk to older pastors, they worry that people will stay home – stream the broadcast but never join church. There are other ways to interact with members and others online besides broadcasting the sermon, but no online experience will ever take the place of being physically present. Nevertheless, we're living now in an entirely different world. The U.S. Postal Service has drastically curtailed services because of more efficient online options. Today newspapers are delivered to email inboxes and apps instead of front doors. The culture's mediums for receiving information are changing; we can choose to be behind the curve or ahead of it.

REFLECTIONS: You are heavily involved in online services at your church.

BACHUS: It allows me to bring a message that resonates with people who won't normally go to church or who have become discontent with church. They are hungry spiritually. I get a lot of inbox messages, people saying they want to grow spiritually but simply don't know how or where to start. The state of the world – the economic turmoil, political upheav-

al, natural disasters – is shaking people to the core. They're telling me they put their hopes in material things and people who have let them down. They want to be fed with something more. So our online teachings, the short video messages I make, allow me to be present with people, teaching, and preaching. I consider it the modern-day epistle. In Corinth, Paul struggled to get his message communicated and the response he desired when he wasn't present, because we are a visual people.

REFLECTIONS: Once you reach people online, how do you nurture their faith?

BACHUS: That's the issue – follow-up. How to follow up with people who see the broadcasts and are touched by them? One local way is to create faith partnerships, friends who help each other grow spiritually, hold each other accountable and join our cyber church. Another vision is to create city-to-city crusades, support groups, or Bible studies where there are high concentrations of cyber members. If thirty people in one town are commenting on broadcasts or sermons on Facebook, it could be possible to set up live video feeds with them and lead a Bible lesson. Another possibility is online resources for personal growth, the model of Jonathan Edwards' daily resolutions – encouraging people to start a spiritual journal and monitor their prayer life on an online platform.

REFLECTIONS: Do you see God behind the media revolution?

BACHUS: I look at it as an extension of creation and the fall of humankind where now it's about choice. In Genesis 1:31 God said creation was "very good," but we are faced with the choice of using technology for good to advance the Gospel, or evil purposes that pervert its purity. The Gutenberg press and its contributions to the Reformation provide a good case study. Print gave people the keys to study and express their own faith and advance the Gospel. That's what new media is offering too – a way to express, shape, and deepen people's faith.

REFLECTIONS: Does the future look like a radical place?

BACHUS: Some people in the tech world think the church is headed toward hologram technology and the para-church model, making it possible for people to gather at church and see an image of the pastor there with them. I think that flirts with the danger line, because a key element of pastoring is personal presence.

Already Not Yet: Hopes and Fears for 2021

By Rachel Hatch

Already not yet. This paradoxical phrase captured my theological imagination in divinity school. The notion was first applied to kingdom theology: God's kingdom is already here on earth and yet is not fully revealed. The phrase is most meaningful to me in the practice of prophetic preaching: when you share a challenging, justice-seeking word from the pulpit, God's justice is already here, but also is not yet fully revealed and must be sought after by God's people. Great preaching invites people to live in the liminal space of the already not yet.

I believe that we are in an *already not yet* space right now with regard to new media and the churches. Right now, in 2011, there are already technologists who are thinking about the ethical and theological questions of technology. There are already church people who are doing the same. Churches are experimenting with new media in practical ways, lay

Churches, like many businesses today, are still in the old mode of investing in heavy infrastructure rather than lightweight (low-cost, low-time investment) innovation.

people innovating new theologies through their use of technology. But we are not there yet. I hope that in this liminal space we will co-create the future we want to see. In the next decade, we will surely be grappling with the next evolutionary wave around technology and faith, so the time to start addressing 2021 dilemmas is now.

Forging New Literacies

As a theologian and as a futurist, I spend a lot of time thinking about hopes and fears, and asking other people about theirs. I value pondering the paradoxes of this new media age, its growing pains,

and its evolving relationship to churches.

At the Institute for the Future, we are focused on immersing in plausible, provocative futures. Peering into those distant horizons, one can see congregations positioning themselves in the new media world in creative and maladaptive ways. These are uncharted waters each church must navigate.

Until recently, churches thought they've had plenty of reasons to dismiss new media or postpone entry into it. Because the technology progresses in rapid cycles, well-hyped breakthroughs and devices become passé, so why bother? And engaging with it takes some work. It requires building new literacies and translating your message carefully in order to maintain depth while also following principles of effective broadcasting. It requires undergoing endless migrations as new platforms emerge and old ones become obsolete. It's enough to make some give up on keeping up altogether.

But churches, like many businesses today, are still in the old mode of investing in heavy infrastructure rather than lightweight (low-cost, low-time investment) innovation. Those who figure out how to turn the corner and embrace lightweight experimentation benefit from rapid cycles of change rather than fight against them.

Many local churches face what could fairly be called "the website-refresh hurdle" that keeps them from converting their current website (which might

be ten years old by now) into something less static and clunky. To most entrepreneurs and business people, this will sound like a trivial challenge: in their world, refreshing the websites happens continuously.

Why should this be so hard for so many congregations? There are various reasons. One, they

By 2021, the experience of information overload that many of us find overwhelming today will seem like the good old days.

are volunteer organizations, often with scarce resources, and the stakes of the website-refresh don't seem high when compared with, say, preparing for the funeral of a beloved parishioner.

Also, website-refreshes can be regarded as an opportunity to renew commitments to the congregation's mission, or even reinvent them, and that can be intimidating: "we need to decide what we really want to say before we broadcast it to the world, don't we?" This kind of soul-searching, involving communal consensus, understandably isn't entered into lightly.

All this points to an unnecessarily passive approach to the new media revolution. Today, we in the churches by and large wait until we receive the technology designed for us before grappling with the issues that it raises. By then it is too late – theologies, ethics, and entire worldviews have been embedded by design.

Perhaps this consumeristic stance merely reflects the broader American culture. But just as makers ("lead adopters" such as tinkers, crafters, and hackers) are asserting their desire to become more involved in the production process of goods and services, churches could make moves that place themselves further and further upstream in crafting the embedded ethics of technology.

In Silicon Valley, the experience of lead adopters proves that their upstream tinkering can have great impact on how specific technologies "show up" when they reach mainstream adoption.

Pockets of early adopters exist across the churches too. Two groups come to mind that are far ahead of the pack. The first are those who emphasize the potential of new media as a tool for evangelism.¹ Broadly speaking, this community of people sees new media as the latest in a new line of communication tools that function as conduits: gifts from God for use in broadcasting and amplifying the Christian message. This approach is consistent with

their history. Generations ago, denizens of Christian radio and TV embraced the latest technology breakthroughs with similar gusto.

A second group of early adopters finds its home in the Emerging Church movement, where the internet is central to its work and identity. They seek communal worship experiences and theological discussions that are new-media-rich. They value the ethos of network connectedness that is a fundamental worldview for many digital natives and their immediate predecessors.

Those in mainline churches will one day experience the mainstreaming of new media that has been shaped by these early adopters; they could learn so much more if they got into deeper conversation with them now.

Let's remember: in the big picture we are still in the early stages of the internet. We are still learning what this greater connectivity is all about, and how we humans will use this new tool we've innovated. We feel the growing pains. We have recently begun to acknowledge, for instance, that our interactions with computers shape us, just as we shape and program our computers – hence the growing field of human-computer interaction.

And we note the paradoxes in our relationship with new media. Take the realm of physical well-being. We now have computational devices that wirelessly connect to the internet in order to track our biometrics and nudge us toward healthier behaviors. At the same time, we are finding ourselves in more sedentary routines marked by sitting in front of a computer and engaging in repetitive movements.

Paradoxically, too, in the realm of spiritual well-being, we are now able to learn online from spiritual traditions the world over in ways that deepen our own practices and enhance our sense of community

Churches could make moves that place themselves further and further upstream in crafting the embedded ethics of technology.

and communion. Yet we also find ourselves with restless, flickering minds,² even mental anguish, all stemming from our own habitual and communal expectations that disallow "turning off," with little time to return to one's spiritual center. We need greater wisdom if we are to experience deeper spiritual well-being as we grapple with new media.

Part of my work as a futurist is a commitment to think alongside the churches in hopes of helping to shape our new media approaches as we lean into the coming years. I am invested in seeing churches

nurture resilient theological and ethical responses in the face of tremendous, rapid change.

Let's take the next ten years: a pivotal period of adjusting to new technologies but also an opportunity to have our say about how that technology should serve us. What follows is a slate of hopes and fears to contend with as we approach the year 2021.

• **Hope for 2021: That churches learn to see the people behind the technologies.**

If you asked me what's changed my perceptions about new media since I went to divinity school, I would say it's that I can see the *people* behind the technology now. You can't work in Silicon Valley and *not* feel the pulse of tech innovation among the people you see on the commuter train and in the debates you overhear around tech design. They are crafted by actual people who come from distinct points of view about the quandaries of technology.

Today, churches think they are better at transparency than they actually are.

But until I moved there, I'd never knowingly *met* someone who designed technology. I suspect the same is true for many "church people."

This lack of exposure and familiarity reminds me of how I felt when I studied church history and first got to know the personalities *behind* the great debates of theology, with all the human particularities that shaped their decisions. The Nicene Creed was shaped by the specific individuals who were invited to take part in decisions (and by the absence of those who weren't!). It was determined and received by people who were influenced by specific political, cultural, and philosophical contexts. In a similar way, the worldviews reflected in our technology come from real people, who embed these worldviews in technologies that then shape our world.

In the next decade, it is my hope that the churches will grasp this embodiment more deeply and begin to see the human face behind the technology – not just for its own sake, but because such an approach makes it harder to draw stark polarities and distort the debate when you can see the people engaged in the work.

It is my hope that churches in the next decade will more robustly engage with people who design technology. Though there are many deeply spiritual technologists, as well as tech-savvy church people, our groups customarily segregate still today. Many of us are intimidated by the very different languages that the other side speaks in its own subculture. Packet switching? Patristics? Hacking? Hermeneutics? Cloud computing? Communion? We ought to

take the risk of moving out of our element, learning how to translate our thoughts into a different language, and asking stupid questions. Venues for these encounters are rare; they need to be thoughtfully constructed to avoid the risk of talking past each other.

• **Hope for 2021: That churches will adopt more nuanced views of the internet.**

Today, some within the church overstate the internet's potential as a "great equalizing force"³ that is free from gender, class, geography, and other factors. This view, held by many technological optimists, ignores the obvious "digital divide" access issue to the internet in the first place and also seems somewhat naïve about the way the global internet functions politically and economically. It is my hope that people within the churches will nuance their views in the next decade.

The internet didn't just fall from the sky. Pivotal early decisions shaped its values and its functions, and will continue to do so. Consider the case of a core enabling technology of the internet, packet switching, which emerged as an innovation after telephone technology had relied on circuit switching. As a technological design made by real people, packet switching created a network that had no center by design, couldn't be controlled, and it had multiple paths between any two points in order to ensure the most resilient communication. This ethos of design – a dynamic, center-less network that grows from the edges – still shapes understandings of the internet today.

As this core technology first came to life, the earliest experiments formed the internet precursor, ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network) and were funded by the U.S. Department of Defense for use on special projects by the U.S. Eventually regular people came to have access to the internet as we know it today.

Though its reach is global and it remains a center-less network by technological design, in practice the internet does have a quasi-governing body that functions to help it retain interoperability, called ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers). Last year, for the first time, ICANN issued top-level domain names in non-Latin characters, which means that whole new linguistic populations who had never been able to access the internet in their native language will now be able to do so.⁴ This holds tremendous potential for learning from the wisdom traditions of many in the world who had not previously been able to penetrate the internet. The internet won't function as "the great equalizing force" unless we stay alert to make sure it does.

Why this detour into the history and spread of the internet? Because paying attention to the politics of the internet should matter to the churches. It should be a priority to any congregation committed to social justice – to “the least of these.” Developing disciplines around nuanced understandings of the internet will, I hope, provide us with a stronger framework for asking questions about the internet and new media moving forward, beyond the dichotomies of technological optimists and pessimists.

• **Hope for 2021: That the churches will engage gamers,⁵ technologists, and digital natives as conversation partners.**

In the next decade, I hope the churches will connect with broader conversation partners and reflect together. If churches are to claim a new-media role in the public sphere, then we need to engage a new demographic that includes game designers, technologists, journalists, and digital natives.

This will likely require what my IFTF colleague Bob Johnansen refers to as “failing gracefully at the edges of your competency.” But as the theological questions raised by new media gain clarity and intensity, I hope we take our participation in the conversation further upstream rather than delay our involvement in the “culturing” of technology until it is too late. This will require trusted translators within the church who are willing to stretch outside their discipline and learn the lexicon and worldview of people who shape these technologies. There are already gamers who are thinking systematically about religion; what can churches learn from them? It could be illuminating to converse with game practitioners who can think from the outside about the nuts and bolts of religions as systems and imagine new ways to piece them together.⁶

We might also be surprised that *Wired* magazine, whose readership is especially concerned with how technology interacts with business, culture, innovation, and science, just hosted a contest asking people to share their visions for the future of churches.

Learning from these and other conversation partners – even the so-called digital natives who may be our own children – will be crucial for navigating our way through the *already not yet* moments of the next decade.

• **Fear for 2021: That seminaries, under desperate pressures, will neglect teaching new media.**

By 2021, I am afraid too many seminaries will neglect to offer education in practical and theological dimensions of new media for future congregational leaders. The dilemma of narrowing down what to teach future church leaders in order to equip them for a 24/7 boundary-crossing role is not new. Cur-

riculum decision-makers have a tough and unenviable job of discerning trade-offs.

Yet mainline churches are already out of sync with today’s digital natives, and risk looking irrelevant to many in the next generations. By 2021, these digital natives will be in their mid-twenties and entering seminary themselves. They will have grown up in an education system increasingly shaped by new media and will expect the same of their divinity school education.⁷ If seminaries exclude approaches to new media, they will leave future church leaders ill-equipped for debates about theology, church governance, the meaning of authority, sacrament, personhood, and community, all of which could be altered by media habits and expectations. They will not capitalize on innovations in new media as a tool for ministry or “techno-spiritual practices”⁸ – for instance, the use of media to spread information quickly in times of crisis, or provide pastoral care and community involvement remotely to elderly or isolated parishioners. Future ministers need to be equipped to advise congregants about how to develop positive habits of “unplugging” for the sake of their well-being.

• **Fear for 2021: That churches will be damaged by the downside of trusted filters and fail to capitalize on their upside.**

By 2021, the experience of information overload that many of us find overwhelming today will seem like the good old days. Navigating signal-noise ratios will become more difficult, and in response people will utilize filters – in a sense, curating their lives to carve out a path using the information that is meaningful to them.

We already rely on filters today. Think of the news network you use to filter your horizon of information in ways that coincide with your worldview. Sometimes we are acutely aware of the biases of these filters, but we find ourselves blindly choosing them simply because they make things easier than doing the filtering ourselves through the vast galaxy of online information.

Such trusted filters will become even more important in the next decade, helping us manage a subset of information and personal connections in a personalized fashion. Increasing numbers of individuals will become media-makers, brand-builders, and reputation managers of their own personas. As a result, people will look at messaging from all quarters with a more critical eye, including messages from the churches.

A primary result of this filtering practice could be that people will filter in order to listen only very narrowly (termed “narrowcasting”); they will fine-tune a tendency to see only what they want to see in the

world. I anticipate three church-related dangers to these so-called filter bubbles.⁹

First, I am afraid that filtering will present tremendous challenges to the ecumenical movement. As filter bubbles become more pervasive, there is the danger that people will curate so extensively that they end up in the proverbial echo chamber, only listening to people with whom they agree. Second, I worry that churches' own messages will fail to make it through the filters people use. Third, I fear that churches will opt out of the complexity of this world of filters, and miss an opportunity – the chance for churches themselves to *provide* trusted filters for people who seek curators to help with sense-making. The most relevant churches in 2021 will help people to avoid “the shallows” (Nicholas Carr’s term) and instead encourage “cathedral thinking” (as suggested by Kwok Pui Lan and others). These conversations are already going on in spheres like the Wisdom 2.0 conference, but I worry that churches will feel overwhelmed and abdicate their place in such conversations.

• **Fear for 2021: That churches won’t be ready for expectations around transparency.**

I worry that we will reach a tumultuous crossroads around questions of transparency in church decision-making. In the next decade, we will move from a world of transparency as a nice-to-have option, toward transparency as an across-the-board expectation – part of the price of entry for any institution in the public eye. Today, churches think they are better at transparency than they actually are.

The turmoil we’ve already witnessed around crises such as recent church sex abuse scandals and financial disrepute will rise to truly critical levels as the world becomes increasingly transparent to us. By 2021, people will be able to trace the footprint of a piece of fruit; they will have visibility into the fruit’s country of origin, the carbon and water resources used in its production and distribution, and perhaps even the story of the orchard on which it grew. If we experience this kind of transparency in the food we buy, why wouldn’t we expect it of our churches?

No organization is perfect – whether a large corporation, a local grocery store, or a congregation. No one expects that. But they will expect transparency, and if church leaders are not ready to give it, they can expect to be regarded with ever-increasing distrust and suspicion.

Living in the Already Not Yet

Thinking about the future is no luxury. It’s a way to strategically and systematically confront longer-term changes so we can make better decisions today. Only then will we shape the future of new media and

faith that we want to co-create, instead of letting it happen to us. Waves of change are coming – some of which the churches will want to ride and others we’ll want to avoid, or get hit! But only by embracing the *already not yet* dialogue will we figure out which is which.

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Notes

- 1 This is the so-called “media as conduit” approach, and is one of many ways to engage with new media. For a full typology of these approaches, see Heidi Campbell’s *When Religion Meets New Media* (Routledge, 2010).
- 2 For an inspiring meditation on the “flickering mind” in the spiritual journey, see Denise Levertov’s poem by that title in *The Stream and the Sapphire: Selected Poems on Religious Themes* (New Directions), published in 1997, years before many of us had our first email addresses.
- 3 Walter Wilson, *The Internet Church: The Local Church Can’t Be Just Local Anymore* (Nelson, 2004), p. 25: “The internet displays no culture, no race, no gender, and no age. It provides the seeker with the ability to navigate his or her way to the foot of Calvary’s cross.”
- 4 This story is well told by Lyn Jeffery in her 2011 Ten-Year Forecast perspective for Institute for the Future (www.iff.org).
- 5 Though many games on the market are overly violent and sexual by nature, there is a whole world of gaming beyond that that can make significant social contributions. See Jane McGonigal’s *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World* (Penguin, 2011).
- 6 For example, consider the Game Developers Conference annual game design challenge, which in 2011 focused on games and religion.
- 7 The Association of Theological Schools has a Technology in Theological Education group that appears to be doing great work (its website lists a 2009 conference on “Ministerial and Spiritual Formation in Cyberspace,” but it’s not clear whether these efforts have been meaningfully embraced yet by school curricula).
- 8 This term was coined by Intel researcher and cultural anthropologist Genevieve Bell.
- 9 See Eli Pariser’s *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding From You* (Penguin, 2011).

What happens when 1,000 students in colleges across the globe go without media for twenty-four hours? The results of a recent study were similar no matter what the continent: young people felt anxiety and loneliness. Most admitted they couldn't abstain for the whole day.

These are findings of "The World Unplugged," a survey conducted late last year by the University of Maryland's International Center for Media & the Public Agenda, in partnership with the Salzburg Academy on Media & Global Change. The study involved students from twelve universities in ten countries across North America, South America, Africa, Asia, and Europe.

Findings include:

- **Students' "addiction" to media may not be clinically diagnosed, but the cravings are real.** Students repeatedly used the term "addiction" to speak about their dependence on media, the study reported. "Media is my drug; without it I was lost," said one student from the UK.
- **Being tethered to digital technology 24/7 is not just a habit but is essential to the way students manage friendships and social lives.** How they use media shapes how others think of them and how they think about themselves, the report said. Increasingly no young person who wants a social life can afford *not* to be active on Facebook, and being active on the site means living one's life on the site, the report remarked.
- **Students construct different "brand" identities for themselves by using separate communication tools to reach different types of people.** According to the report, these digital natives can rattle off a long list of communication platforms they use simultaneously but in different ways: They call their mothers, they text and Skype Chat close friends, they Facebook with their social groups, they email their professors and employers.
- **For many students, going without media ripped back the curtain on a hidden loneliness.** For some students the problem went beyond that. Some recognized that online connections had been substituting for real friendships.
- **What is "news"? To students, news means "anything that just happened" – worldwide events and friends' everyday thoughts. Also: "We no longer search for news, the news finds us," and "140 characters of news is all I need."** In every country, students felt inundated by the information and news items coming to them via

their mobile phones or the internet. As a result, most students reported that they rarely go prospecting for "hard" news at mainstream or legacy news sites, the report stated.

- **Across the world, students depend on music not only to make their commutes more tolerable, but to regulate their moods.** Over and over again students wrote that music both enhances – and shuts out – the environment in which they exist.

- **"Simplify, simplify."** Some students turned out to be Transcendentalists-in-the-making: they "were able to revert to simple pleasures" when they gave up all media for twenty-four hours. Many admitted they hadn't been fully aware of how much time they committed to social networking. Students commented on the qualitative differences in even close relationships during the period they went unplugged. "I interacted with my parents more than the usual," reported a student in Mexico. "I fully heard what they said to me without being distracted with my BlackBerry."

Other conclusions from the report:

- **Lessons for students:** "The depths of the 'addiction' that students reported prompted some to confess that they had learned that they needed to curb their media habits. Most students doubted they would have much success, but they acknowledged that their reliance on media was to some degree self-imposed *and* actually inhibited their ability to manage their lives as fully as they hoped – to make proactive rather than reactive choices about work and play.
- **For universities:** "Students need to be taught about the role of media in their lives – how to distinguish between fact and fiction, credible and non-credible sources, important and unimportant information, and how to mindfully navigate multiple platforms for multiple personal and professional purposes without becoming toxically overwhelmed and distracted."
- **A final point:** "There is a tremendous need for news curation: people and tools to make sense of the 24/7 influx of information. Contributing to the glut problem is that among the messages even from trusted reporters and sources there is always dreck in the mix: breaking news folded in together with (tweeted) asides about where to meet for lunch. How to sort through it all in a digestible way and have the way be part of a social network will be an increasingly greater challenge and opportunity."

Source: This account was adapted from www.theworldunplugged.wordpress.com

Realtechnik and the Tethered Life

By Sherry Turkle

(adapted with permission from the author's new book Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other, published this year by Basic Books)

Marcia, sixteen, a sophomore at Silver Academy, has her own problems. "Right now," she says, on-screen life "is too much to bear." She doesn't like what the internet brings out in her — certainly not her better angels.

Online, she gives herself "permission to say mean things." She says, "You don't have to say it to a person. You don't see their reaction or anything, and it's like you're talking to a computer screen so you don't see how you're hurting them. You can say whatever you want, because you're home and they can't do anything."

Drea, a classmate sitting next to her, quips, "Not if they know where you live," but Marcia doesn't want to be taken lightly. She has found herself being cruel, many times. She ends the conversation abruptly: "You don't see the impact that what you say has on anyone else."

Marcia and Drea are part of a group of Silver Academy sophomores with whom I am talking about the etiquette of online life. One says, "Facebook has taken over my life." She is unable to log

Anxiety is part of the new connectivity. Yet, it is often the missing term when we talk about the revolution in mobile communication.

off. "So," she says, "I find myself looking at random people's photos, or going to random things. Then I realize after that it was a waste of time." A second says she is afraid she will "miss something" and cannot put down her phone. Also, "it has a camera. It has the time. I can always be with my friends. Not having your phone is a high level of stress." A third sums up all she has heard: "Technology is bad because people are not as strong as its pull."

Anxiety is part of the new connectivity. Yet, it is often the missing term when we talk about the revolution in mobile communication. Our habitual narratives about technology begin with respectful disparagement of what came before and move on to idealize the new. So, for example, online reading, with its links and hypertext possibilities, often receives a heroic, triumphalist narrative, while the book is disparaged as "disconnected." That narrative goes something like this: the old reading was linear and exclusionary; the new reading is democratic as every text opens out to linked pages — chains of new ideas. But this, of course, is only one story, the one technology wants to tell.

There is another story. The book is connected to daydreams and personal associations as readers look within themselves. Online reading — at least for the high school and college students I have studied — always invites you elsewhere. And it is only sometimes interrupted by linking to reference works and associated commentaries. More often, it is broken up by messaging, shopping, Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube. This "other story" is complex and human. But it is not part of the triumphalist narrative in which every new technological affordance meets an opportunity, never a vulnerability, never an anxiety.

Resist Idealizing

There were similar idealizations when it became clear that networked computers facilitated human multitasking. Educators were quick to extol the virtues of doing many things at once: it was how the future wanted us to think. Now we know that

multitasking degrades performance on everything we try to accomplish. We will surely continue to multitask, deciding to trade optimum performance for the economies of doing many things at once. But online multitasking, like online reading, can be a useful choice without inspiring a heroic narrative.

We have to love our technology enough to describe it accurately. And we have to love ourselves enough to confront technology's true effects on us. These amended narratives are a kind of *realtechnik*. The *realtechnik* of connectivity culture is about possibilities and fulfillment, but it is also about the problems and dislocations of the tethered self. Technology helps us manage life stresses but generates anxieties of its own. The two are often closely linked.

Degrees of Separation

So, for example, mobile connections help adolescents deal with the difficulties of separation. When you leave home with a cell phone, you are not as cut off as before, and you can work through separation in smaller steps. But now you may find yourself in text contact with your parents all day. And your friends, too, are always around. You come to enjoy the feeling of never having to be alone. Feeling a bit stranded used to be considered a part of adolescence, and one that developed inner resources. Now it is something that the network makes it possible to bypass. Teenagers say that they want to keep their cell phones close, and once it is with you, you can always "find someone."

Sometimes teenagers use the network to stay in contact with the people they "know for real," but what of online friends? Who are they to you? You may never have met them, yet you walk the halls of your school preoccupied with what you will say to them. You are stalked on Facebook but cannot imagine leaving because you feel that your life is there. And you, too, have become a Facebook stalker. Facebook feels like "home," but you know that it puts you in a public square with a surveillance camera turned on. You struggle to be accepted in an online clique. But it is characterized by its cruel wit, and you need to watch what you say. These adolescent posts will remain online for a lifetime, just as those you friend on Facebook will never go away. Anxieties migrate, proliferate.

What I call real *realtechnik* suggests that we step back and reassess when we hear triumphalist or apocalyptic narratives about how to live with technology. *Realtechnik* is skeptical about linear progress. It encourages humility, a state of mind in which we are most open to facing problems and reconsidering decisions. It helps us acknowledge

costs and recognize the things we hold inviolate. I have said that this way of envisaging our lives with technology is close to the ethic of psychoanalysis. Old-fashioned perhaps, but our times have brought us back to such homilies.

Because we grew up with the net, we assume that the net is grown-up. We tend to see it as a technology in its maturity. But in fact, we are in the early days. There is time to make the corrections. It is, above all, the young who need to be convinced that when it comes to our networked life, we are still at the beginning of things.

I am cautiously optimistic. We have seen young people try to reclaim personal privacy and each other's attention. They crave things as simple as telephone calls made, as one eighteen-year-old puts it, "sitting down and giving each other full attention."

Today's young people have a special vulnerability: although always connected, they feel deprived of attention. Some, as children, were pushed on swings while their parents spoke on cell phones.

We have to love our technology enough to describe it accurately. And we have to love ourselves enough to confront technology's true effects on us.

Now, these same parents do their email at the dinner table. Some teenagers coolly compare a dedicated robot with a parent talking to them while doing email, and parents do not always come out ahead. One seventeen-year-old says, "A robot would remember everything I said. It might not understand everything, but remembering is a first step. My father, talking to me while on his BlackBerry, he doesn't know what I said, so it is not much use that if he did know, he might understand."

Forward Together

The networked culture is very young. Attendants at its birth, we threw ourselves into its adventure. This is human. But these days, our problems with the net are becoming too distracting to ignore. At the extreme, we are so enmeshed in our connection that we neglect each other. We don't need to reject or disparage technology. We need to put it in its place. The generation that has grown up with the net is in a good position to do this, but these young people need help. So as they begin to fight for their right to privacy, we must be their partners. We know how easily information can be politically abused; we have the perspective of history. We have, perhaps,

not shared enough about that history with our children. And as we ourselves, enchanted, turned away from them to lose ourselves in our email, we did not sufficiently teach the importance of empathy and attention to what is real.

To move forward together – as generations together – we are called upon to embrace the complexity of our situation. We have invented inspiring and

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enhancing technologies, and yet we have allowed them to diminish us. The prospect of loving, or being loved by, a machine changes what love can be. We know that the young are tempted. They have been brought up to be. Those who have known lifetimes of love can surely offer them more.

When we are at our best, thinking about technology brings us back to questions about what really matters. When I recently traveled to a memorial service for a close friend, the program, on heavy cream-colored card stock, listed the afternoon's speakers, told who would play the music, and displayed photographs of my friend as a young woman and in her prime. Several around me used the printed program's stiff, protective wings to hide their cell phones as they sent text messages during the service.

One of the texting mourners, a woman in her late sixties, came over to chat with me after the service. Matter-of-factly, she offered, "I couldn't stand to sit that long without getting on my phone." The point of the service was to take a moment. This woman had been schooled by a technology she'd had for less than a decade to find this close to impossible. Later, I discussed the texting with some close friends. Several shrugged. One said, "What are you going to do?" A shrug is appropriate for a stalemate.

Reclaiming Good Manners

That's not where we are. It is too early to have reached such an impasse. Rather, I believe we have reached a point of inflection, where we can see the costs and start to take action. We will begin with very simple things. Some will seem like just reclaiming good manners. Talk to colleagues down the hall, no cell phones at dinner, on the playground, in the car, or in company.

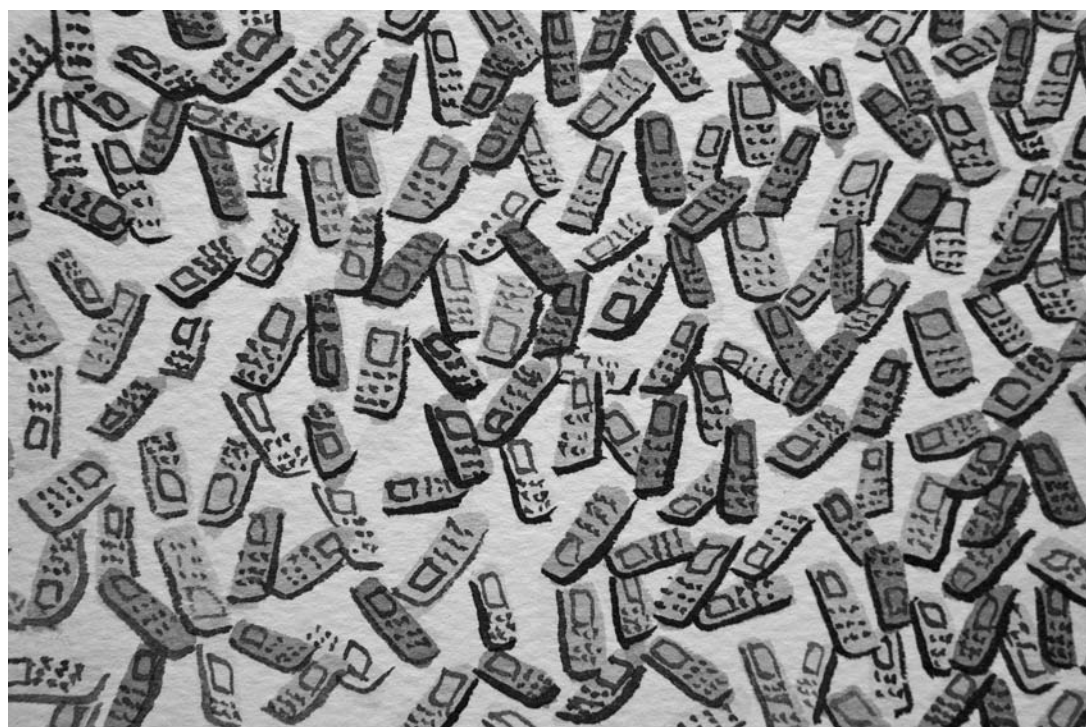
There will be more complicated things: to name only one, nascent efforts to reclaim privacy would

be supported across the generations. And compassion is due to those of us – and there are many of us – who are so dependent on our devices that we cannot sit still for a funeral service or a lecture or a play. We now know that our brains are rewired every time we use a phone to search or surf or multitask. As we try to reclaim our concentration, we are literally at war with ourselves.

Yet, no matter how difficult, it is time to look again toward the virtues of solitude, deliberateness, and living fully in the moment. We have agreed to an experiment in which we are the human subjects. Actually, we have agreed to a series of experiments: robots for children and the elderly, technologies that denigrate and deny privacy, seductive simulations that propose themselves to be places to live.

We deserve better. When we remind ourselves that it is we who decide how to keep technology busy, we shall have better.

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Plugging into a Richer Vision of God and Humanity

By Thomas H. Troeger

There are two extremes in responding to the proliferation of electronic communications that preachers need to avoid: uncritical employment of the media and denial of their relevance for preaching.

Effective homiletics has always been responsive to the culture of communications in which the word of God was preached. We have only to think of St. Augustine's defense of the use of classical rhetoric for presenting the gospel, or medieval treatises picturing gestures for preachers that were based on the visual art of cathedrals, or the integration of Biblical cadences with the patterns of call and response in African American preaching, or the development of testimony in marginalized communities to subvert the established powers, or the so-called "new homiletic" of the twentieth century that replaced the concept of a logically developed outline with a "plot" that was closer to the tension and resolution of film and dramatic television shows.

Thus for preachers to acknowledge and adapt some of the methods and qualities of our current electronic culture is not a novel turn in the history of how the gospel is declared and given witness. It is a continuation of the diverse and dynamic movements of homiletical development through the ages. However, like all developments, it is not automatically good or bad. It depends on how the media, their qualities and values, are employed.

Do they serve to enhance and deepen our attentiveness to the presence of God, to the risen Christ, to the living Spirit, to the fellow members of the community gathered about us, and to the world in which we are called to minister? Or do they become merely gimmicks, catchy but misdirecting our energy toward their showy effects without drawing us into a deeper relationship to God, into a profounder understanding of the gospel and its implications for how we live? These are valid questions for any homiletic, for any way of communicating the gospel to a particular community and culture.

Whatever methods we use to employ technology in preaching, I believe those methods need to be preceded by engaging within ourselves the multiple ways of knowing and expressing ourselves with which God has endowed us and the congregation. How can preachers, as biophysical, thinking, feeling,

Does the use of new media serve to deepen our attentiveness to the presence of God, to the risen Christ, to the living Spirit, to the community gathered about us, and to the world in which we are called to minister?

talking creatures employ the wholeness of who they are in giving witness to the wonder of God? This question arises from the first and greatest commandment – to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength – and from developments in our understanding of human ways of knowing, developments that technology reinforces through its simultaneous use of image, sound, and interactive transaction.

Distorted Divisions

Columnist and commentator David Brooks has written that one of the major ways we are changing as a culture is in how we understand human cognition. We are coming to see how our varied ways of knowing need to be integrated. Last March Brooks began one of his columns by observing that an exclusive focus on rational and analytical ways of knowing distorts who we are as human beings. It makes us what he calls "divided creatures." In a

culture of divided creatures, Brooks writes, things operate this way:

“Reason, which is trustworthy, is separate from the emotions, which are suspect. Society progresses to the extent that reason can suppress the passions. This has created a distortion in our culture. ... When we raise our kids, we focus on the traits measured by grades and SAT scores. But when it comes to the most important things, like character and how to build relationships, we often have nothing to say. ... Yet while we are trapped within this amputated view of human nature, a richer and deeper view is coming back into view. It is being brought to us by researchers across an array of diverse fields: neuroscience, psychology, sociology, behavioral economics and so on. ... I suspect their work will have a giant effect on culture. It will change how we see ourselves ...”¹

If a “richer and deeper view” of human knowing is “coming back into view,” where was it in view originally? One place it used to be in view is the best of Christian faith and theology. Listen to St. Augustine and note all the different ways of knowing that he invokes in explaining what he means by loving God: “When I love you, what do I love? ... it’s something like light, sound, smell, food, and touch that I love when I love my God – the light, voice, fragrance, embrace of my inner self, where a light shines for my soul. That’s what I love when I love my God.”²

In light of the impact of electronic media and the wholeness of human cognition that characterizes the best of Christian tradition, how can preachers recover the “richer and deeper view” of human knowing that is now emerging in our culture?

Rather than answer this question in the abstract, I will share a condensed version of a sermon that employs multiple modes of human cognition and expression. It draws upon the artwork of children that was projected via PowerPoint, but it is not a children’s sermon. Rather it is a sermon for all generations that draws upon varied ways of human knowing, including: visual and kinesthetic intelligences, gifts that children exercise in boldly imaginative ways that can reawaken these capacities in adults. Here is a condensed form of the sermon:

Whenever my wife and I take a trip abroad, we purchase travel books about where we are going. The books usually have a section called “Travel Tips.” Travel tips tell you what to bring and what to be sure to see.

What travel tips do we have for the journey of faith? What do we need to bring and what do you want to be sure to see? I asked the children of this congregation to draw pictures from a journey of faith in the Bible and to describe what they had drawn. I then used their pictures and their words to formulate a travel tip for the journey of faith that is sound wisdom no matter what our age.

George Assousa titles his picture, “Shepherd and his sheep are following a star.” You see a star up in the sky above a shepherd and a sheep. Underneath them George has written his name in big, bold letters. He is the fourth character in the story. It’s a story about the star, the shepherd, the sheep, and George. Travel Tip: On the journey of faith, you become part of the Holy story.

Katherine Anderson writes: “An angel in the sky is looking down on the baby Jesus. The wise men jumped up in the air to see him closer. The shepherd and sheep stayed close to the baby Jesus.” Travel Tip: Jump or kneel. But do whatever you have to do to see Jesus.

The four- and five-year-olds of this congregation did Jesus’ journey into the wilderness where he is tempted by the devil. Evan Baker writes of his picture: “This is Jesus saying ‘NO!’ to the bad guy.” Look at Evan’s painting. The giant word NO! leaps out at you. Travel Tip: Sometimes on the journey of faith you have to say “No!” You have to take a clear moral stance.

Nicholas Arends also does a picture of Jesus resisting temptation. He calls it “The Evil One with Jesus.” Note the blending and blurring of the water colors to create what looks like a modern abstraction with no discernible realistic form. Travel Tip: Sometimes good and evil run together. There are times on the journey of faith when it is not crystal clear where the good is and where the evil is. They blend together.

The fifth- and sixth-grade classes did the travels of Paul the Apostle. Shea Snider created a picture titled “Paul is healed.” You may recall the Biblical story in which Paul is blinded on the road to Damascus. Ananias later restores Paul’s sight by touching his eyes. Shea pictures Paul’s eyes shut with the hands of Ananias approaching the apostle’s face. Travel Tip: The touch of another person can bring healing.

These pictures have the profundity of the living Spirit of God in them. Looking and reflecting on them, we begin to understand what Isaiah the prophet meant when he said, “A little child shall lead them,” and what Jesus meant when he said that unless we become like children we cannot enter the Kingdom of God. We are thankful for every generation that joins us on the journey of faith. But at the

end of this sermon, it is only fitting to conclude by offering thanks to God for the children of this church and their wisdom that leads us to the heart of God.

I cannot produce here the dramatic affect of the children's pictures, brightly projected in large images on a screen at the front of the nave, easily viewable by all. The altar, baptismal font, pulpit, and screen were arranged in such a manner as to add to the beauty of the worship space. The sermon, however, depends on a great deal more than the skilled use of PowerPoint and its graceful placement in the space. Equally important are two other factors: first, the educators who worked with the children, creating a classroom ethos in which their artistic and imaginative efforts were encouraged, and secondly, how the sermon uses multiple ways of knowing, varied modes of human cognition.

The teachers were so creative that in the weeks following the service, they took the children's pictures and my sermon and designed a calendar for the coming year that they then had professionally published. They sold the calendar at church fairs and in the narthex of their church. Each month featured two to four of the children's pictures in the top pan-

If we eliminate the children's language or if we withhold the more adult articulation of theological insight, we end up with "cognitive imperialism," the stressing of one way of human knowing to the exclusion or diminishment of other modes of cognition.

el, along with the children's words and the travel tips I had derived from them. Underneath the pictures and words was one whole month with a box for each day in which to write appointments and reminders. The church sold hundreds of these calendars. The sermon had morphed from PowerPoint and speech into another form of expression. Although not every sermon will give birth to a project this elaborate, the story gives witness to what preaching can become in a media age that not only uses technology but also the multiple gifts of human knowing that are present in the congregation.

The beginning of the sermon, each travel tip, and the conclusion all employ a form of human reasoning more adult and more conceptual than the children's pictures and descriptions. This allows the sermon to draw forth from the art complexities that the children may not yet fully appreciate. Consider, for example, the contrast between these two

travel tips: *Sometimes you have to take a clear moral stance, and sometimes good and evil run together.* The boldness of the children's art work in dialogue with adult modes of thought results in a more holistic understanding of the ethical complexities of the journey of faith.

If we eliminate the children's visual, bodily language or if we withhold the more adult articulation of theological insight and principle, we end up with what I call "cognitive imperialism," the stressing of one way of human knowing to the exclusion or diminishment of other modes of cognition. We become what Brooks terms "divided creatures." The sermon is in part an effort to reintegrate the wholeness of human knowing in the presence of God. This is a wholeness that, as we have seen, characterizes Augustine's knowledge of God, and that flows from the first and greatest commandment.

This, then, is my critical principle for the employment of electronic media in the proclamation of the gospel: do they complement and enhance the wholeness of human knowing as preaching gives witness to the reality of God? I believe that electronic media can do this, but only if they are employed by preachers who are plugged into more than technology, preachers who are using the richness of gifts with which God has endowed them as biophysical, intellectual, spiritual creatures.

Notes

- 1 David Brooks, "The New Humanism" in *The New York Times*, March 8, 2011, p. 27-A.
- 2 Augustine, *Confessions*, (Book X: 8) as cited in Don E. Saliers, *Music and Theology* (Abingdon, 2007), p. 3.

Thomas Troeger, the J. Edward and Ruth Cox Lantz Professor of Christian Communication at Yale Divinity School, has written twenty books in the fields of preaching and worship. They include Sermon Sparks: 122 Ideas to Ignite Your Preaching (Abingdon, 2011), Wonder Reborn: Creating Sermons on Hymns, Music, and Poetry (Oxford, 2010), God, You Made All Things for Singing: Hymn Texts, Anthems, and Poems for a New Millennium (Oxford, 2009), Preaching and Worship (Chalice, 2003), and Preaching While the Church is Under Reconstruction (Abingdon, 1999). He is also a flutist and a poet whose work appears in the hymnals of most denominations. He is dually ordained as an Episcopal priest and a Presbyterian minister.



Dispatches from the Connected Life

Ready or not, people of faith are hurdling into the techno future just like everyone else. But the gospel values they are carrying with them complicate, test, and enrich the way forward. Reflections invited Yale Divinity School alumni to weigh in with their own stories and surmises about this new media moment. Here are some samples. The contributors reveal how they are navigating, resisting, embracing, or otherwise making their way through historic times.

The Word Became Facebook

by Travis Scholl '07 M.Div.

The mid-1990s: I still remember my last year of undergrad when my classmates started visiting the computer lab to use this new thing called email. And the next year, when getting on the internet meant enduring the long series of screeches and beeps that dialed up America Online.

But by the time I found my way to YDS, 1996 felt so long ago. Even though I had long before abandoned AOL, I found that my colleagues preparing for ministry were communicating more by social media than by the telegraph called email. Thus I joined, and it felt so exclusive. Like I was ahead of the curve.

Some have estimated that Facebook reached the height of its dominance in March 2010, when more people visited Facebook than Google. In its perceived ebb have come Twitter and now Google+. I spend more time now communicating once again by phone rather than computer. Except that I'm not talking. I'm checking my Twitter feed.

Awhile back, I heard someone on NPR wax eloquent about this media revolution. What was most revolutionary about it, he (or maybe it was she) said, was its astonishing velocity. She (or he) compared it to the 1970s, when the fastest technological advance in communications was moving from a dial phone to a push-button. Then the 1980s, when we went cordless. Twenty years felt like real progress. By contrast, it seems like a century ago when anyone used Netscape to browse the web. 2005 feels so long ago.

Were Luther alive, I am quite certain he would be posting on his blog, one thesis at a time.

This can pose any number of challenges for those who are in the business of "news" – or, more exact, for those of us in the business of communicating

"good news." How do we keep up with the breakneck speed of it all? Will the technology overtake the human interactions it was supposed to support? Will Facebook be the same ghost town as MySpace by 2013?

Yet the one question that is already answered is whether or not we should be there. The ubiquity of social media is simply too thorough to avoid. And too easy. Setting up a Facebook page or a Twitter account takes all of, oh I don't know, three minutes.

The question I am still trying to think through goes deeper than that. And is more confounding. How can social media, in any real way, express a witness that approximates anything close to incarnational? How are social media fundamentally changing the ways we conceive of presence in our daily interactions, when all I might ever see of you is pixelated? How do I, as a minister of good news, maintain a ministry of presence in a digital culture that strikes me as, with each passing day, more and more gnostic?

It isn't lost on me that the very Reformation of which I am an heir was mediated by a technological revolution even more profound than the one we are undergoing today. There simply would have been no Luther without Gutenberg.

And so, yes, you can find me on Facebook. Twitter too. Were Luther alive, I am quite certain he would be posting on his blog, one thesis at a time. But my hope is found in the fact that whether or not any of it is good news is best left to the One who can make any news good.

The Rev. Travis J. Scholl is managing editor of theological publications at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. He blogs at www.stltoday.com/civilreligion.

Embraced by the Virtual Body of Christ

by Deanna A. Thompson '92 M.A.R.

I have to admit that in life before cancer, I had a dim view of the internet's ability to bring people together. Living and working with others who are constantly connected to digital tools left me skeptical that any new relational depth was being plumbed through our wired lives.

Then I got sick. Really sick. In a matter of months, I went from being a healthy forty-one-year-old religion professor, wife, and mother of two to a near-invalid with a broken back, a stage IV cancer diagnosis, and a grim prognosis for the future.

To keep family and friends updated during the early days following the diagnosis, my brother created a Caring Bridge site for me, a website dedicated to connecting people who have serious illnesses with those who care about them. News of my diagnosis spread quickly. Just as quickly, loved ones signed up to receive my Caring Bridge postings. From my narration of what stage IV cancer had done to my body to the grief of having to resign from my very full and wonderful life, each of my posts was met with dozens of postings to the Caring Bridge site, as well as additional emails, cards, packages, visits, and calls from people from all corners of my life. I started to realize that through our connectedness via Caring Bridge, I was being surrounded by a cloud of witnesses greater than any I could have imagined before.

Thus it is through this cancer journey that I've been awakened to a new – indeed, almost mystical – understanding of the church universal, mediated through what I've come to call the virtual body of Christ: that is, the body of Christ incarnated in, with, and through the power of sites like Caring Bridge.

Now let me be clear: I'm not trying to sound sentimental or issue some feel-good platitude about how cancer has made me more appreciative of the value of community.

What I'm talking about is a new understanding of the church universal, a breathtakingly broad embodiment of Christ's hands and feet ministering to me and my family during our walk through the valley of the shadow of cancer.

I'm talking about a new understanding of the church universal, an embodiment of Christ's hands and feet ministering to me and my family during our walk through the valley of the shadow of cancer.

This experience of the virtual body of Christ has also gifted me with a fresh appreciation of the ecumenical character of church catholicity. Prompted by my entries on the Caring Bridge site, many of my friends from the Roman Catholic tradition – the church that holds most tightly to this notion of universality – have embodied Christ to me in stunning ways. I've had Mass dedicated to me across the globe. I've been given a medallion blessed and sent on to me by a priest friend. These traditions of dedicating, blessing, and honoring – traditions that make rare appearances in our Protestant expres-

sions of church – have made their mark on my soul.

But there's still more to say about the universal nature of the church. I've become convinced that the church universal extends even further, beyond the bounds of Christian communities to include those of other faiths and even those of no particular faith.

Take the grace bestowed upon me by one of my agnostic Jewish colleagues. Shortly after she returned from a trip to Israel, she sent me an email about how my postings on Caring Bridge had become a source of inspiration to her. Spurred on by my story, she had even gone out on a limb and attempted to pray herself.

She then told me she had visited several churches in Israel, and in each one, she sat down and prayed, asking Jesus for a favor: that he might consider healing her friend with cancer.

While such embodiments of grace flowing from the virtual body of Christ continue to take my breath away, I also must confess that Caring Bridge has not been a wholly unproblematic tool. For instance, friends and acquaintances have told me how much they love my Caring Bridge site – but of course I wish to God I didn't need one. When I could not find the words to express and post my despair over my new life, I heard from some well-meaning folks who said I needed to post because they needed to hear how I was doing. There are moments when Caring Bridge becomes for readers like any other social networking site. But for me, a vehicle for updating others on life with stage IV cancer will never be just about social networking.

Even with its potential pitfalls, my life – as it is lifted by the ongoing love, prayers, and support of so many – is living testimony that God's saving grace continues to work through our humble human creations. Thanks be to God for the internet.

Deanna Thompson is professor of religion at Hamline University in St. Paul, MN. She is the author of Crossing the Divide: Luther, Feminism and the Cross (Fortress 2004) and of a theological commentary on Deuteronomy (Westminster John Knox, forthcoming 2012). She is a Lutheran theologian who writes and speaks widely on the intersections of Lutheran and feminist thought. See also www.caringbridge.org/visit/deannathompson

Taking Up the Bible Anew

by Marek Zabriskie '89 M.Div.

With a little help from the far-flung world of social media, our church invited members of our parish this year to join me in reading the entire Bible in 2011. And what an adventure it launched.

Many people make New Year's resolutions in hopes of becoming a better person or obtaining self-improvement. The number one resolution is to lose weight. The second most common resolution is to exercise more. Within six days, most Americans have given up, because they have no one to hold them accountable.

We decided to capitalize on New Year's resolutions by inviting people to make a spiritual resolution and read the entire Bible in a year. Our plan was to provide the support of our church and create mechanisms to help hold them accountable to their resolution.

Issuing email invitations, we had hoped to have perhaps fifteen church members participate and were astonished when, in six weeks' time, we had 180 participants and 85 friends beyond the church who had joined our Bible Challenge. The number continues to grow.

I found that sending the email invitation was like fishing in a stocked pond. Many men responded, "I have always wanted to do this. Count me in." I discovered that reading the entire Bible was a lifetime goal that many wanted to accomplish, but they needed someone to challenge them to do it and help them reach their goal.

We provided free Bibles, but a turning point came early when we suggested that they could download the Bible and read it on their iPad, iPhone, Kindle, or Nook, or listen to it on CDs. The overall effect has been remarkable. We now have husbands and wives passing the Bible back and forth across the bed stand at night. A married couple who are both physicians and commute forty minutes each way to work are listening to the Bible on CD as they drive. YDS Dean Harold Attridge, a personal friend, has joined us,

reading the Bible each day on his iPhone. Lawyers and executives in our parish who commute by train into Philadelphia each day are reading the Bible on their iPads or Kindles.

We use Constant Contact email to communicate regularly with participants. Our email messages encourage them to continue their daily reading and offer ideas for comprehending the Bible and reading it devotionally.

The experience has been so well received that our church decided to create The Center for Biblical

Studies (CBS) to promote The Bible Challenge across the United States and the world.

The communications offices of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion are now promoting the CBS and The Bible Challenge to more than 5,000 Episcopal churches and Anglicans in 168 countries around the world. They along with St. Thomas Church are using Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to promote The Bible Challenge nationally and globally.

Our CBS website (www.thecenterforbiblicalstudies.org) was inexpensive to create and can have enormous impact. We stumbled onto a simple, good idea and let the Holy Spirit guide us to use technology

We stumbled onto a simple, good idea and let the Holy Spirit guide us to use technology to spread its impact from one community to churches around the world.

to spread its impact from one community to almost every country around the world. We believe The Bible Challenge can energize countless churches and transform millions of lives. We are thrilled with how technology has allowed us to further this ministry.

If your parish or you would like to join The Bible Challenge or help us launch The Center for Biblical Studies, please contact me at mzabriskie@stthomaswhitemarsh.org or 215-233-3970 ext. 120. We welcome your participation. You can also find us on Facebook or at www.stthomaswhitemarsh.org or www.TheCenterforBiblicalStudies.org

The Rev. Marek P. Zabriskie is rector of St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Fort Washington, PA.

Becoming Smart about Smartphones

by Diana Carroll '08 M.Div.

Two months ago, I took the plunge. I finally got a smartphone.

I resisted making this technological leap for a long time, despite pressure from friends, colleagues, and, of course, my phone company. My resistance partly had to do with setting good boundaries and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. After all, if I could get church email on my phone any time of day or night, would I really be able to resist checking it when I was supposed to be “off duty”?

A much deeper reason, however, was my fear of what kind of person a smartphone would make me. I had spent a good deal of time around other people who used smartphones, and it bothered me deeply the way they always seemed to be checking their phones while we were talking or sharing a meal. They would frequently interrupt our time together to read a text message that apparently could not wait. More often than not, they would then take the time to write a reply. Whole conversations were being carried on with someone who wasn't in the room, while I simply looked on and waited for the person's attention to turn back to me.

I did not want to be one of those people.

This is the great irony of our many new communications technologies: they enable us to reach many more people much more often, but they can have the effect of making us less present to the people physically within reach. What I fear most is that some of these technologies will erode our very capacity for being present at all. The ability to be fully present – to God, to others, and to ourselves – is absolutely essential to the spiritual life.

Jesus very rarely healed anyone from a distance, though he clearly had that power. His earthly ministry was almost exclusively carried out in person, face to face.

I know first-hand that electronic communication can be an amazing vehicle for building community across distances. I belong to the Young Clergy Women Project, which has members across the country and the globe. We keep in touch through a blog, e-zine, and email newsletter. Especially for those serving in rural or isolated areas, where they may be the only woman minister under forty for miles around, the support and wisdom provided by this web-based community is invaluable. Some

members even go to great lengths to meet up with each other in person.

No matter how much we become connected by email, Facebook, texting, video calls, and whatever new digital breakthroughs emerge in the coming years (or next week), none of it can replace the physical presence of another human being. This is true in the life of the church as well as everywhere else. We may post sermons online, offer pastoral care via email, and provide webcasts of worship services, but sacraments still cannot take place virtually or at a distance. By their very nature, they require contact between one human being and another – the pouring of water, the laying on of hands, the sharing of bread and wine.

According to the gospels, Jesus very rarely healed anyone from a distance, though he clearly had that power. His earthly ministry, right up to the end, was almost exclusively carried out in person, face to face.

This is the same kind of ministry that followers of Christ are still called to offer to the world. The world needs it more than ever. The church's ability to be truly present and to teach us presence will only become more valuable and relevant, not less.

Since becoming a smartphone user, I would like to be able to say I have wholly resisted the temptation to respond to messages while I am spending time with someone. That would, however, be untrue. Still, it helps immensely to approach this new technology with an awareness of the potential pitfalls involved. Slowly but steadily, I am learning to master my smartphone, email inboxes, and Facebook account, making them work for me instead of me working for them. It has become a kind of spiritual discipline – one that I will need to keep practicing, I have no doubt, for years to come.

The Rev. Diana Carroll is an Episcopal priest currently serving as Assistant to the Rector at the Church of the Holy Trinity, Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia, PA.

Narcissism and the Net

by Jerome Strong '04 M.Div.

We are allowing our lives collectively to spiral out of control by devaluing communication and solid face-to-face relationships that are the basis of civilized society and settling instead for the artificial contact we have with people online. I was nonplussed, when, during a local Usher's Anniversary service, the guest preacher stopped what he was saying in the pulpit to tend to a buzzing smartphone he had attached to his hip. That bothered me even more than when, at another service, I saw people in the choir texting – or when preaching from the pulpit myself, I saw people in the congregation texting with a huge grin on their faces because whatever it was that was distracting them from the work of the people was quite entertaining. Whatever happened to “We would see Jesus?”

There are those on our highways who have transitioned into eternity while trying to convey a text message – taking with them several other unsuspecting motorists because of the horribly fatal automobile accidents their selfish negligence has caused. You may remember the reported images of the woman

who, while walking in a mall, fell into a fountain while texting. I read recently that too much time on Facebook is the cause for extreme tardiness in the workplace. There is even a study now of people who have withdrawals – Facebook Syndrome – from not having access to social media.

These are all indicators that we have gone too far with the convenience of social networking and our trusty electronic devices. Yet I am almost sure that if the average user of social media were polled,

the consensus would be satisfaction. I say satisfaction because social media offer people the opportunity to be as narcissistic as they have ever imagined. They are able to choose the best of their photos, which paint them in a light that others are bound to envy; the trip to Prague, the opera, the theatre, the new car, roses delivered at work by the best lover ever, and the winning ticket at the races. Social media have given us the means by which we can wear our best masks while eschewing the parts of our personality that need the most work. Yet the parts of us that push us towards such media narcissism and real-person isolation are the parts that need our attention. So much social media now drown out the noise the squeaky wheels make, the wheels we used to hear.

Social media have given us the means by which we can wear our best masks while eschewing the parts of our personality that need the most work.

Jerome Strong lives in Oakland, CA, where he teaches religion and takes classes in art.

Left Behind?

by Liz Frohrip '79 Mus.M. '80 M.A.R..

The old commercial declared “let your fingers do the walking” to tout the benefits of that era’s newest communication methods. Now it’s closer to “let your fingers do the talking” as we text, tweet, and post incessantly.

At least, some of us do. Though a lot of folks have smartphones or tablet computers, many others, for either technological or financial reasons, don’t. A good 15 percent of my congregation doesn’t even use email. When a church or other organization relies heavily on electronic communication, two classes emerge: those who know what’s going on and those who are left in the dark. Those in the second class unfortunately feel no one cared to fill them in.

Worse, each group is tempted to make judgments about the other. The electronics-avoiders tut-tut over the loss of “real” communication among those who depend on digitized speech, while the thoroughly up-to-date shake their heads at the ignorance and pig-headedness of the technophobes.

A healthy, diverse community needs to include both extremes as well as those of us who stand on the middle ground, fascinated but not terribly competent.

As the body of Christ at this transitional period in history, we must use multiple modes of communication: For those who only communicate via Facebook, we have to be there. For those who communicate by text, it’s an option we need to pursue. For those who read only snail mail, we have to write, use proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling. For those who still use that thing attached to the wall by a cord, it’s a viable instrument. All this takes time and patience, but it is necessary. Our ultimate goal is not just efficient communication; it’s communicating for the purpose of doing Christ’s work.

Everybody wanted to get their hands dirty – in a real-world, tactile, pre-digital way – and do something to feed the hungry.

Last spring we planted a tomato and herb garden on the church’s property. An older member who doesn’t even email conceived the idea and tilled the ground. Two families who only commu-

nicate by iPhone and Facebook did the planting and constructed a Facebook page to journal the project and recruit interest. The harvest was a success.

Then last Friday, the same non-technical guy garnered the donation of 415 additional pounds of tomatoes from a local farm to augment our overall project: to make lots of tomato sauce for families in need. Sauce-making leadership passed to a woman who’s more comfortable with email than other modes. A suitable sauce recipe, safe-food-handling instructions, and extra equipment were secured by a busy person with an iPhone who reached out to a much larger community. A crew was gathered via the tomato project Facebook page, telephone, email, and even by something called face-to-face conversation.

There was, however, one unifying factor: everybody wanted to get their hands dirty – in a real-world, tactile, pre-digital way – and do something to feed the hungry. The result: hard work, fun, community building, and a lot of people fed.

The swirling array of new media mesmerizes those of us who see its potential and find it fun. However, we need to keep daily perspective: it can have a polarizing effect if not used judiciously. It’s still only one tool among many.

The Rev. Liz Frohrip is Associate in Ministry at Salem Lutheran Church in Bridgeport, CT.

The Best and the Worst

by Michael Milton '03 M.A.R.

We can use new media to develop the best or the worst parts of ourselves. Let’s look at someone who uses new media to elevate the worst parts of himself, then one who does the opposite.

Everyone sees Jeff as a nice guy, and he is one. But they might be surprised to know what he does on his computer. He starts off each day by pulling together breakfast, sitting down, turning on TV, and

checking the sports scores on his iPad. He has a Twitter account that doesn't reveal his identity, and if the sports scores irritate him he'll make some snide comments on Twitter about referees, coaches, or players. In web jargon, he's a "troll."

Before he leaves for work, he finds time to spend a few minutes on free pornography sites, which he usually checks four or five times a day. While riding the bus, he scans the news on his phone. Usually he'll post to Facebook a partisan sneer du jour, but most of his friends on Facebook won't see it because they've tired of it and set their filters to ignore him. If he's feeling sad sometimes he'll put a prayer into his status update, which usually gets a few "likes."

At work, if one of his hands is below his desk, he's probably text messaging without looking at his phone. He has an unlimited texting plan and spends most of the day chatting with his girlfriend and other people.

A couple times a week he has visitation with his children, and they'll sit around a table at a cafe or bookstore for ninety minutes. They all spend as much time tweeting on their smartphones and playing video games as they do talking.

Back home, he'll look at the Facebook profiles of his ex-girlfriends, read trashy blogs into the wee hours, and eventually go to sleep.

He doesn't focus. When he reads news in the morning, he is half-present, casual, unreflective, and prejudiced about events. When he works, he focuses on his job enough to come off as competent, but is surfing the net and texting. He loves his family, but they get a mere precious fraction of his attention. He's connected in the sense that he's always communicating, but he has a profound and ill-concealed feeling of alienation. He doesn't read books.

He's connected in the sense that he's always communicating, but he has an ill-concealed feeling of alienation. He doesn't read books.

Denise uses new media to elevate the best parts of herself. In the morning she picks up her Kindle and finishes the reading she started the previous night. She has an encyclopedic knowledge of the sci-fi romance genre. She maintains a blog where she means to critique authors in the field but ends up heaping adoration on them. Her pseudonym is well-known in the sci-fi romance community as a cultivator of talent.

At breakfast she asks her husband about his day. Her iPad, iPhone, Kindle, and computers are on, but not at hand. She grabs her phone as she walks out the door, listens to the news on public radio as she walks to the bus stop, and on the bus tweets from an account in her real name anything interesting she heard on her walk.

At work, the news is turned off. As a community organizer, she is in a constant struggle to focus and be present in her interactions with many people. She writes over a hundred emails a day to colleagues and friends.

To get the word out for her organization, she has to be fluent in digital media platforms. She has a good sense of when to communicate the organization's message on social media, or video, or on a blog, or as editorial content on third-party websites, or using some combination. Her contact list is full of passionate Generation Y kids who recruit their friends online to support her work.

Every day she has responsibilities that require sustained focus; she blocks off parts of her day and goes off the grid to fulfill these duties. Usually she wins the focus struggle. She keeps her mission as an organizer in front of her mind at all times, and she thinks about compassion.

By calibrating herself in this way, she is able to communicate and shift attention rapidly while maintaining a thread of mindfulness. People recognize this and admire her for it.

At night, the iPhone doesn't follow her to bed, but the Kindle does. She disciplines herself to put down the sci-fi romance novel occasionally and read one of the long-form journalism pieces that established authors are starting to self-publish and sell for a buck or two over Kindle. She uses this content and new media generally to elevate the best parts of herself.

I'm somewhere in between these two composite sketches, hopefully closer to Denise than Jeff. The temptation to use new media to gratify the worst parts of oneself is always present, but the amplifying power of new media presents an opportunity to build the best sorts of community and steward the best sorts of creativity.

Michael Milton, who lives in Washington, D.C., is a strategist and client manager for nonprofits at Blue State Digital.

Be Selective

by Peter Baldwin Panagore '86 M.Div.

I work in a trans-media ministry that reaches a million people a week. First Radio Parish Church of America was founded in 1926 on AM radio. I produce using media tools – script-writing (stories), video, audio, social network, the web, print, and email. FRPCA communicates through media – TV, AM, FM, email, web, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, magazine, book, and smartphone, in video, audio, and print.

I have a few favorite media tools. My iPad is my teleprompter. I use it for my ministry, including on-location shoots, funerals, worship services, or for reading the Bible, preaching, and storytelling. It's easy. The teleprompter app is cheap. It's effective. The first time I used it was as an officiating minister at a swanky wedding in Bar Harbor, Maine. When I pulled it out at the rehearsal, people didn't know how to respond. What?! No black book? No black folder? No Bible? But it went so well – the teleprompter is so smooth and the Bible app so easy – that I have used it ever since, and my iPad syncs my calendars.

My iPad connects me with Facebook. I am a public person with a private life. I use my personal FB wall mostly for professional reasons. I rarely post anything personal and never post anything private. We have a Facebook group for our ministry, too: Daily Devotions – FRPCA. We encourage my friends and fans to share my video postings, thus slowly growing our user base.

Through Constant Contact we send our daily emails. Mailing systems like Constant Contact prevent our daily emails from being misrecognized as spam. With judicious links and careful email layout, we direct readers to our website and to Facebook. Through a function in Constant Contact we tweet everyday. Linking our daily emails to our website and Facebook, and the other way around, integrates our communication tools, allowing each to build upon the other, creating a stronger virtual community.

Back at YDS, I carried my Swiss Army knife. My “everything” knife had a corkscrew (for sacramental wine only), a toothpick, tweezers, scissors, a saw blade, a magnifying glass, two screwdrivers, a can opener, and two knife blades. Today, I carry another everything tool – my iPhone, where I take story notes, use GPS to scout on-location spots, document events with photos, map parishioners' homes, email (naturally), connect with LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter, and I use it as a flashlight so I don't stub my bare toes on summer nights.

I am a public person with a private life. I use my personal Facebook wall mostly for professional reasons. I rarely post anything personal and never post anything private.

Our website aims to be clean, clear, and simple to use. It reflects a fractal design based on measurements of eye movements over websites. Google Analytics measures usage. I ask myself, how do I get people to go to DailyDevotions.org or to our Facebook wall? By telling them, over and over and over.

But here's the thing to remember about using media, all media, any media: to make things appear easy, simple, and clear takes a significant amount

of time, and with every media venue added one increases the workload in a disproportionate way. As you consider adding media in your ministry, be selective.

The Rev. Peter Baldwin Panagore is a creative tech head, producer, author of Two Minutes for God (Simon & Schuster, 2007) a storyteller, and the minister at First Radio Parish Church of America in Portland, ME.

Joining the Network

by Robert Loesch '66 B.D.

In 1966 when I began in my first parish, pastoral ministry was done completely face to face or on the phone. Forty-five years later, my own ministry now includes the use of social media as one of many ways to minister, putting me in touch daily with church members I wouldn't otherwise get to know nearly as well.

I still visit many individuals in their home, nursing home, assisted living facility, or hospital – usually

church members who cannot be reached by computer or cell phone. Personal, individual face-to-face ministry remains crucial in our depersonalized, technological society.

For nearly all the rest, I use Facebook for direct communication. Many of our younger members share messages and information posted daily on their wall.

I receive reminders of the birthdays of my Facebook friends. I can send greetings to them privately or so their other friends can share in these messages. Parents report on the trials of taking care of children, the daily and special events in their family lives. During the past summer, more than twenty families of our parish posted images and reports about their vacation trips.

Recently, as I was preparing to perform two different marriage ceremonies, several attendees posted their reflections about the ceremonies for Meredith and Daniel, Ashley and Adam. This strengthened my pastoral connection, and the church's connection, to the extended families of those involved in significant life events.

Social networking is helpful during serious illness. Parishioners on Facebook who have been ill keep their friends and family informed, sparing the intrusion of visitors during difficult times. I often add my own prayers and brief greetings. This sort of communication can occur as a loved one is dying, and in the aftermath of the memorial service when family and friends share their grief.

Facebook allows me entry into conversations and experiences that would only happen otherwise if I were in the home or in daily physical contact. Frequently, I have received private inquiries about questions of faith or ethical issues to which I respond privately on Facebook, or by more secure methods of communication.

Several local soldiers who have returned from Iraq or Afghanistan have kept in touch during their deployment with Facebook friends. I have followed Matthew's deployment, his search for work, and his reintegration into routine daily life.

These forms of outreach do not comprehensively define ministry today, but they have become essential tools of connection that were not possible before the internet.

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The Rev. Robert Loesch is pastor of Zion's United Church of Christ, Sand Lake, NY.

Struggle for the Soul of New Media

By John Brueggemann

Every day now, faith in the new technology is understandably bolstered by remarkable and escalating achievements. Information flows like never before. Poor farmers in developing countries with mobile phones can learn the best time to take their harvest to market or join the protest against an oppressive ruler. Integration of technology with the human brain allows, in some cases at least, the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the lame to walk.

The great promise of the new technology is largely visible and publicly acknowledged. The peril, less so.

Guns don't kill people (so say the bumperstickers) and neither do computers. Would Ryan Halligan, Megan Meier, or Tyler Clementi have killed

As with most social activity, virtual life is deeply entangled in two of the great questions in human history. One is the problem of justice, the other is the problem of community.

themselves if they hadn't been bullied online? Would Congressman Anthony Weiner have exposed himself without digital technology? Would tween fashionista Kiki Ostrenga have experienced the meteoric rise and devastating fall of homemade fame without social media? Who knows? But there is little question that the internet, like a firearm, is a dangerous tool. Dramatic headlines reporting bully-induced suicide, sordid sexting, or self-destructive narcissism may shock us. Or we complacently conclude that our own sense of normalcy would never lead us to such extremes. However justified such confidence is, it can easily obscure the way our lives are being transformed in mundane but powerful ways by the spread of digital technology.

As with most social activity, virtual life is deeply entangled in two of the great questions in human

history. One is the problem of justice: how do we discern, balance, and facilitate what people deserve and what they need? The second is the problem of community: what makes people feel a sense of belonging, meaning, and solidarity? Our encounter with the new technology poses fresh challenges extending from these two questions. How we respond to these challenges affects our own daily behavior online and our attitudes about the sweeping media changes now in play.

Two broad trends characterize the evolving structure of the internet. Most fundamentally it is being built up by millions of people every minute of the day and at the same time becoming more integral to their lives, even shaping their values. From 2005 to 2010, the number of web-users across the world doubled. There are now over two billion, according to Internetworldstat.com. They have collectively created more than a trillion distinct URL web pages.

But alongside this global explosion of internet looms another trend: the rapacious hunt for influence on the part of corporations. Have you noticed the proliferation of advertising on the web? It is becoming the wallpaper of our era – visible (or audible) whenever we go online, at work, at home, and throughout American life in general, relentlessly tugging at our consciousness.

To date, the web has basically functioned with “net neutrality”: any user can get to any site as fast as any other user with the same infrastructure. But now this principle is threatened by large firms seek-

ing to develop “tiered access.” If you don’t give them business, they will constrain your access to the web. This means, for example, that depending on which services a user buys online, one of the big kahunas like Verizon, AT&T, or Comcast might degrade his access to sites linked to competitors. These three, among others, have made forays in this direction.

The upshot of corporate-controlled, tiered access is not hard to picture. It would be as if every route on the virtual map was a toll road with cops direct-

The Wikipedia entry for Britney Spears is longer than that of Isaac Newton or Reinhold Niebuhr.

ing traffic down particular streets, making available different fees and avenues depending on who is driving the car. Not only would every journey be profitable to the gatekeepers and costly to the traveling consumer, but the destinations to which people are unduly guided would be part of a corporate plan. The preferred and profitable well-worn roads would become the only ones most people even know. Amazon.com would thrive while the local book retailer who can’t afford the fees and gets a slower connection loses even more ground.

Ruthless control of information always characterizes monopolistic or, as in the case of big media, oligopolistic supremacy. (About a half dozen firms dominate each of the film, television, and wireless provider industries.) Amidst the incessant mantra of “too much government” it remains to be seen whether the Federal Communications Commission has the will or ability to intervene to any effect.

Intimations of Tyranny

Given that every user is voluntarily providing large amounts of information about her identity and interests (which is collected virtually every time you use a credit card, Twitter, Amazon, and pretty much any search engine) and in light of the enormous opportunities for profit available through the monetization of the internet, we can expect the unseen manipulation to be vast. “Content targeted advertising” informed by data mining is but one manifestation. To a citizenry inured to corporate penetration throughout public life this may not seem like a big deal, especially if a person is led to products and services she likes anyway. However, consider the implication for small players in a given industry or opposing voices critical of big media and their allies. Any novel product or alternative view they could offer would ultimately be smothered by those face-

less companies who control the map. If the internet succumbs completely to the aims of tiered access, we can expect full-throttled oligopolistic tyranny: limited competition, innovation, information, dissent, and ultimately freedom.

If a small number of elites get to define what the internet is in some fundamental way, then it is bound to intensify economic inequality in general and the “digital divide” in particular. Systematically uneven access to computer hardware (i.e., property) and training (i.e., skills) is now contributing to a new dimension of class inequality. Current research suggests that intermittent access, slow connections, or weak technical support are common problems in lower-class settings that hold people back. (See the work of sociologist Paul DiMaggio and his colleagues.) Needless to say, this form of inequality shapes subsequent opportunities for education, employment, healthcare, legal and political representation, not to mention the capability of filtering the most odious intrusions of the internet. In the context of market-based domination of the network, those poor people who cannot afford the best products will lose the most, as usual. But we will all lose in the end.

From early on, it was obvious that the internet has enormous capacity for drawing people together, creating potential new communities, with untold ramifications for civic life. There is no question that the internet is helping to make the world “flat” and, as the cliché suggests, “more connected.”

Attention, Please

But there is also a broad countertrend that threatens these fresh hopes for community. Attention is the big driver in the virtual world. You will never see the words “turn this machine off” online. This is fully consistent with market logic. Searching and advertising have become intertwined. Attention here has a double meaning – the attention fixed upon the screen, but also the bid for attention made by the user who projects information online.

Insofar as attention is the coin of the realm, the internet is a narcissism machine. Across the political spectrum, there seem to be a lot more folks talking than listening. Think about how hard people work to collect friends on Facebook, followers on Twitter, hits on Youtube, comments on blogs and so on. Brief notice is surely not the same thing as real listening, which often makes the social interaction in such settings quite shallow.

Despite the immeasurable diversity of discourse on the internet, the structure of the web increasingly draws people of similar perspectives together.

That is what “personalization” and “networked individualism” are all about. You no longer have to tolerate difficult conversations with unappealing people. Uncomfortable, busy, scared, or conflicted? No problem. Just log off. Reset your filter. This is a core element of the new interactive sites.

The most dominant search engine, Google (which handles 34,000 queries per second!), creates sophisticated profiles for every user and then guides them towards their interests. That is, how Google functions for me may be very different than how it works for you. Like-minded people are more likely to end up accessing the same sites, reading the same texts, chatting with each other, and generally feeling affirmed in their insular worldviews by the information and products to which they are led. What would happen in a city that had public libraries, town hall meetings, coffee shops, and bars for Republicans and separate ones for Democrats but now faces broad problems that affect every citizen? Perhaps the deterioration of current public discourse gives us a clue where this could lead.

Planet Trivia

We also know that staggering amounts of energy are devoted to trivia. The Wikipedia entry for Britney Spears is longer than that of Isaac Newton or Reinhold Niebuhr. The most popular websites at any given moment always involve celebrities and games. For all the connective capability of interactive media, there is something stupefying and parochial about constantly sharing minor details of “what I did last night.” My network of friends may be huge, but many of the ties are inordinately weak. The market-research firm Pear Analytics estimates that 40 percent of tweets consist of “pointless babble” (another 6 percent is devoted to “self-promotion” and 4 percent is spam).

The problem is not just that people waste time. Virtual life is changing human relationships in general. Americans have been used to disposable cars, appliances, clothes, and other things. But the market culture enabled by the internet has taken “planned obsolescence” to a new level. We now have disposable feelings, values, friends, and identities. The anonymous, ephemeral, unaccountable way we relate to one another is evident in the epidemic of rudeness evident throughout American life. The web is a hub for these new norms of disposability in an increasingly selfish world. In shifting from the physical community to the virtual one, perhaps we are forgetting how to have difficult conversations, or any sustained discourse for that matter, with people

who disagree with us, people we will have to face for some time to come in order to keep our respective communities and society functioning and sane.

Our habits in virtual life affect our behavior in the rest of life in other ways too. We now know that electronic multitasking (e.g., listening to an iPod while emailing and talking on the phone) inhibits cognitive function more than marijuana and is linked to chronic sleep deprivation. Texting while driving can be as lethal as Driving Under the Influence. Interfacing with a computer can be addictive (which is partly why people knowingly sacrifice peak performance, sleep, discourse, and safety). The increasing mobility of the new technology exacerbates all these issues. As much interest as there is for childish escapism, the internet also enables and encourages attachment to our jobs, another gift of the market culture.

Reckoning with the Real World

Of course the freedom to have fun or do work any place or time is not all bad. The paradoxical problem in all this, though, is that as we get more connected to people elsewhere, we often get less connected to people nearby. Talking on the phone, while the waiter, cashier, next person in line, or car behind you waits, always means: “this offline interaction is not important enough to focus on by itself.”

Appreciating the humanity of other people requires a certain amount of respect for their physical presence – their organic bodies in all their awkwardness and vulnerability. There is no society, no neighborhood, no common good, without such encounters within physical proximity.

What does all this have to do with the church? Nothing – unless the church wants to be relevant to the most powerful cultural change of our time.

On a good day, church offers what now sounds like radical counter-cultural wisdom. Slow down. Listen. Remember who you are. Protect your community. But also think about someone other than yourself.

All technology is unnatural in some sense. Homo sapiens are not born knowing how to dial, type, drive, or log on. And machines tend to distance us from the elemental power of the earth. But the creative capacity of our large brains was designed for the development of culture, which is to say there is something fundamentally natural about technol-

ogy. At any rate, the new technology is here to stay. But that does not mean we have to passively accept everything about how it functions or evolves. The moment is probably more contingent and malleable than we might suspect. We could make different choices both in terms of our own personal lives and how we relate to the broad patterns of society.

Indeed, the church has a special role to play here. On a good day, it offers what now sounds like radical counter-cultural wisdom. Slow down. Listen. Remember who you are. Protect your community. Nurture conversations with other communities. Dwell on what brings you genuine joy. But also think about someone other than yourself. Consider what God wants from you and for you. In general, the internet does not countenance this wisdom. Nor, to be sure, does the market. As our experience with the new technology shifts from optional use to basic dependence, and as the market seeks a firmer grasp on our lives, nourishing this wisdom will become as important as ever.

The question for the church is not whether it can make clever use of slick technology for worship or congregational solidarity, which are seductive opportunities for appealing to younger generations and potential adherents in general. The real question is whether the church is going to provide any compelling leadership or counternarrative amidst this cultural tsunami.

What that would mean has to get worked out by real leaders in communities of faith. Surely the first step is recognizing that the new technology is not neutral in our common life together, and it is not the panacea for many of the challenges congregations face. Ultimately we are called to imagine solutions and responses that are more attentive and alert than we have ever imagined before. This summons requires relational covenants thicker than what can be found in the virtual world, memory deeper than the amnesia of the delete button, and commitments more enduring than the hollow promises of the market.

John Brueggemann is professor of sociology and Quadracci Professor in Social Responsibility at Skidmore College. His latest book is Rich, Free and Miserable: The Failure of Success in America (Rowman and Littlefield, 2010).

Minority youth aged consume an average of thirteen hours of media content a day – about four and a half hours more than their white counterparts, a recent Northwestern University report finds.

The report says minority children (age eight-eighteen) spend one to two additional hours each day watching TV and videos, about an hour more listening to music, up to an hour and a half more on computers, and thirty to forty minutes more playing video games than their white counterparts.

“The big question is what these disparities mean for our children’s health and education,” says Northwestern Professor Ellen Wartella, who directed the study and heads the Center on Media and Human Development in the School of Communication.

The only medium for which no difference was found between minority and white youth was reading print for pleasure. Young people in all groups read for pleasure approximately thirty to forty minutes a day, the study finds.

“Our study is not meant to blame parents,” says Wartella. “We hope to help parents, educators, and policymakers better understand how children’s media use may influence health and educational disparities.”

The study, “Children, Media and Race: Media Use Among White, Black, Hispanic and Asian American Children,” reported other findings:

- Minority youth are especially avid adopters of new media, spending about an hour and a half more each day than white youth using their cell phones, iPods and other mobile devices.
- Traditional TV viewing remains the most popular of all media. Black and Hispanic youth on average consume more than three hours of live TV daily (3:23 for blacks, 3:08 for Hispanics, 2:28 for Asians and 2:14 for whites).
- TV viewing rates are even higher when data on time-shifting technologies such as TiVo, DVDs, and mobile and online viewing are included. Total daily television consumption then rises to 5:54 for black youth, 5:21 for Hispanics, 4:41 for Asians, and 3:36 for whites.
- Black and Hispanic youth are more likely to have TV sets in their bedrooms (84 percent of blacks, 77 percent of Hispanics compared to 64 percent of whites and Asians).
- Minority youth eat more meals in front of the TV set – with 78 percent of black, 67 percent of Hispanic, 58 percent of white, and 55 percent of Asian youth reporting that the TV is “usually” on during meals at home.

Source: Northwestern University NewsCenter

Paul Raushenbush is senior religion editor at The Huffington Post, which this year surpassed The New York Times as the nation's most-viewed news website (more than thirty million unique visitors monthly, according to industry estimates). An ordained American Baptist minister, Raushenbush previously spent eight years as associate dean of religion life and the chapel at Princeton University. At Huffington he oversees a stable of 600 regular bloggers. He also edited Christianity and the Social Crisis of the 21st Century (HarperOne, 2007), a centennial edition of the book by his great-grandfather, Christian reformer Walter Rauschenbusch.

REFLECTIONS: You were a chaplain at Princeton. Do you feel a sense of vocation as religion editor at Huffington Post?

RAUSHENBUSH: I do see this as a ministry. There's a lot of hate, misinformation, and violence on the internet. I view my task as pushing onto the web as much positive, peaceful, helpful information as I can. That's really a continuation of what I was doing at Princeton – bringing people together onto a larger stage, people with diverse and disparate beliefs, so that they might understand each other better. This feels like that, except we're bringing together a lot more people.

REFLECTIONS: Which subjects and themes get the most response?

RAUSHENBUSH: That's been kind of surprising. What's done really well are the serious themes – reflections on Scripture, for instance. What does the Bible say about marriage, about forgiveness? We'll offer a full spectrum of opinion – John Dominic Crossan, the American Bible Society, and many others. People are really interested. One time we did a very simple piece – “Five Things to Know about the Bible” – and within twenty-four hours, the volume of response was just crazy. For a few days, it drew the most traffic of any piece on Huffington Post.

In general, we do a mix of topical, current pieces – the debt crisis, 9/11 – but I'm also doing a lot on prayer these days. We have bloggers who look at how religion relates to the international scene, but also how religion relates to the personal quest.

REFLECTIONS: Does the sheer volume of online religious discussion say anything about the state of American religion? Is it a sign of health? Of confusion?

RAUSHENBUSH: There may be a decline in personal practices of religion, but there is intensifying inter-

est in the phenomenon of religion. That's partly due to 9/11, and there are those who want to deride religion, but people are keenly asking questions like, What role is religion playing in American society and in global society? I don't think that role has declined at all. Virtually every national story has a religion angle to it. In so many places, religion is the glue to the community.

Online the trick is not to create a cage match of constant confrontation. I could have a lot more traffic if I encouraged a culture of animosity. But what we are committed to doing is the sort of journalism that is participatory. Leaving religion out would be unthinkable.

REFLECTIONS: Is the internet helpful or harmful to religious life?

RAUSHENBUSH: Was it better when only the local priest and rabbi gave the answers? I'm of the opinion that the more information we have the better, as long as the information is good information. Online, people can find out what others are thinking from totally different religious traditions on questions that you thought were perhaps long resolved – or questions you suspected had far more nuances than you were always led to believe.

Maybe, for instance, you *can* be Christian and be gay and not have to make a choice between two very important identities. The problem with the internet is you have to be your own curator. You have to have your own BS monitor. You can't assume that something is true just because it comes up first on a Google search. That's the flip side of this new world of access.

REFLECTIONS: In this new digital milieu, do you see American religion on the brink of revival?

RAUSHENBUSH: It's a really interesting moment. I sense a real desire for spiritual renewal among those who are committed to a mainstream religious movement for social justice. I meet young evangelicals who are fired up about justice. I see many similarities between young evangelicals and (Walter) Rauschenbusch. I hear them saying, Wow, nobody told me about the gospel's commitment to the poor. This harkens back to Rauschenbusch, who was eventually confronted by poverty, which compelled him to ask, “What is the gospel saying about this? Oh! there it is, right in front of my nose.”

I'm still immensely positive about what *can* happen in American Christianity today. It's all about spiritual and social redemption. They are more powerful together.

Friending the Revolution

By Cyrus Farivar

Over the last few months, it's been hard to read news stories about Tunisia and Egypt – and more recently Libya, Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen – without finding references to Twitter and Facebook, which are often credited with catalyzing those revolutions.

As regimes in Tunisia and Egypt fell in 2011, internet activists and Middle East watchers have been scratching their heads trying to work out how much a state's social media penetration (and more broadly, internet penetration) influences social and democratic revolution.

Though social media specifically, and the internet as a whole, surely have some small role to play in organizing protests, the facts don't automatically confirm or validate the claims for their liberating

Though social media surely have some small role to play in organizing protests, the facts don't automatically confirm or validate the claims for their liberating power.

power. Anyone interested in democratization should remember this essential truth about this year's Middle East upheavals: in Tunisia and Egypt, the militaries decided not to fire on their own people, while in Libya and Syria, civil war erupted, bringing state violence against its citizens. Bullets have little to do with Facebook.

Nevertheless, it's easy to be seduced by this idea that social networking sites or even the internet in general somehow "caused" significant political change in the Middle East in 2011.

Poetry, Parties, Upheaval

But a few facts about actual online life need to be kept in mind. For instance, Facebook use across the entire world is always going to be smaller than the level of internet penetration. (Think of everyone you know who's online – and then think about the

other people you know who aren't on Facebook, but are still online.) Thus, in countries where internet penetration is already low, the percentage of people on Facebook is even lower. In Egypt, nearly one quarter of Egyptians are online, but less than 10 percent of the population is on Facebook. In the U.S., where Facebook penetration is now 51 percent, people use it to discuss politics, poetry, and parties. So do people in Egypt and everywhere else.

In other words, just as not every American on Facebook is hatching a way to fix government gridlock inside the Beltway, neither can we expect every Yemeni on Facebook to be talking about how they can bring down President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

A look at country-by-country statistics, based on figures from the social networking analysis site Socialbakers.com, shows Jordan and Palestine have more than twice the Facebook penetration as Egypt, and yet there have been no headlines of a Facebook revolution in the Levant. (Venezuela has a solid Facebook penetration rate of 34 percent, but Hugo Chavez – himself an avid Twitter user, too – isn't going anywhere anytime soon.)

The hopes and temptations of techno-determinism have led to speculations about the broader influence of internet penetration on democratization.

One researcher, Jillian C. York, writing on the blog Global Voices, asked earlier this year if the internet can "affect the effectiveness of such tools for organizational or revolutionary purposes? Or, can a tiny group of internet users influence a country-wide movement?" Andrew Trench, a South African journalist, also blogged: "If Egypt and Tunisia are valid case studies, it looks like internet penetration of around 20 percent is the mark."

If this were true, authoritarian countries with high penetration rates should be on the brink of regime collapse. But Russia, China, and Iran all have penetration rates well above 30 percent yet remain among the world's most influential authoritarian countries.

These countries cajole, intimidate, and counter-balance online opposition. For every pro-democracy Facebook group, there are plenty of ways in which governments can co-opt the internet to serve their own purposes, through censorship, placation, and outright intimidation.

Tool of Repression

It's as well known now that online social networking can be used as a tool of surveillance just as it can be used as a tool of activism. An Al Jazeera English documentary that debuted in August showed how pro-regime forces in Bahrain used Facebook to track down protestors. In June 2009, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that some Iranians entering Iran were forced to login to Facebook upon their re-entry into the country.

Since 2007 the Chinese government has organized the "50-Cent Party," which pays hundreds of thousands of young Chinese internet users to

nately, cannot be said for countries such as Libya, Iran, Russia, and China.

In recent months, American policymakers have begun issuing millions of dollars' worth of grants to projects like the "internet-in-a-suitcase," which activists hope will allow surreptitious access to the internet even if traditional access is blocked or shut down.

But, if already many activists are being harangued or worse at the border, or surveilled and threatened for what they post online, what will happen the first time an activist is arrested for possessing one of these American-made devices? That's not to say that the United States shouldn't be in the business of helping people communicate more freely, but it's important to remember that just because a country has more access to the internet doesn't mean that it will become a liberal democracy overnight.

*Cyrus Farivar is an Iranian-American journalist and the author of *The Internet of Elsewhere* (Rutgers, 2011). He hosts Spectrum, a weekly radio show on European science and technology for Deutsche Welle English from Bonn, Germany.*

Venezuela has a solid Facebook penetration rate of 34 percent, but Hugo Chavez – himself an avid Twitter user – isn't going anywhere anytime soon.

post pro-China comments on message boards. The Kremlin has orchestrated cyber attacks against perceived "enemies," including Estonia. In Iran, for all the talk of a Twitter Revolution, in June 2009 the office of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei joined Twitter, posting daily in Persian and English.

Earlier this year, Iran concluded its first blogging competition, which was open only to blogs not blocked within the country. The top prize, not surprisingly, went to an Ahmadinejad supporter. China threatened foreign journalists and arrested hundreds of activists who called for protests across the Chinese internet in early 2011. In Russia, the government has formally invited tenders to develop a vast internet-monitoring system to counter online dissent.

What goes on online may be irrelevant in terms of being a democratizing force. Egypt and Tunisia were unwilling to unleash sustained brutal force against their own countrymen. The same, unfortu-

A Digital Daughter Returns Home

By Paula Jenkins

My adventure in the digital wilderness started this way. After Yale Divinity School a decade ago, I returned home to San Francisco and found myself in the midst of the great dotcom boom, working as a project manager for a start-up company. Three years and three rounds of layoffs later, I made the jump to a digital advertising agency.

In advertising, we were paid to sell a brand and an image that went with it. In nearly all cases, the messaging we created spoke to consumers' egos by suggesting they might achieve happiness (narrowly defined as acceptance, love, social standing) by acquiring the brand or products that our client was selling. I became well-versed in the many ways of manipulating image and appearance in the online world.

At this same moment, along with the rest of America, I started to become rather obsessed with social media. My initial interest was partly research-oriented, but I quickly found myself with a handful of sites to check every day, blogs to read and comments to post, with my own accompanying persona to maintain on each site. And I'd gotten sucked into the online game World of Warcraft, where I was busy leveling and playing a Night Elf Druid character. It seemed like I was spending countless hours a day, ironically alone, all in a misplaced attempt to be social.

All this landed me in the digital wilderness, as I now regard it: these new vast virtual spaces became a place of loneliness, hazard, and mirage-like illusion.

Counterfeit Reality

It's difficult, for instance, to discern actual truth on social media sites. They rely on individuals to post interesting daily updates on their own status. Either by necessity (people only post when something interesting actually happens to them) or by design (people overstate the interestingness of their

day), social media offers a re-presentation of life, usually more exciting, more exotic, faster paced, and better accessorized than everyday life. Some of this "hyper-reality" may reflect the eagerness or anxiety of regular folks trying to keep up with the fast-food pace set by reality TV, where timelines are collapsed, love happens quickly, disputes resolve in thirty minutes, and teasers are crafted for next week's dose of drama.

I soon discovered the danger of social media's hyper-reality obsession: To "compete" in this online world as a blogger, I felt that I needed to push myself to be smarter, funnier, pithier, and more interesting

All this landed me in the digital wilderness: these new vast virtual spaces became a place of loneliness, hazard, and mirage-like illusion.

and original than others. And since I was constantly judging myself against those hyper-real, unobtainable versions of people, I found I was moving further away from myself, and losing confidence in that self. In this foreign wilderness, I very much felt alone, wrestling with my own inner demons. Much like the wilderness recorded in the Bible, these virtual landscapes are rife with material temptations, full of opportunities to question one's worth and purpose. The result was often self-judgment and loathing.

In the midst of this confusing time, my return to myself came in a single moment, when I decided to

go on retreat. I had been lost, confused, questioning the morality of working in advertising, and recently divorced. At a Saturday evening reconciliation service, a Franciscan Friar placed his hands on my shoulders and uttered a quiet greeting, "Welcome Home."

I came to recognize the power of these two well-placed words. I saw the irony in the fact that I had to unplug from the online world to plug in to God. I had to disconnect from the digital wilderness to re-connect to my true source. I had to see the hypocrisy of the hyper-real life I'd been leading in the digital world, working in a digital ad agency, and living so much of my life online. Welcome home: it was those two words, spoken by another of God's children, that reminded me of who I was and pushed me onwards in my journey for my authentic self.

Prodigal Daughter

Parallels with the Gospel parable of the Prodigal Son seem obvious to me now. A daughter of the digital age, I'd come back to God feeling unworthy, full of doubts, full of loathing, because I'd been judging the value of my own heart and mind against the hyper-real versions of people I'd never met. I had done nothing to deserve the love and grace that

Social media offers a re-presentation of life, usually more exciting, more exotic, faster paced, and better accessorized than everyday life.

surrounded me in the moment of being welcomed home. Yet in that moment at San Damiano Retreat, I understood that each of us is valued and accepted and loved for who we are in total. We are not in competition for God's love. There is no "most popular" or "most likely to succeed" or "my favorite child" plaque up for grabs with God. Like the father in the Prodigal Son parable, God welcomes us home for exactly who we are, as we are.

In the past six years, I've taken on a leadership role at San Damiano, leading their Young Adult ministry. This fall, our retreat will confront the question: "How do we find God in the digital age?" My simple answer is that God is exactly where God has always been. Technology has revolutionized a great deal in our lives, but it hasn't changed God at all. We need to remember what technology is and isn't. Technology is an invention of humanity, and its perceived greatness is the assertion of our own collective egos. As members of the church, it's our responsibility to find ways to use technology to recruit, communi-

cate, educate, fund-raise, and minister. There has never been a more powerful set of inexpensive tools available to our churches and our congregations.

But we are all meeting this new world at different paces. One of the interesting contrasts I've noted between two recent generations – those in their forties and those in their twenties – is our very different life views, presumably resulting from the role that technology played in our formative years. For myself and others in Gen X (sometimes called the Thirteenth Generation, born between 1961 and 1981¹), we've long known that our generation has been on the leading edge of a world full of new and changing media, even as we grew up in a time when communications were slower and required patience. Full of early adopters who welcomed the faster pace, Gen X embraces new technology while synthesizing the slower speed of our parents' world with the ever-quickenning pace of our children's approach to new media devices. Though comfortable with new technology, we still see it as new and different. We sense that we are the last generation that will remember having a childhood with no computer in the home.

Retreat work with Gen Xers, I've found, often focuses on the acceleration of the contemporary world and how new technology is still something we are learning to navigate and integrate in our lives. The change in the world today is something we approach with mindful and thoughtful questioning.

Gen Y (the Millennial Generation born 1982 to 2000²), however, is the first generation who likely had a computer at home from very early on. No doubt, they will regard Gen Xers (who they lump together with all previous generations) as being slower in communication methods by comparison. The internet, of course, is not new to them, and much of technology (smartphones, GPS, TiVo) is seen as the latest upgrade from media that's always been a part of their consciousness.

Real-time Everytime

At retreats, I've heard many Gen Yers say they expect communications to be available, immediate, and real-time wherever they are. Text and mobile communications have rendered physical distance nearly irrelevant. Facebook and blogs are their natural communication tools. Overall accessibility to celebrities, politicians, news anchors, CEOs, and others through Twitter has given Gen Y a less hierarchical view of the world. Compared to Gen X's early mantra of "questioning authority," Gen Y seems not to contend with the question. Traditional authority has in many cases been stripped of its power and mystique. Their experience shows that people

can become famous or powerful (often regarded as one in the same by Gen Y) by using new media to publish and promote their own creative ideas, be it a unique blog, Twitter feed, or YouTube channel.

In the end, I have come to believe that spending time on the internet is one facet of a fully modern life. It is a space to find one's voice, to bind communities together. It is a great equalizer, giving voice to people across the globe.

Nevertheless, since the period of my own wanderings in the virtual wilderness, I've come to see

**“How do we find God in the digital age?”
My simple answer is that God is exactly
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the online space as one that should be approached mindfully and purposefully, regardless of one's generational ties. I now limit the time I spend online and define what I'm doing beforehand, whether it be research, entertainment, writing, or socializing.

With the lens of purposeful activity, the internet offers us a place to interact, to find communion. With blogging and Facebook, we have a way to extend our message of peace, of Christ's love to people beyond our day-to-day reach, including those who may be wandering out there in the virtual wilderness. By actively working to create a community of believers around a blog or Facebook page, we are meeting people where they are, standing there with open arms, ready to welcome them home.

Notes

- 1 Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069* (Quill, 1992).
- 2 Howe, et al.

Paula Jenkins '98 M.A.R. lives near San Francisco, where she works as a project manager for a credit union. As a board member and young-adult ministry leader at San Damiano Retreat in Danville, CA, this fall she is leading a retreat entitled “Linked In, Liked, and Friendd: Finding God and Oneself in the Digital Age.” She blogs about her life's adventures at welcomingspirit.net.

SUNLIGHT

By Jim Harrison

After days of darkness I didn't understand
a second of yellow sunlight
here and gone through a hole in clouds
as quickly as a flashbulb, an immense
memory of a moment of grace withdrawn.
It is said that we are here but seconds in cosmic
time, twelve and a half billion years,
but who is saying this and why?
In the Salt Lake City airport eight out of ten
were fiddling relentlessly with cell phones.
The world is too grand to reshape with babble.
Outside the hot sun beat down on clumsy metal
birds and an actual ten-million-year-old
crow flew by squawking in bemusement.
We're doubtless as old as our mothers, thousands
of generations waiting for the sunlight.



Tweeting among the Birds of the Air

By James Martin

The industry term for the appeal of a website is “sticky.” Visitors (or “eyeballs”) stick to a site if it is interesting, lively, useful, provocative, and generally appealing. Conversely, the “bounce rate” refers to how frequently initial visitors navigate away from a page to a different site. Sticky is good; bouncy is bad.

How bouncy or sticky are Catholic websites? How well is the church using social and digital media in its mission to spread the Gospel?

First, the good news. These days almost every Catholic organization and diocese and most parishes have a firm web presence. One can check out editorials in the diocesan newspaper, follow the pastor’s blog (and read his latest homily), make donations to a favorite Catholic charity, and check on Mass times. An up-to-date website is as much a necessity today as a weekly parish bulletin is (or used to be).

More good news: The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has found great success in the world of social media. It has over 31,000 fans on Facebook, where the conference sometimes sponsors trivia contests and where fans use the page for lively discussions. The conference also maintains its own YouTube channel and frequently updates its Twitter feed. Sample tweet: “Are you ready to spend some behind-the-scenes time w/Pope Benedict XVI at the Apostolic Palace? The grand tour.” (Note 4 tweeters: 2 save space drop XVI.)

Sticking to It

The bad news is that more than a few Catholic sites are unimaginative, difficult to navigate, full of dead links and look like they have not been redesigned since the Clinton administration. In the print world, magazine editors are encouraged to redesign every five years. On the web, reinvention happens far more frequently. If the medium is the message, then the message is that the church is often a laggard. A good website requires more than just repositories

for information. As philosophers might say, these are a “necessary but not sufficient” condition for stickiness.

Most good websites are updated daily. If they want young eyeballs, then this is done several times a day – not just text but videos, podcasts, slide-shows, and interactive conversations. If not, he or she should not be surprised by a lack of visitors.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has found great success in the world of social media. It has over 31,000 fans on Facebook.

Those who wonder whether it is really possible to update sites daily would do well to remember that there is plenty going on in our church, so it is not hard to be creative: point viewers to international church news; upload videos of Catholic speakers; link to articles from your favorite Catholic magazines; point to new (or old) Catholic art; post the latest Vatican press release.

Many church employees might say: “Are you nuts? I’m too busy!” But not updating is like having a microphone in the parish that is not working. If church organizations do not maintain a fresh website or blog, fewer people – especially the young, who get their information digitally – are going to visit these sites and hear the church’s message, or even care if the church is speaking.

Back to the good news: The official church has hit its stride in the blogosphere. Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York and others blog religiously (pun

intended). But blogs present significant challenges, like encouraging dialogue among readers and building a sort of virtual community. Take a look at a few diocesan blogs and note how many comments there are: often the number is zero.

Why zero? Too often it is because the blogger posts and then walks away. To repurpose Truman Capote's comment about Jack Kerouac, that's not blogging, that's typing. Responding to commenters encourages more people to read, post, and discuss. This practice is not without its own dangers; it is easy to get bogged down in arcane theological battles.

In All Things Charity

Accepting and publishing comments, even those not in line with church teaching, is another challenge that demands, besides patient catechesis, constant charity. Still more charity is required when the comments become *ad hominem*. "In omnibus caritas," as Blessed John XXIII liked to say. Easy to say, but harder to do when someone says you are an idiot, a heretic (or both) or that one should be, as someone recently said of yours truly, laicized.

Sometimes the attacks ping around the web and find their way to the Catholic school where the targets of the attacks work, the university where

speaking in familiar styles as undignified, then why should we?

In every age the church has used whatever media were available to spread the good news. St. Augustine practically invented the form of the autobiography; the builders of the great medieval cathedrals used stone and stained glass; the Renaissance popes used not only papal bulls but colorful frescoes; Hildegard of Bingen, some say, wrote one of the first operas; the early Jesuits used theater and stagecraft to put on morality plays for entire towns; Dorothy Day founded a newspaper; Daniel Lord, S.J., jumped into radio; Bishop Fulton Sheen used television to stunning effect; and now we have bishops and priests, sisters and brothers and Catholic lay leaders who blog and tweet.

How sad it would be if we did not use the latest tools available to us to communicate the word of God. If Jesus could talk about the birds of the air, then we can surely tweet.

James Martin, S.J., is culture editor of America magazine and author of the new book Between Heaven and Mirth: Why Joy, Humor and Laughter are at the Heart of the Spiritual Life (HarperOne). This essay is adapted from an address given at the 2010 World Communications Day, sponsored by the Diocese of Brooklyn.

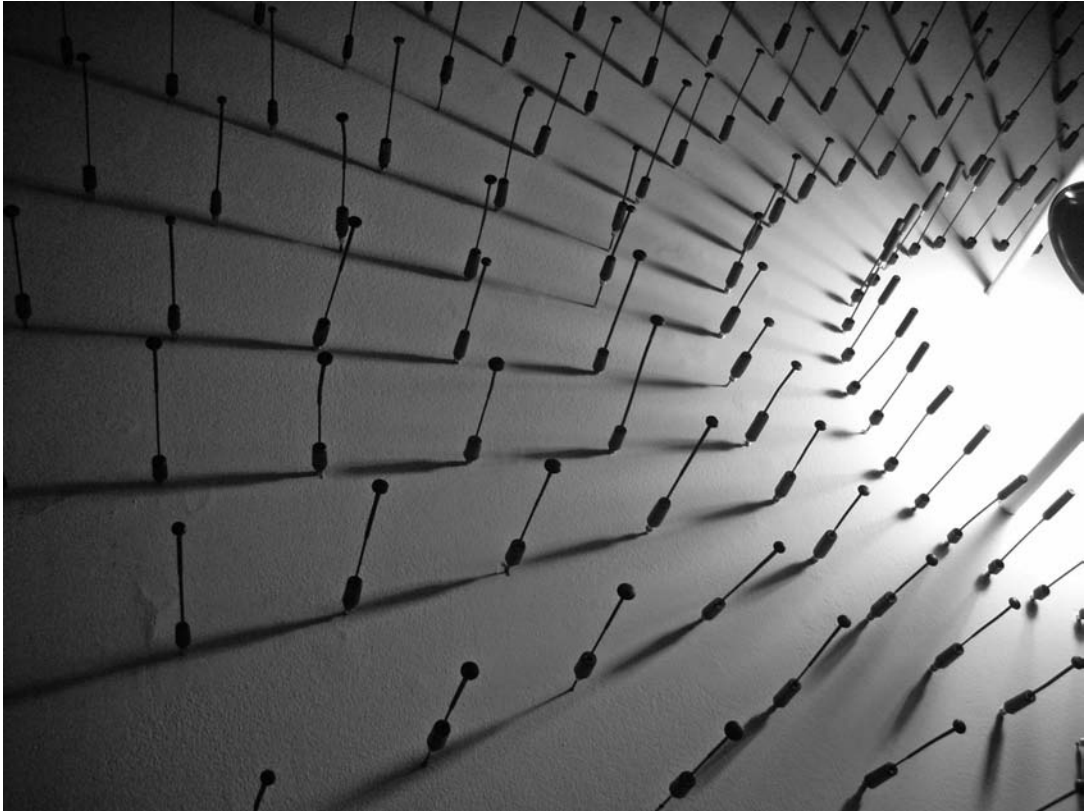
To repurpose Truman Capote's comment about Jack Kerouac, that's not blogging, that's typing.

they teach, or the diocese in which they minister. So a caveat: don't believe everything you read in the blogosphere.

Back to how the church can better use digital media to spread the Gospel. Does the church seriously want to reach young people? I mean people who are really young – not just under fifty, but under twenty-five – young men and women in college or high school. The church longs to reach the young, but is it willing to speak not only in the language of young people, but in the modes they use?

Jesus, after all, asked his followers to go to the ends of the earth, not just to places where they felt comfortable. And Jesus did not sit around in Capernaum waiting for people to come to him. And he spoke in a language that people understood and used media that people found accessible.

Using parables, he was not afraid of being seen as undignified by talking about commonplaces like mustard seeds or sheep. The Son of God did not see that as beneath him. And if he did not consider



*Heidi Campbell teaches media studies at Texas A&M. Her book *When Religion Meets New Media* (Routledge, 2010) examines the use of media technologies in the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish traditions. Her blog, www.religionmeetsnewmedia.blogspot.com, gathers many of her articles on religion and digital culture and posts news about a growing field of academic inquiry.*

REFLECTIONS: Is the web changing religious practice?

CAMPBELL: New media is accentuating changes that are already happening in religious culture. Religious practice traditionally was “place-based”: to practice, you had to go to a certain space or a particular institution; it was often geographically situated. Because of network technologies religious community doesn’t have to be that way now. What new media allows is increased personalization of our information-gathering and information-sharing. People have new options to engage their faith – online prayer groups, e-devotions, Second Life, blogs. And those options will increase as new media gets more and more embedded into daily life.

For instance, I practice centering prayer, and when I can’t get to a prayer gathering I will often visit an online prayer chapel to facilitate my practice. Ideally, centering prayer is an embodied experience with other people. But it’s possible for me to go to a website and hear a recorded voice that guides me through a similar experience.

REFLECTIONS: Is new media simply the latest communication tool, or does it represents a decisive historical turn?

CAMPBELL: In several ways, digital culture is unique. It encourages us to be always on and to stay connected with others and information. It’s become an expectation that the practice of information-sharing should always be happening or possible. Engagement is often valued over contemplation. The sheer ability to connect and share becomes a valued commodity – even more than the actual content. So the process becomes more important than the outcome. There’s an expectation of publicized privacy. Your information is never your own. Boundaries are fluid and what was once private conversation or information is openly accessible to the world.

REFLECTIONS: How does this translate in religion?

CAMPBELL: What we see is that digital immigrants import offline religious expectations and values online – social etiquette and protocols, respect for the sacred text – which shape their expectations of how religion online should function. Whereas digital natives are first learning how to build social relations

or form and express their religious identity online on Facebook, Twitter, and elsewhere and then import those patterns into their offline life. These groups are starting in very different places and leading them to see religion in different lights. Online communication is marked by great informality, so engaging with sacred texts online does not require the same sense of respect or protocols. This approach challenges traditional expectations and responses.

REFLECTIONS: Are online and offline traditions destined to go their separate ways?

CAMPBELL: The question is whether there will be dialogue between the immigrants and natives – between traditional religious institutions and empowered religious individuals. Will they negotiate and learn from each other about how religious community and identity does and should function in digital culture? Which elements of tradition can we relinquish in order both to stay in the community and function within this new media culture? And which elements are core to our identity, elements that young people will have to adopt if they want to stay true to their religious community?

Take an online prayer group meeting in a chat room in real time. What you miss online is of course the physical presence of others, the nonverbal cues, the social accountability to other people. However, many people online don’t see this as wholly problematic. People *do* feel connected. They adapt themselves to that environment. With some traditions, connection via the spirit is more important than physical proximity anyway.

REFLECTIONS: There’s 1.0 and 2.0. What is 3.0?

CAMPBELL: Web 3.0 is still being worked out, still emerging and being defined. It relates to features of cloud computing and the semantic web, new ways of storing and standardizing information. It relates to the “smart revolution,” the concentration of doing multiple things on one device. Web 3.0 will further accentuate 2.0 themes – personalization, decentralization, deprivitization, integration, the convergence of technologies and industries and cultures. There are ramifications for religious traditions. Religious communities will continue to face questions of hierarchy and decentralization. Increasingly, individuals expect their religious practice to be co-created and personalized: you give me a tool kit and I’ll decide what I will add to it. Yet this is a controlled interactivity where digital platforms present you with predetermined options, and the intent and values of the designer set the stage for what kind of future we can create.

Biblical Authority in the Google Galaxy

By Kent Harold Richards

With its inconceivable data explosion and instant global connectivity, the internet revolution has generated murmurs of unease. From some quarters comes worry that the speed and scale of information will upend centuries of habits of reading and respect for authoritative truths, threatening to sweep away traditional learning and veneration of the past.

These anxieties usually get around to another claim: in this media age looms a crisis of religious authority, or in the case of traditional Bible reading and reverence for God's Word, a crisis of Biblical authority. But is that true?

Having just left the halls of academia after forty years and becoming the minister of a small United Methodist congregation, I know the question of authority retains a perennial power and fascination. But debate about a crisis of Biblical authority has

Debate about a crisis of Biblical authority has boiled for decades, even centuries, before Google arrived. It will outlast the era of the microprocessor.

boiled for decades, even centuries, before Google arrived. It will outlast the era of the microprocessor. Controversies around Biblical truth are no more acute now, and no more settled, than in the '60s, or the 1560s, or 360 C.E. Authority is an elusive, powerful force – a drama that moves us, resists us, inhabits us.

"Authority Always Wins"

What do we mean by authority? I think of the words of the chorus of John Mellencamp's *Authority Song*, "I fight authority, authority always wins ..." and I hear the voice of people who are denied authority. The struggle between the individual and larger forces – educational, legal, moral, military, municipal, political – is a signature human experience. Some

notion of power is never far from authority's various definitions, including religious authority. Those of us in the "business" of religion sometimes forget that religious authority debates are not just driven by religion. Authority was as much a political as a religious issue in the decision by King James I to gather a group of translators to provide the church with an "authorized" version of the Bible during his contentious reign. Either way, the question of power was central.

Where does this authority abide? In the case of the Bible, does the authority reside innately in Scripture, or does it rise from the relationships between the Bible and the institutions or persons who read, interpret, defend? Said otherwise, is the Bible's power found directly in the text or in the assertion of the religious body that claims power for it? For centuries, people in the academy and in religious organizations have landed on one side of this question or the other, or tried to combine the two. As a former academic now in the parish, I often would like to draw on elements from both sides.

Does technological culture have anything to add here? Despite pessimists who dread the effect of new media on traditional religious culture, the raging revolutions of technology have not remarkably changed, banished, or compromised the Bible's authority. Nevertheless, the digital age is posing new questions, even new models, of authority that energize the perennial debate.

Take a question relevant to both academy and parish: Which is more authoritative, Wikipedia or *Encyclopedia Britannica*? To oversimplify a bit, the

authority claimed by and for Wikipedia relies on a bottom-up model rather than the top-down ideal that drives *Britannica*. Wikipedia's authority is based on a democratizing collective authority – “crowd-sourced” – a process of fact-gathering and vetting not limited to empanelled experts.

Up-Down, Down-Up

Many lament the possible eclipse of the old top-down model, the rectitude of its protocols and canons. The accuracy – authority – of *Britannica* always derived from strong editorial controls, data checks, monitors on individual biases and academic correctness. Yet all that authoritative display never produced a perfect, error-free *Britannica*.

Wikipedia famously has errors too. Many questioned its reliability and authority. But the critics are losing the battle. Wikipedia's popular acceptance resides in its information architecture, visual design, governance – what is frequently referred to as collective or symbiotic intelligence – and ultimately the brand itself. These elements, coupled with the “findability” factor that places it high in Google searches, have increased the perception of Wikipedia as an authoritative source for the twenty-first century.

A bold new sort of authority confronts the researcher, reader, and citizen: the algorithmically driven search engine in our immense new galaxy of data. Google says its search engine PageRank aims to demonstrate “the importance of web pages by considering more than 500 million variables and two billion terms. Pages that (Google) believes are important pages receive a higher PageRank and

A bold new sort of authority confronts the researcher, reader, and citizen: the algorithmically driven search engine in our immense new galaxy of data.

are more likely to appear at the top of the search results.” Google aims to make itself an authority in the universe of knowledge, surely the most ambitious breakthrough in data management since Gutenberg.

The democratization of knowledge unleashes all kinds of unanticipated consequences whatever the era. Each generation sifts the past and sorts through the alarms of the present. An individual's confrontation with the stories, poetry, or hard sayings of the Bible can stir in the recipient a brush with grandeur, momentousness, antagonism – tremors of authority measured by readers such diverse as William Blake, Herman Melville, Saul Bellow, and G. F. Handel.

As a parish minister, I see the drama of Scripture's meaning and authority unfolding in the lives of church members. They hear the Word of God – wrestle with it, seek meaning in it as they make their way along a real-world horizon of pain, uncertainty, and hope. This wrestle is proof that the quest to discern Biblical authority is no dry exercise but a lively, urgent operation. It is taking place in the hearts of believers and in the minds of would-be believers every day, whether they encounter Scripture online or in a tweet or in a 200-year-old family Bible.

Contemplating the theme of authority in a *Christian Century* article forty years ago, sociologist Peter Berger observed there are two kinds of hysteria: the “hysteria of those who have lost their old certitudes and the hysteria of those who, often with blind fanaticism, have committed themselves to new ones.” When he was writing, computers were the size of sedans, and the idea of an internet would have been gaudy science fiction. But his words apply in the new media age. We would do well to avoid devolving into either extreme. That would be a crisis of terrible proportion.

A Hebrew Bible scholar, Kent Harold Richards served as executive director of the Society of Biblical Literature for fifteen years until his retirement in 2010. He is minister of First United Methodist Church in Mystic, CT.

The *Ekklesia* of Social Media

By Scott Gunn

Not long ago, I began a new ministry leading Forward Movement, a publishing ministry of the Episcopal Church that dates back to 1935. Like all publishers, we face the challenge of moving into digital publishing and adapting to new reading preferences. You can layer all these challenges onto the church, which is facing its own struggles to discover how we should be the church for the twenty-first century.

So I've been thinking a lot about social media. It is too early to say for sure, but it looks like social media might be a disruptive technology that changes how we do church at a fundamental level. Other technologies have made only slight changes in our common life. The electric light, for example, was a major technological disruptor in society at large, but it didn't fundamentally alter how we engage in our mission as a church.

But several questions confront us as we look at social media and consider the many complex issues about our religious identity and place in the world. Exploring these questions could help us think about how to embrace (notice I did not say *whether* to embrace) social media – and help us see whether Facebook will, like movable type, be regarded as a revolutionary force in shaping church history.

1) Are social media a mission field, or merely an extension of our “meatspace” (brick and mortar) mission field?

Before I try to suggest an answer to this question, we need to keep in mind the extraordinary power – the charisma – of social media. Social media do not function the same way as static websites, even though you look at ordinary websites and social media on your computer screen. Static websites function more like other marketing materials: they communicate information to the reader. Postcards or billboards do pretty much the same thing. But social media are different.

Facebook might communicate information, but what it does best is build connections. That's the “social” in social media. When I share a link to a website, the real value of Facebook is not that I've shared a link, it's that my friends and I can discuss

If someone sitting in a pew tweets a sound bite from my sermon, the Word has been proclaimed not just inside the four walls but to the four corners of the earth. That's good in my book.

the link together. If someone is confused about your announcement of a new program on Facebook, you're likely to hear about it. Two-way communication is intrinsic to this revolution.

There are more than 750 million active Facebook users as I write this. Facebook says an average user creates ninety pieces of content each month. On social media, users are constantly interacting with one another in all sorts of ways, discussing not only trivial things but matters of the greatest importance. Like “meatspace,” cyberspace affords many opportunities to share the gospel. And when the gospel is shared, it might be with hundreds of friends at once. These friends may not be on the same continent, let alone the same town.

It seems to me that we would do well to think of social spaces as mission fields. The point is not to gather people into one's existing congregation

but to change lives. The gospel knows no national or parish boundaries. On social media sites, I can engage in conversation with people I'll never meet. My friends can share information with their friends. The web of connections is massive. It's not as effective as an in-person conversation, but the power to change hearts is every bit as real.

2) Has the time come for us, as a church, to think harder about how to reach out to this space – instead of using social media to promote our current, physical congregations?

Sure, a congregation might have a Facebook page to share information among its members. But the same level of effort can create a presence that shares the gospel across the globe. People might not be drawn to your local congregation, but through social media connections they may find their way to another. It is possible, in other words, that a congregation in one country will be building up the membership of a congregation in another, even on the other side of the globe.

If a congregation is only sharing information one-way or is always just asking for something of its members online, people will tune out. But the congregation that learns to create online community will find that the sharing goes far beyond current members. To do this requires a shift in thinking. The theological point at stake here is that we are sharing the good news (which does not need to be tied to any one congregation), not just strengthening a local institution.

We don't need to make an either-or choice between strengthening local congregations and reaching out to a global community. It is important to do both.

3) How will social media affect our worship?

Television has had a documented impact on public school education. In his 1985 book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman wrote about *Sesame Street*'s impact on the classroom. Suddenly teachers had to adapt to shortened attention spans and break lesson plans into small pieces, just like a TV program. New studies suggest that Twitter and other social media are affecting our cognitive functions. Will Twitter lead to us breaking up our liturgy into bite-sized chunks?

It's too early to tell what impact social media will have on worship. Postman also wrote about the temptation to make our worship more like TV entertainment, and it's not hard to find supporting examples. But it's also pretty easy to find examples of community worship that seem little changed from

the sixteenth or fourteenth centuries or even earlier. Perhaps there's room for both?

These questions go way beyond an etiquette controversy over whether one should encourage or discourage tweeting during worship. I think if someone sitting in a pew tweets a sound bite from my sermon, the Word has been proclaimed not just inside the four walls but to the four corners of the earth. That's good in my book.

The bigger issues will take years to understand. Perhaps we'll see in time that we've altered liturgical texts to have shorter sentences – closer to the 140 characters of a standard tweet. Perhaps we'll see that we've built in more opportunities for online sharing among members during worship. For now, we do well to pay attention to the specific changes that we are deciding to make or that people are seeking. Not every cultural or technological shift has had a direct, obvious impact on our worship.

4) What are the implications for church work? Do we still need the same kind of committees and organizations? Do social media allow us – impel us – to work differently?

Social media do change parish ministry. As a parish priest, I often learned about pastoral needs through Facebook before I heard about them by phone or in person. I was able to offer pastoral care – especially the lighter varieties – that I couldn't have offered otherwise. A “congratulations!” on news of a job.

We don't need to rely on centralized programs any more. We need networks of passionate people who can enliven us all.

“I'm sorry to hear that” to news of a disappointment. This might be no different than things I might have said at coffee hour, but coffee hour is limited to a few minutes with a few people.

Pastoral care isn't the only arena to change through social media. With social media, a member can post a message, “Who wants to come over and help plant flowers?” and the whole project is planned and volunteers are lined up without staff involvement. The medium governs the method: peer-based context encourages peer-based thinking in our common work. A healthy church can create an entrepreneurial culture in which ministries are carried out on a scale that's not possible by other means. And because it's all public, the newest member has the same access as a long-time regular.

Of course, there is plenty of potential for things to spin out of control. It's no different than coffee hour or phone-calling campaigns. Sometimes people will need encouragement and others will need to be reined in. But good leadership and clarity of purpose within a congregation will solve most of these problems, in much the same way that rogue phone campaigns are banished by healthy congregational life. Perfect love casts out fear, and good leadership casts out bad behavior.

When I was beginning a parish group for twenties-thirties, I asked them what they were looking for. "Whatever you do, don't make us go to meet-

With social networking, a healthy church can create an entrepreneurial culture in which ministries are carried out on a scale that's not possible by other means.

ings," they said unanimously. They want to be active in ministry, not in talking about possibilities of ministry. So if I want to harness that group, I wouldn't form a committee. Rather, I would invite them to be in our Facebook group, and then we'd announce a trip to a local feeding ministry. People could indicate their interest and perhaps plan to share rides or divvy up the cooking. This process, this online clarifying and delegating, turns out to be more efficient than the traditional meeting. A good leadership team will create the conditions for this kind of ministry, and they probably won't involve loads of committees and commissions.

But in this scenario, you need people who can look out for one another online. You need to foster a trust among members that they can share their online hopes and concerns. You need to allow Spirit-led ministries to flourish naturally. That, my friends, is *ekklesia*. The *ekklesia* of Facebook.

At the church-wide level, the same trends are shaping ministry. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some of the most innovative and effective programs and ministries now being created are coming not from denominational program staff but from clergy and lay leaders working together via social media. Why is this? When people who are passionate about a ministry (e.g. young adult programming) are able to work collaboratively, they can create something greater than any one person might have managed. The very passion that pushes people to sign up for the (usually unpaid) effort is the result of a commitment level and expertise where excellence can flourish.

Denominational or judicatory leaders could stop trying to create programs and ministries. Instead, they could be amplifying excellent work that already exists throughout the church. We don't need to rely on centralized programs any more. We need networks of passionate people who can enliven us all. A church-wide office might promote particular programs that are seen as effective and that cohere with denominational standards or theology. The work of the denominational or judicatory staff becomes lifting up rather than pushing down.

And this gets me back to my work at Forward Movement. We'll need to start thinking of ourselves not just as publishers of content for the church, but rather as connectors and amplifiers. We are connecting people – experts to other experts as well as content creators to content consumers. We are amplifying the best work and ministries we can find.

How do we find out where great work is happening? Social media, of course.

Denominational structures will look very different in a very few years, and not just because of resource constraints. In fact, the resource constraints may turn out to be a blessing that shakes us out of our complacency. The needs of the church are different today than they were thirty or even ten years ago. And they'll be different in five years or even next year.

I hope we can continue the conversation on Facebook.

The Rev. Scott Gunn '92 M.A.R. '96 M.Div. is Executive Director of Forward Movement, an agency of the Episcopal Church. He blogs at www.sevenwholedays.org, and you can find him on Facebook at www.facebook.com/scottgunn.

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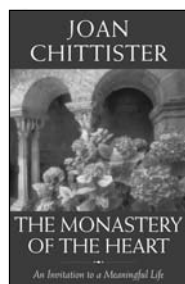


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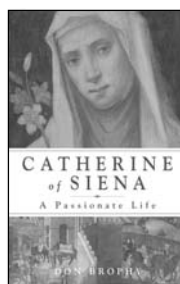
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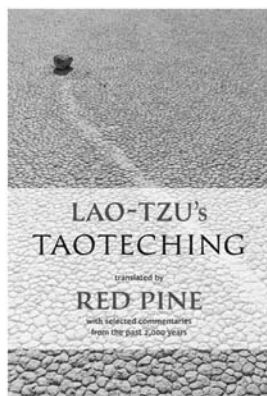
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translated by Red Pine

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Red Pine's beautifully nuanced translation is accompanied by the original Chinese and commentaries from scores of poets, monks, recluses, adepts, scholars, and emperors. "I envisioned this book," Red Pine notes in his introduction, "as a discussion between Lao-tzu and a group of people who have thought deeply about his text."

"Highly recommended."—*Library Journal*



The Lover of God

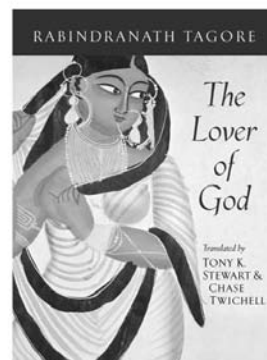
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"Highly recommended."—*Religious Studies Review*



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www.yale.edu/yalebiblestudy/

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YALE BIBLE STUDY

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The Congregational Church of New Canaan, Connecticut, faced a problem familiar to thousands of other twenty-first century congregations: how do we teach the Bible so it becomes more central to our lives?

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In 2007, New Canaan church members discovered something old and invented something new. They discovered the power of small-group dynamics, a communal model as old as the apostolic age. They gathered laypeople willing to trust each other and talk together about life-and-faith issues. Not least, they found a way to present biblical expertise in a compelling, practical format. They called on Masbach's old school—Yale Divinity School—for help.

The church arranged to tape a series of Bible conversations between YDS Dean Harold Attridge and YDS professor emeritus David Bartlett, capturing their give-and-take discussions, usually in 15-minute segments, on DVD. The church sponsored the cost and distributed the discs to the small study groups (up to a dozen people each), which committed to meeting regularly for eight weeks. The result was the Yale Bible Study Series, beginning with the Gospel of John and Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. It is our hope that viewers will find the series informative, challenging, and inspiring.

→ Read more about the Yale Bible Study Series. (pdf)

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The Gospel of John	The Gospel of John
Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians	Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians
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- *The YDS library offers free access to some four dozen valuable religion databases—including, for alumni only, the ATLASerials collection of more than 100 major religion and theology journals.*

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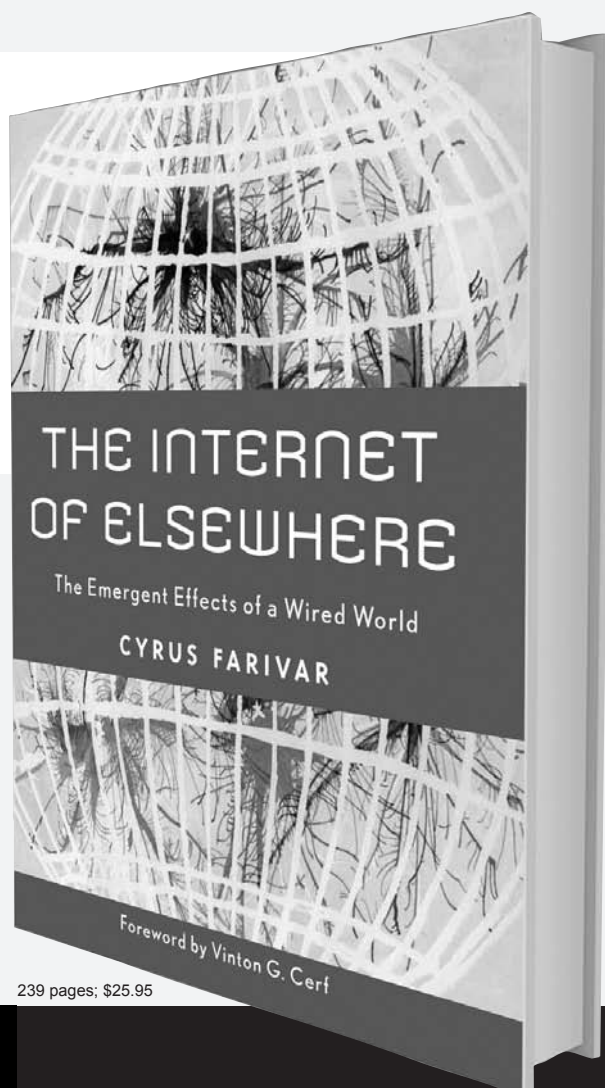
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From the Editor: “This Very Night Your Soul...”

By Ray Waddle



It all started six years ago when artist Rob Pettit lost his cell phone. It was an annoying moment, naturally, but it also stirred some unexpected thoughts.

“It occurred to me how dependent on it I had become,” says Pettit, who lives in Brooklyn NY. “I started thinking about our waste and overconsumption of technology, our dependence on it, the desire always to want the next device.”

He replaced his phone, but his thinking didn’t stop there. He started collecting discarded cell phones. A notion grew: perhaps out of these now-silent little units of circuitry, something new could be communicated.

He had no trouble gathering them. Friends handed him their old models. Recycling companies sent them by the hundreds. Before long, he had 5,000 recycled cell phones – a new palate for making art, painting, floor sculptures. This *Reflections* features some of his work.

Mobile phones are synonymous with efficiency, speed, convenience, intimacy, multitasking – also with the stressful paradox of being always connected remotely even if it means ignoring the person nearby. Pettit is mindful of these themes, but his work breaks in a different direction. Out of these little icons of hyperactivity, his quest was to create something restful and meditative – spiraling patterns, rhythms, and repetitions that spark a connection between the viewer and the work. (In his paintings, he uses a pointillism effect, drawing tiny cell phones – thousands of them – to attain the image. See pages 40 and 60 for examples.)

He takes inspiration from the sand mandalas of Tibetan Buddhist monks. Full of intricate beauty that takes hours or days to complete, these sand paintings embody a deep spiritual practice: the monks ritually destroy their meticulous artwork after completing it. The gesture is a rebuke against possessiveness, attachment, the arrogance of permanence.

Pettit captures that spirit with his cell-phone spirals and other works, taking hours to complete them in galleries or other art spaces, enjoying the meditative calm of the crafting, then happily dismantling them moments later.

“I was drawn to the Tibetan idea of spending a long time on a piece only to see it get washed away,”

he says. “I enjoy the satisfaction of doing the work and then letting go and not holding on to it. I think I’ve always felt a strong will not to have a great attachment to things.”

Examining the larger new media world, this *Reflections* issue confronts some of these questions of connection, perspective, attentiveness, glut, anxiety, balance, imbalance, and ambivalence, the search for a humane strategy through the technological gauntlet.

Debates today around media, spirituality, and society carry much of that struggle and search. So many books and arguments simply pit celebrants of technology against debunkers, while the rest of us try to sort out the next breakthrough coming at us from the glimmering horizon.

Clay Shirky fearlessly sees a new era of social collaboration and creativity emerging from our new media moment. The technology has finally caught up to our own dreams of transformation, he says.

“What matters most now is our imaginations,” he writes in *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age* (Penguin, 2010).

“The opportunity before us, individually and collectively, is enormous; what we do with it will be determined largely by how well we are able to imagine and reward public creativity, participation, and sharing.”

Shirky is exuberant and companionable about our possibilities. Others see a coming darkness – intellectual fragmentation, sensory overload, dangerous distraction.

“The way we live is eroding our capacity for deep, sustained, perceptive attention – the building block of intimacy, wisdom, and cultured progress,” writes Maggie Jackson in *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age* (Prometheus, 2008).

The personal journey of David Ulin, in his book *The Lost Art of Reading: Why Books Matter in a Distracted Time* (Sasquatch Books, 2010), acutely describes the dilemmas many of us face.

He is a professional book critic, a lover of books and reading. But something happened around 2006. He started having trouble sitting down to read. That’s the year he got high-speed internet. By the 2008 election, he was fully plugged in, checking news and analysis almost constantly. But he sensed something violent was happening to the old time-honored value of silence.

"That seems increasingly elusive in our overnetworked society, where every buzz and rumor is instantly blogged and tweeted, and it is not contemplation we desire but an odd sort of distraction, distraction masquerading as being in the know," he writes.

He worries that we are exchanging depth of thought for speed of thought. The decline of attentiveness and reading could mean the death of empathy, maybe the demise of our civilization's idea of personhood. The books he has personally read and collected amount to a tactile map and history of his inner life in ways a Kindle cannot be.

Ulim isn't writing about religion, but it's easy to see the relevance to the future of religious tradition. Church worship and faith practices invite activism, compassion – and also a sensible cultivation of patience, grace, waiting, a reckoning with mortality, a

humility before a larger divine narrative. These are contemplative values and cadences sustained by a 500-year culture of reading.

Originally hesitant, churches are embracing new media to convey the Good News. Part of that news is an assertion about what human beings really are. Are we incessant transmitters of data, helpless before the latest tech upgrade and news update? Or does the individual hold a core of mystery beyond words, a core that needs nurture and asks for acknowledgement, because that's the bedrock and battleground of conscience and identity?

"This very night your soul is required of you," it says in Luke's Gospel. Our debate now is how to hear that news bulletin – whether on an app, or the onion-sheeted page, or perhaps in the spiraling figures of a thousand discarded cell phones renewed by art.

CREDITS

ARTWORK

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POETRY

Heather McHugh is a poet, translator, writer, and teacher. She has translated Euripides' *Cyclops* and is the author of the book of essays *Broken English: Poetry and Partiality*. Her volumes of poetry include *Hinge and Sign: Poems, 1968-1993* and *Eyeshot*.

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Jim Harrison is the author of more than twenty books, including the novella *Legends of the Fall*. His volumes of poetry include *The Shape of the Journey: New and Collected Poems* and *In Search of Small Gods*.

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