A *Digital* Turn to the User👍🏽❤️🙏🏽 : (Re)imagining Preaching in the Networked Age

by

Cassandra Ann Granados

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Abstract

How can we most effectively preach in the age of TikTok, Facebook, and Zoom? This dissertation seeks to answer this question by using an interdisciplinary methodology that combines theological studies, sociology, and media studies. In the age of social media, an updated ecclesiology is needed, whereby mainline American churches look beyond their physical buildings as their sole places of influence and ministry. Rather, they recognize themselves as community members, who are interconnected to a broader network and have a responsibility to serve their community, both in-person and online. Digital media reconceptualize how we communicate, sustain relationships, and understand community; thus, preaching—both online and in-person—necessitates a new *digital* turn to the user, which is conscious of the impact of the medium on the message. This dissertation creates a networked homiletic that (re)imagines the sermon as media and the preaching event as a sacred moment to hear the proclaimed Word with the virtual body of Christ, who is neither bound by time nor space. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused churches—even the most reluctant ones—to pivot their services online, even temporarily. Beyond the pandemic, the challenge and opportunity to use media in ministry remain. Digital preaching should utilize creative approaches to be noticed on social media newsfeeds. When considering the context of the user, preaching online makes the work of contextualizing the message more complex. Furthermore, in-person preaching needs to be adapted considering the

influence of media on our attention, culture, and entertainment. A practical guide will be offered to help preachers better communicate with their listeners in both online and in-person contexts. Bringing theological, liturgical, homiletical, and theoretical aspects together will provide a foundation to create an approach to preaching for our technological world today and beyond.

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Introduction

The State of the Problem

Imagine with me … a group of pastors wanting to expand their ministry by making their sermons available on social media. After the initial nervousness and some careful planning, they mustered up the courage to put their first sermons online. Some upload their pre-recorded sermons on YouTube, while others livestream their messages on Facebook and Instagram. With the best intentions, they take the homilies that they have preached in-person and merely transfer them online, with the assumption that they would be effective. This approach seems logical, after all their homiletics professors did not indicate any distinction between preaching online and off. With eager anticipation, these pastors check their online posts and videos. To their disappointment, they discover that no one viewed their sermons, nor commented on them. Feeling discouraged, these pastors do not know what to do and begin to think that posting sermons on social media is not worth the time and energy. Even more, the naysayers in their churches have been telling them that church online is not *really* church, and moreover, true community can *only* happen in-person.

These discouraged pastors begin to consider that—maybe—the grumpy cynics have a point. In true church fashion, these ministers reflect on *how things have always been*. A church service traditionally involves Christians coming together at a designated time and place to worship. Members of a church sing hymns, pray to God, respond to the preaching, partake in Holy Communion, and give in the offering. After the service, the community exchanges handshakes, hugs, and conversation. These activities are typical of an in-person religious community, which has originated from biblical and theological roots. For example, in Mathew 18:20, Jesus instructs his disciples on the significance of this gathering, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."[1] Later, the Reformers and the Puritans have also defined the church based on these activities. The Augsburg Confession (1530) states that, "The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly

[1] Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

administered."[2] The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) instructs that the local church is where "the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed."[3] These descriptions of the church necessitate that the faith community is together in a church building; thus, a divine encounter occurs within these in-person parameters.

Despite what they know, these pastors are aware that people today are not gracing the steps of their churches, and the paradigm of in-person ministry does not have the attraction that it once did. Faith communities have a new modern reality: decreasing membership, dwindling finances, and crumbling buildings. Every Sunday, these pastors preach to aging congregations amid a sea of empty pews, and their faith communities are faced with questions of sustaining life on a shoe-string budget. They have preached and prayed for their parishioners to invite individuals, particularly "the young people," to come to their church. Nevertheless, they still hold out hope and want to expand their horizons beyond the church walls and go to where the people are—on social media. However, these pastors do not know exactly how to go about this task. Like many of us, they are genuinely asking, "How is my sermon going to be captivating in the age of TikTok and Instagram?"

Their question is an understandable concern because preaching today is a difficult task. We live in a networked age, where there are no longer distinct boundaries between our online and offline lives; rather, we simultaneously and seamlessly communicate in both. Technology has influenced our perception of relationships, community, and what seizes our attention. Social media can easily preoccupy and entertain us as we endlessly scroll through content. Amid this environment, pastors face the task of crafting sermons that are captivating enough to catch and sustain their audience's attention. Preaching the gospel on social media is not business as usual; it requires new approaches to be noticed on the digital street corner amid memes, partisan political posts, and selfies.

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[2] "The Augsburg Confession," *Book of Concord* (website), accessed October 4, 2021, https://bookofconcord.org/augsburg-confession/article-vii/, 7.1.

[3] *The Confession of Faith, Agreed Upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, with the Assistance of Commissioners from the Church of Scotland: as a Part of the Covenanted Uniformity in Religion Betwixt the Churches of Christ in the Kingdoms of Scotland, England and Ireland: Approved by the General Assembly, 1647, and Ratified and Established by Acts of Parliament, 1649 and 1690, as the Public and Avowed Confession of the Church of Scotland: with the Proofs from the Scripture.* (Haverhill, N.H: S.T. Goss, 1821), 25.4.

Nevertheless, fear not, pastors! This dissertation emerged because I was one of those pastors who mustered up the courage to livestream my first sermon on Facebook in 2016. As we all know, digital preaching went from being a peripheral activity to becoming a mainstream practice amid the unprecedented circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. Churches, who had never considered this online option, were compelled to convert their worship services to an online format. While dipping our toes in the digital waters and expanding our ministry can be difficult, the research within these pages seeks to provide both a theoretical framework for understanding church online and a practical help for preaching on social media. While this knowledge will not guarantee that our sermons will "go viral," and we will become the next greatest Internet preachers, it offers a critical starting point for conceptualizing and crafting digital sermons. My research approach seeks to uphold an ethical homiletic as set forth by Paul Scott Wilson, whereby "homiletics exists to serve the preaching needs of the church … [and] homiletics arises out of and leads to actual sermons."[4] In applying these principles, this dissertation seeks to not only offer a contribution to the academy, but also be a helpful resource for pastors.

From my pastoral experience, I have noticed two common assumptions: (1) digital worship is a passive event that does not foster community and (2) digital preaching should be identical to traditional in-person preaching, in terms of sermon composition and theological understanding. My research seeks to offer a response to these assumptions by offering an updated ecclesiology for understanding the church online, one which acknowledges our networked society. My research questions are: How is preaching online rooted in ancient and contemporary beliefs of worship and proclamation? How does digital media remediate[5] (and reconceptualize) the Christian community, particularly the preaching event? My desire is to create a homiletic which recognises media's impact on the preaching event, so that preachers can create sermons that are relevant and speak to their *glocal*[6] context. Therefore, I will seek to argue the following thesis statement: Digital media remediates (and reconceptualises) how we communicate, sustain

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[4] Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 152.

[5] Remediation refers to action of media to reconfigure, refashion, rival, and/or remix prior forms. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 61, 65, 271.

[6] *Glocal* denotes the interconnected nature of global and local contexts.

relationships, and understand community[7]; thus, preaching—both online and in-person—necessitates a new *digital* turn to the user, which is conscious of the impact of the medium on the message.

Methodology

Adapting Heidi A. Campbell and Teresa Berger's approaches[8], I propose an interdisciplinary methodology that combines theological studies, sociology, and media studies to create a new homiletical approach called a networked homiletic. This multifaceted method will advance beyond a popular understanding of social media and provide an analytical perspective of it as a phenomenon.[9] Extending beyond merely "preaching online," I will work towards a homiletical philosophy that recognises the interconnected relationality of our technological age, as we simultaneously and seamlessly operate in both digital and physical spaces. Due to the influence of media, this homiletical approach is encouraged for both preaching in both online and off.

Bringing together biblical, theological, and homiletical history, this methodology identifies the common theme of a networked community, which demonstrates that preaching online is rooted in ancient beliefs of worship and proclamation. Our networked community transcends technology, time, and space, as it can be seen in concepts like the Body of Christ and the sacramentality of preaching. Moreover, the following chapters provide descriptions of a networked community through the lens of Scripture, theology, and homiletics, which reveals that people have always been in networks, even before the digital age and the advent of social media. Media theory and sociology have just given us the language to conceptualise these connections that are formed between individuals. While networks have changed over time, connection is the greatest hope for networked communities in any era: individuals communicate, connect, and

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[7] Nancy K. Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 2nd ed, (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015); Heidi A. Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online: We are One in the Network* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

[8] Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, xviii; Teresa Berger, *@ Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 11.

[9] danah boyd, "Social Media: A Phenomenon to be Analyzed," *Social Media+Society* (April-June 2015): 1-2.

make meaning together with each other. As we will explore, networked preaching stresses the importance of engagement in the preaching event, inviting users to join the conversation. Rather than being merely "hearers" or "listeners," the online audience are media users, which denotes their active agency and potential for participation in the preaching event.

Here is the road map of our journey, as we unpack the research together:

Chapter 1 explores the apostle Paul's understanding of community through the metaphor of the Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians. Paul demonstrates an expansive understanding that extends beyond temporal, spatial, and physical limits, which provides a framework for understanding church online and networked relationality. Additionally, I briefly examine the work of Peter Damian, who applies this doctrine specifically to the question of physical presence with other worshipers. In his treatise "The Lord Be With You," Damian affirmed the inclusive belief that "the whole church is spiritually present" during the reciting of the liturgy, even if an individual is alone.[10] His framework allowed him to worship God and celebrate the Eucharist in isolation.[11] As Damian reimagined his own liturgical practice, digital worship can also be reimagined as a communal ritual that transcends time and space.

Chapter 2 explores how Calvin recognizes the Word of God as proclaimed, sacramental, and lively, which indicates how God's Spirit is involved with every aspect of proclamation, both in the pulpit and in the pew. Calvin had a deep conviction of the need to promote biblical literacy and sound doctrine amid the false teachings of his day. Today, amid the prevalence of misinformation on social media, the preaching moment—both in-person and online—provides an opportunity to impart a message of hope and good news. Additionally, preaching should be more than soundbites of information, but as Calvin expressed, a sacramental moment in which the people meet Christ through the proclaimed Word. Through the preaching of the Word, Christ transcends the limits of the physical world, and in essence, believers are connected virtually to Him through the working of the Holy Spirit. This research provides a framework for modern

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[10] Berger, *@ Worship*, 24; Peter Damian, *Selected Writings on the Spiritual Life*, trans. Patricia McNulty (New York: Harper, 1959), 63.

[11] Damian, *Selected Writings on the Spiritual Life*, 63.

preaching, whereby the listeners can receive Christ's grace, virtually. Due to the vast amount of Calvin's writings, a select sampling from the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, his commentaries, and sermons are used to capture a portrait of his understanding of preaching both in theory and practice.

Chapter 3 traces the homiletical history of the past sixty years as homileticians have conveyed their understanding of the Christian community and have negotiated the relationship between preachers and hearers in their approaches. The New Homiletic movement represented a "turn to the listener," which emerged from the crisis and questioning in the 1970s. Postmodern preaching can best be understood as a "turn to the other(s)," which offers a revision on prior understandings of community as it values particularity over appeals to common human experience. Looking at the New Homiletic and postmodern homiletics, preaching scholars have envisioned an expansive ecclesiology that attempts to make the sermon more collaborative and give voice to the hearers' particularity and lived experience, which provides a framework for proclamation in the age of social media. The most recent development in homiletics is the "turn to digital preaching," which can be seen in Casey Thornburgh Sigmon's research, in which she creates a classification scheme for the theory and practice of digital preaching that she calls *homilecclesiology*. With digital preaching, the preaching event goes "beyond the limits of the liturgical event, sanctuary space, and face-to-face encounter."[12] Digital preaching fosters community by opening the preaching event to more individuals beyond the time-space limits of in-person worship. In disrupting the binary between the pulpit and pew, this framework encourages the voices of the community through digital dialogue in the comment section, by tweeting, and through other technological means.[13] Sigmon's expansive ecclesiology is rooted in relational networks,[14] which provide a foundation for reimagining a homiletic that incorporates digital media theory.

Venturing to disciplines outside of the realm of theological studies, chapter 4 provides theoretical concepts for understanding our experience in a networked environment. Drawing from digital

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[12] Casey Thornburgh Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly: A Process Homilecclesiology for a Digital Age" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2017), 142.

[13] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 13, 142, 205.

[14] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 142.

media and sociology, the theories of presence, relationality (tie strength), remediation, and qualities of digital communities are discussed as they inform our experience of church online. This chapter demonstrates that through textual interactions and emoticons, digital media remediates (and reconceptualizes) how we communicate, sustain relationships, and understand community, which suggest ways that churches can develop community in digital settings. Examples of effective engagement between a preacher and the congregation are presented. This remediation indicates that the movement from offline to online is not direct but, rather, is impacted by the digital medium itself.[15] This engagement through the comment section and emoticons suggest ways in which churches can develop community in digital settings. Additionally, the differentiating factor between digital faith-based communities from other networks will be discussed. For the Academy of Homiletics, this education provides a necessary framework to make worship and preaching more effective in digital spaces. Teaching these theories will help pastors implement strategies to help build community, both online and in person.

The final chapter articulates a homiletic that (re)imagines preaching in mainline churches, particularly in the United States. In digitally turning to the user, networked preaching reimagines the *sermon as media* and the preaching event as a sacred moment to hear the proclaimed Word with the virtual body of Christ, who is not bound by time and space. Additionally, in-person networked preaching needs to be adaptive considering the influence of media on our attention, culture, and entertainment. This chapter helps to dispel the assumption that putting a camera in front of a preacher is all that is necessary for digital preaching. The current homiletical approaches require a revision and a reorientation for preaching today in a networked age. Sermons on social media should be adapted to online spaces, which requires a theological (re)imagining and creative approaches to be noticed on social media newsfeeds. Practical guidelines for preaching will be offered to help preachers to communicate better with their listeners in online and in-person contexts. Bringing theological, liturgical, homiletical, and theoretical aspects together will provide a foundation to create an informed approach to preaching for our technological world today and beyond.

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[15] Swagato Chakravorty, "Mediation," *The Chicago School of Media Theory* (blog), accessed December 10, 2020, https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/mediation/.

One further reflection on the rationale and research process should be noted. The decision to use specific authors within this thesis was an intentional and deliberate choice. The Apostle Paul was chosen for chapter 1 because he is a central figure in the New Testament and formational to Christian thought. For chapter 2, Calvin was selected because his theology is influential to the Christian tradition and especially the Reformed tradition to which I belong. The homileticians used in chapter 3 were selected because of their influence and impact on the field of homiletics. Finally, the media theorists chosen for chapter 4 were selected because their theories were pertinent to digital faith communities. Moreover, Pink Robe Chronicles was chosen as an example because of their robust engagement between a preacher and her congregation online.

Limitations and Contribution

In clarifying what this dissertation is, it is important to identify its research limitations. This dissertation is not in biblical studies, Pauline studies, on Calvin, nor the history of the church. Rather, this research attempts to identify themes and concepts in the biblical witness and in the history of the Church that may be rightly brought forward when considering the potential of church online. While these concepts, ideas, and doctrines are used, this is a dissertation in homiletics, which has an approach different from other cognate subjects like systematic theology, historical theology, and biblical studies.

This research contributes to theological studies by providing an updated ecclesiology for a social media age, in which churches look beyond their physical buildings as their sole places of influence and ministry. Rather, these churches recognize themselves as community members, who are interconnected to a broader network and have a responsibility to serve their community, both in-person and online. While some may dismiss church online as “not being church,” this thesis offers another perspective and a theological understanding in discerning where God is in the digital preaching event. By incorporating digital media theory, this thesis offers a rich notion of digital presence, which recognizes that digital spaces can be sacred, meaningful, and a means of connection. This interdisciplinary research is a missing perspective in both the academy and the church, as it incorporates media theories to create a homiletical approach. This dissertation suggests a new turn to the user, which complicates the standard of the speaker-listener model and indicates the participants’ engagement in the preaching moment online. Departing from previous

scholarship, this thesis seeks to redefine homiletical theology and practice considering our network sociality. The outcome will be sermons that are better adapted to social media by generating more digital engagement.

To conclude, a final note about this present work's title is offered. The title, A *Digital* Turn to the User 👍🏽❤️🙏🏽: (Re)imagining Preaching in the Networked Age, with its corresponding emojis is intentional and not a mere aesthetic choice. Historically, the "thumbs up" emoji was one of the first options for user's engagement on social platforms. Later, the "heart" emoji became an added reaction available to users, along with the "praying hands" emoji. An example of this engagement is seen in the Pink Robes Chronicles, which is offered in chapter 4. These emojis not only illustrate the specific ways users can engage with content on social media, but they are symbols of user engagement itself. Moreover, the title has an implicit dual meaning because it not only means "A Digital Turn to the User," but it also infers "A Digital Turn to User Engagement," whereby the term "engagement" is exchanged with these three emojis and their specificity to digital culture.

Let us begin (re)imagining preaching in a networked age…

Chapter 1
Biblical Community and Virtual Presence

"…we are all one body in Christ and we who dwell in Him cannot be separated from one another in spirit even though we are separated in the flesh…."[16]

With the emergence of new technology, critics inevitably voice their opposition to its use. Theologian Robert V. Jenson warned vehemently in 1987 that the "institutionalization of electronic mediation is, for the church, the enemy. By their need and power to replace human communities by a human mass, these media contradict the church's message."[17] He was referring to the technology of his day: television, radio, and print journalism, which do not allow hearers to have "intrinsic contact with each other."[18] Due to this lack of engagement between participants, Jenson asserts that, "mass media cannot create or foster a community."[19] Furthermore, the gospel cannot be conveyed through media because genuine communication requires embodied presence.[20] However, Jenson did maintain that media could be used to educate faith and provide a "window" to observe the church.[21]

Later in 2005, theologian Craig A. Baron determined that digitally mediated worship was a "disembodied, non-communitarian, and ahistorical sense of sacramental participation."[22] He was referring to the Eternal Word Television Network's rituals, such as the televised rosary, mass,

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[16] Peter Damian, "The Book of 'The Lord Be With You,'" in *Selected Writings on the Spiritual Life,* 53-81, trans. Patricia McNulty (New York, Harper, 1959), 62.

[17] Robert V. Jenson, "The Church and Mass Electronic Media: The Hermeneutic Problem," *Religious Education* 82, no. 2 (1987): 281.

[18] Jenson, "The Church and Mass Electronic Media," 280.

[19] Jenson, "The Church and Mass Electronic Media," 280.

[20] Jenson, "The Church and Mass Electronic Media," 283.

[21] Jenson, "The Church and Mass Electronic Media," 284.

[22] Craig A. Baron, "Sacraments 'Really Save' in Disneyland: Reconciling Bodies in Virtual Reality," *Questions Liturgiques: Studies in Liturgy* 86 (2005): 305.

and sacramental adoration.[23] He notes the value of the sacraments to provide grounding for human existence in relation to God, community, and liturgy.[24] While noting the promise of the Internet for building connection and community, Baron also indicates that "theology will be highly critical of virtual reality and cyberspace for its loss of the body."[25] He warns that virtual reality diminishes the importance of human embodiment, which is "a means of God's revelation, a place of encounter with God."[26]

Recently in 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Pastor Ronald L. Giese asserted that "online church is not church."[27] Drawing from biblical accounts, he concludes that "God's dwelling in the church is a *place*," which encompasses all local churches simultaneously.[28] Additionally, Giese cautions against accepting new terms and contexts, such as assuming the New Testament permits a theology of digital presence.[29] He considers online church to be a disembodied experience[30] and further maintains that "physical bodies are an integral part of God's sanctification and redemption."[31] However, Giese does recognise that some aspects of church ministry, like teaching and discipleship, could be done online – even though they are inferior to their in-person counterparts.[32]

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[23] Baron, "Sacraments 'Really Save' in Disneyland," 305.

[24] Baron, "Sacraments 'Really Save' in Disneyland," 285.

[25] Baron, "Sacraments 'Really Save' in Disneyland," 303.

[26] Baron, "Sacraments 'Really Save' in Disneyland," 284.

[27] Ronald L. Giese, Jr. "Is 'Online Church' Really Church? The Church as God's Temple," *Themelios* 45, no. 2 (August 2020), https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/issue/45-2/, 366.

[28] Giese, "Is 'Online Church' Really Church?" 367.

[29] Giese, "Is 'Online Church' Really Church?" 367.

[30] Giese, "Is 'Online Church' Really Church?" 362.

[31] Giese, "Is 'Online Church' Really Church?" 367.

[32] Giese, "Is 'Online Church' Really Church?" 365.

As noted above, Jensen, Baron, and Giese raise genuine concerns about technology's limitations to provide embodiment, presence, and community within church contexts. Their response may have been fueled by their motivation to preserve and protect the institution of the church and its traditions. However, they are mistaken in thinking that digital church cannot supply these qualities. As this thesis is being written, the COVID-19 pandemic with its increasing variants continues to be a great concern. While it is impossible to predict the future, this unprecedented moment presses us to think more seriously about the nature of digital church. This thesis will attempt to provide a robust understanding of digital embodiment, presence, and community, not only for the health and safety of the world, but also for non-pandemic times.

The objective of this first chapter will be to examine the way the ancient church provides a conceptual framework for the notion of church online in our networked world. This rhetorical and sociohistorical analysis suggests that apostolic succession of the church is not dependent upon physical presence and that digital worship is rooted in ancient beliefs of the Christian community. In this chapter, I argue that the apostle Paul's understanding of community, through the metaphor of the Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians demonstrates an expansive understanding that extends beyond temporal, spatial, and physical limits, which provides a framework for understanding church online and networked relationality. Additionally, I briefly examine the work of Peter Damian, who applies this doctrine specifically to the question of physical presence with other worshipers.

The first section explores ancient expressions of community found in voluntary associations, which suggest the cultural understanding of community that was established before Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. The next section examines Paul's use of σῶμα (body) to identify the Corinthians as σῶμα Χριστοῦ (the Body of Christ) within 1 Corinthians 11-14. While it is not possible to cover all aspects of this matter, the focus will be on understanding the kind of network to which the people are connected through their relationship with Christ, one that is inclusive and does not hinge upon class and status. The third section provides instances, wherein preaching and worship occur without bodily presence. Paul used epistles to extend his presence and preach when he could not be physically there, thus his relationship with the early churches was not always dependent upon in-person interaction. Additionally, Damian was able to worship God and celebrate the Eucharist without the physical presence of others. As Paul and Damian reimagined

their understanding of community and worship, digital worship can also be reimagined as a communal ritual that transcends time and space.

1.1 Understanding Ancient Expressions of Community

Eating meals together is a timeless and central activity of communities. Insights into the values of a community can be drawn from what takes place at the table. Before examining Paul's guidance on the Lord's Supper, the customary practices of voluntary associations and the associated class disparity will be explored. These gatherings suggest the cultural backdrop that presumably informed the Corinthians' understanding of community before Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. This section explains some of the specific protocols of these associations, which Paul was attempting to counteract for the Eucharistic meal.

1.1.1 Voluntary Associations in the Ancient World

Voluntary associations were a common aspect of Graeco-Roman culture, as individuals would come together to form their own societies of choice,[33] even marking the formation of their groups with a toast.[34] These groups were centred around family, vocational trade, or a cultic god.[35] Participation in these associations increased during the Hellenistic age as cities were no longer facilitators of religious life.[36] These small societies provided their members with a sense of social importance and self-esteem. New Testament scholar Stephen J. Chester reflects that "[The members] became somebody in their own smaller world, even though they never could be

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[33] Stephen J. Chester, *Conversion at Corinth: Perspectives on Conversion in Paul's Theology and the Corinthian Church* (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 227.

[34] Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations 50 B.C. to 284 A.D.* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 82.

[35] Chester, *Conversion at Corinth*, 228.

[36] Chester, *Conversion at Corinth*, 228-29.

in the larger one."[37] Yet, the greater society did recognize, as a whole, the existence of these small groups.[38] Financially supported by their members, the associations also provided ceremonies marking the stages of life: birth, "coming of age," and burial.[39]

These societies operated successfully by contractually obligating their members to financial dues, organizational protocols, and etiquette. In the second century, a group of Dionysos worshippers in Athens used the *Rules of Iobacchoi* to govern their organization.[40]

> The Iobacchoi shall meet on the ninth of each month … each member shall take part in word or act or honorable deed, paying the fixed monthly contribution for the wine. If he fail [*sic*] to pay, he shall be excluded from the gathering … until the priests have decided either that he must pay or that he may be admitted.[41]

Along with being barred due to unpaid contributions, the Iobacchoi members could also exclude individuals from the assembly once a month by vote. Chester notes that as a result, "those on the inside of a club, whatever their rank, could feel themselves superior to those excluded, particularly if they knew it to be a good club."[42]

Due to the commonplace nature of the voluntary associations, a logical conclusion is that Corinth had these social gatherings like the other metropolitan cities.[43] Therefore, these societies also provide an important reference for understanding the early congregations of Christ. This historical methodology prevents modern readers from seeing Christian communities as a unique phenomenon.[44] For instance, as the Iobacchoi allowed exclusion, the Corinthians also imposed

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[37] Chester, *Conversion at Corinth*, 229.

[38] Chester, *Conversion at Corinth*, 229.

[39] Chester, *Conversion at Corinth*, 231.

[40] Marvin W. Meyer, ed., *The Ancient Mysteries, A Sourcebook: Sacred Texts of the Mystery Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 95-96.

[41] Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, lines 42-71.

[42] Chester, *Conversion at Corinth*, 240.

[43] Chester, *Conversion at Corinth*, 231.

[44] Chester, *Conversion at Corinth*, 234.

their own divisions and restrictions based on an individual's social standing, which is explored later.

1.1.2 Food Disparities Between the Haves and the Have Nots

Mirroring the greater society, voluntary associations had their own form of hierarchy and visible class divisions, which is most noticeable in the food they ate.[45] Classicist Peter Garnsey suggests that in these ancient societies, food was used as a means of expressing one's wealth and earning stature in one's social setting.[46] In celebrating the birth of a child, a rich family would enjoy an extravagant meal. Ancient Greek historian Ephippus describes this feast,

> to roast a slice of Chersonesian cheese and stew cabbage shimmering with oil and bake fat lambs' breasts and pluck ringdoves and thrushes, as well as finches, and nibble on cuttlefish and small-fry together and vigorously pound numerous octopus tentacles and drink many cups of strong wine.[47]

In addition, the recipes of the wealthy often included exotic animals, a variety of ingredients, and generous portions. For example, Roman gourmet Apicius provides a recipe in his cookbook for roasted flamingo with various herbs and spices, which is served with a honey wine sauce.[48] Greek scholar John Edwards argues that feasting on rare birds, like flamingos, was a "culinary status symbol."[49] Furthermore, Athenaeus indicates that wealthy individuals not only ate fine delicacies, but also indulged in excessive amounts of food and drink. For instance, comic poet

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[45] Peter Garnsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 128.

[46] Garnsey, *Food and Society*, 113.

[47] Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters, Volume I: Books 1-3.106e*, Loeb Classical Library 204, ed. and trans. S. Douglas Oslon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), book II, 65d, 367.

[48] John Edwards, *The Roman Cookery of Apicius*: *A Treasury of Gourmet Recipes & Herbal Cookery*, trans. John Edwards (Washington, DC: Hartley & Marks, 1984), book 6, VI-1, 2.

[49] Edwards, *Roman Cookery of Apicius*, 135.

Antiphanes reflected that, "I enjoyed many fine foods; and after I drank three toasts, or maybe four, I ran a bit wild, since I'd consumed enough food for four elephants or so."[50]

In contrast to those who had plenty, the poor experienced a different reality in the ancient world. Athenaeus recounts the experience of an impoverished woman with her family of five, "We raise our voices in lyreless lament whenever we have nothing; and because of our lack of food, our complexions are pale."[51] When the lower classes were able to eat, their available foods were limited and simple, predominately consisting of a prominently vegetarian diet with some insects, like cicadas.[52] In his epigrams, second century Roman poet Martial recounts the disgraceful occasion when a rich man Cæcilianus gorges on truffles in front of a crowd of his invited guests.[53] Pliny the Younger, a late first century Roman author who is best known for his writing on nature, recounts that the hosts served "choice fare" to the privileged few at the dinner party, while the lower-class attendees were relegated to "cheap food and tiny portions."[54]

As the various accounts demonstrate, the ancient world established class divisions, which were dramatically expressed at mealtimes. The haves and have nots experienced two different realities, one of opulence and the other of scarcity. Most likely, the Corinthians had this cultural understanding, which they inadvertently brought to the Lord's Supper.

1.2 The Corinthians as the networked Body of Christ

This section reconstructs the trouble at the Corinthians' table by using archaeological, sociological, and textual evidence. Even though modern readers may never have definitive

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[50] Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters, Volume II: Books 3.106e-5,* Loeb Classical Library 208, ed. and trans. S. Douglas Oslon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), book III, 127d, 109.

[51] Athenaeus, *Learned Banqueters,* book II, 55f.

[52] Athenaeus, *Learned Banqueters,* book II, 55f.

[53] Martial, *The Epigrams of Martial,* Bohn's Classical Library (London, Henry Childs and Son, 1860), 34; cf. Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essay on Corinth*, ed. John H. Schutz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 157.

[54] Pliny the Younger, *Complete Letters*, Oxford World's Classics, Oxford Scholarly Editions Online, ed. Peter G. Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), liber II.6.2.

answers, these theories give insight into the situation that Paul was addressing in Corinth. While scholars may disagree on the economic status of the Corinthians, what is apparent is the disparity at the table. Despite the normative communal practices concerning food, Paul was attempting to establish a new standard and expectations for the believers in Corinth as they are all networked together through Christ. The values of an inclusive community that Paul was instilling in the Corinthians is applicable to modern faith communities, both in-person and online.

1.2.1 Reconstructing the Lord's Supper with Archaeological Evidence

In 1 Corinthians 11:17-22, Paul gives a description of what is occurring when the believers gathered. He identifies the σχίσματα (divisions, 11:18) among them, whereby some individuals are drunk, and others are hungry at the Lord's Supper (11:21). New Testament scholar Gordon D. Fee suggests that when Paul says, "go ahead with one's own supper," he is referring to wealthy people eating their own private meals with generous portions.[55] The theme of excess and scarcity exhibited by the Corinthians sounds like the Graeco-Roman accounts discussed earlier. Drawing upon archaeological evidence, New Testament scholar Jerome Murphy-O'Connor suggests that Roman homes, such as the villa of Anaploga,[56] were a possible setting where the Corinthians celebrated the Lord's Supper.[57] Due to its physical dimensions and the couches around its walls, the dining room could only accommodate nine guests. Therefore, the owner of the house would allow his closest friends to recline while eating lavish food and drink in the comfort of a heated room.[58] Consequently, everyone else would be relegated to the Atrium, which could hold 30 to 40 people. These remaining guests were stuck sitting close together, with

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[55] Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 590.

[56] Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "House-Churches and the Eucharist," in *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, 3rd ed., 153-73, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 155.

[57] Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 159.

[58] Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 155 and 159; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "House-Churches and the Eucharist," in *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church*, eds. Edward Adams and David G. Horrell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 134.

small bits of food in a cold, open-air room.[59] Drawing on Romans 16:23, Murphy-O'Connor proposes that Gaius, who was a wealthy believer at Corinth, could have hosted the faith community at his home.[60] His theory[61] suggests that the design of these villas inadvertently encouraged the division and food disparity amongst the believers, as not everyone was able to partake in the Lord's Supper in the same location.

1.2.2 Social Status of the Corinthians

Complementing Murphy-O'Connor's research, New Testament scholar Gerd Theissen offers a sociological perspective about the Corinthians, which has become the "new consensus" among scholars.[62] The congregation at Corinth was socially and economically diverse, in particular, the faith community was composed mostly of people from the lower class with a few noble, influential members (1 Corinthians 1:26).[63] Furthermore, most of the people that Paul explicitly mentions by name in his letter were of high social status,[64] such as Crispus and Stephanas, who led their own households (1 Corinthians 1:16; Acts 18:8),[65] and Gaius, who most likely hosted a communal meal for the believers at Corinth (Romans 16:23).[66]

Social stratification among the believers in Corinth is evident in 1 Corinthians 11:17-22. Nineteenth century theologian Frédéric Godet identified ὃς πεινᾷ (one is hungry, 11:21) and τοὺς

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[59] Murphy-O'Connor, *Christianity at Corinth*, 132; Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 156.

[60] Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 156.

[61] Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 160-61; Chester argues that "The assumption of a large house is therefore defensible in relation to the Corinthian church even if not in relation to others." Chester, *Conversion at Corinth*, 250 n. 92.

[62] Gerd Theissen, "Social Stratification in the Corinthian Community: A Contribution to the Sociology of Early Hellenistic Christianity," in *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church*, eds. Edward Adams and David G. Horrell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 98.

[63] Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 146.

[64] Theissen, *Christianity at Corinth*, 105.

[65] Theissen, *Christianity at Corinth*, 104.

[66] Theissen, *Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 158.

μὴ ἔχοντας (the ones not having, 11:22) as "the poor."[67] Theissen also adopted this interpretation. Conversely, "the wealthy" are individuals who are identified as eating their own dinner (11:21) and getting drunk, (11:22).[68] Unlike our modern understanding of the Eucharistic meal, the Lord's Supper at Corinth did not consist of merely bread and wine, but also additional foods in various quantities and qualities.[69] Like Theissen, New Testament scholar Hans Conzelmann states that the Corinthians' meal was "not merely a sacramental proceeding, but a real meal."[70] As discussed in the previous section, hosts would often serve guests food that corresponded with their social status.[71] Thus, in practice, the greater an individual was in society, the greater was his or her dinner portion and the quality of the food.[72] For instance, Martial describes the food disparity between the privileged nobleman Ponticus and the poor,

> You partake of oysters fattened in the Lucrine lake; I tear my lips in sucking at a limpet. Before you are placed splendid mushrooms; I help myself to such as are fit only for pigs.… The golden turtle-dove fills your stomach with its over-fattened body; a magpie which died in its cage is set before me.[73]

Considering this account and the others discussed earlier, one can determine that the privilege and social influence of the higher-class Corinthians allowed them to control what happened at the meal. Theissen determines that "the wealthy Christians not only ate by themselves and began before the regular Lord's Supper, but also had more to eat."[74]

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[67] Frédéric Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 2, Clark's Foreign Theological Library, trans. A. Cusin (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1890), 144.

[68] Theissen, *Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 155.

[69] Theissen, *Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 153, 155.

[70] Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, ed. George W. MacRae SJ, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 1975), 195.

[71] Theissen, *Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 156.

[72] Theissen, *Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 154.

[73] Martial, *Epigrams of Martial*, 3.60; cf. Theissen, *Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 157.

[74] Theissen, *Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 155.

While Theissen's theory is well regarded, early Christian scholar Justin J. Meggitt denies that the celebration of the Lord's Supper was a full meal, rather it was exclusively the Eucharistic elements.[75] He argues that majority of the early Christians lived in poverty like many of the people of the Roman empire,[76] thus rejecting the notion that τοὺς μὴ ἔχοντας (the ones not having, 11:22) are "the poor." Rather, these "have nots" were merely people, who were denied the bread and wine. However, Meggitt's interpretation is difficult to accept, since the description in verse 21b of one being hungry and another drunk presupposes large quantities and varieties of food and drink.[77] Moreover, his assertion also seems unlikely, considering the Graeco-Roman customary practice of different social classes eating meals semi-together; even the slaves receive a small bit of inferior food. As discussed earlier, Ponticus did not deny the poor something to eat, but rather offered him barely edible items.

In the end, this economic disparity between the privileged and the poor exacerbated the division at the Lord's Supper that Paul addressed. The Corinthians lived in a culture that normalized the behavior of discrimination through food, and how people were treated at mealtime reflected how society valued them.

1.2.3 Discerning the Body

After rebuking the unacceptable behavior that left some hungry and others drunk, Paul exhorts them to not partake in the Lord's Supper in this dishonorable manner, but rather to recognize the body. This section uses a more detailed exegetical approach by analyzing the textual variants in the Scriptural manuscripts to reveal the body to which Paul refers.

In the words of institution (11:23-26), Jesus said to his disciples that the bread is μού τὸ σῶμα (my body). Paul gives a warning to those who partake in the Lord's Supper in an ἀναξίως

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[75] Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 118-22, 189-93; Chester, *Conversion at Corinth*, 246-47 n80.

[76] Justin J. Meggitt, "The Social Status of Erastus (Rom. 16:23)," in *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church*, 220.

[77] Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, 118-22, 189-93; Chester, *Conversion at Corinth*, 246-47 n80.

(unworthy manner) will be guilty τοῦ σώματος καὶ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ κυρίου (of sinning against[78] the body and blood of the Lord, 11:27). Paul's warning should be interpreted considering his earlier rebuke of the Corinthians' conduct (11:17-22). New Testament scholar Joseph A. Fitzmyer states that the Corinthians made the Lord's Supper "an occasion for social discrimination and divisive conduct."[79] In addition, the unworthy manner of the Lord Supper was not merely the injustice of the food disparity between the rich and the poor; rather, the Corinthians' behavior was a symptom of a more insidious issue. Chester determines that "The main problem is rather that those of higher social status compete amongst themselves for honour and influence."[80] He identifies that the Lord's Supper was a "new social practice" that the Corinthians were trying to implement; however, they were doing it with the memory of their old association meals.[81] Paul was running a high risk by confronting the very existence of this problem, for he was asking for a "radical social adjustment from his richer converts than their association would have ever asked of them."[82]

Paul gives the imperative that the Corinthians need to examine themselves before partaking in the Lord's Supper (11:28), and he cautions that those who are not διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα (discerning the body, 11:29) inflict judgement upon themselves. In verse 29, it is unclear which body Paul refers to, whether it is Christ's physical body or "the body of Christ," the gathered assembly.[83] The Greek critical apparatus also indicates this textual variant for verse 29, as manuscripts use σῶμα (body), σῶμα τοῦ κυρίου (body of the Lord), σῶμα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ (body of the Lord Jesus), or αἷμα τοῦ κυρίου (blood of the Lord).[84]

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[78] Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 619. Fee adds "sinning against" to help the readers' understanding of this verse.

[79] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*: *A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 427.

[80] Chester, *Conversion at Corinth*, 249.

[81] Chester, *Conversion at Corinth*, 251.

[82] Chester, *Conversion at Corinth,* 251.

[83] "σῶμα," Barbara Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014), dictionary section, 179.

[84] Aland et al., *Greek New Testament*, 1 Corinthians 11:29 (critical apparatus [6]29), 575.

To understand his intent, we should consider the surrounding context of this passage and take note of any additional references to σῶμα (body) as the assembly of people. In 1 Corinthians 10:17, Paul states that, ὅτι εἷς ἄρτος, ἓν σῶμα οἱ πολλοί ἐσμεν, οἱ γὰρ πάντες ἐκ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἄρτου μετέχομεν[85] ("because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread"[86]). In 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul writes, καὶ γὰρ ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι ἡμεῖς πάντες εἰς ἓν σῶμα ἐβαπτίσθημεν, εἴτε Ἰουδαῖοι εἴτε Ἕλληνες, εἴτε δοῦλοι εἴτε ἐλεύθεροι, καὶ πάντες ἓν πνεῦμα ἐποτίσθημεν[87] ("For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit"[88]). Paul describes here a kind of network to which all the people are connected through their relationship with Christ. Irrespective of ethnicity or social status, all believers are connected to the one Spirit of God. Later, in 12:27, Paul also identifies the assembly of believers as σῶμα, when he declares δέ Ὑμεῖς ἐστε σῶμα Χριστοῦ (Now, you are the body of Christ).

Therefore, when interpreting this passage on the Lord's Supper, the reader can determine that Paul did not want distinctions to be made at the table; rather, as a unifying symbol, the bread refers to the body, which refers to the congregation. Fee declares that one part of the body of Christ cannot abuse or disrespect another and an abuse of the body is actually "an abuse of Christ himself."[89] Thus, the wealthy Corinthians cannot abuse their poorer neighbours at the Lord's Table. Fee confirms this interpretation, offering that

> Most likely the term "body," even though it comes by way of the words of institution (v. 24), deliberately recalls Paul's earlier interpretation of the bread (10:17), thus indicating that the concern is with the problem in Corinth itself, of the rich abusing the poor. Everything Paul goes on to write seems to point in this direction.[90]

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[85] Bible, Society of Biblical Literature, Greek New Testament (SBLGNT), accessed through BibleGateway.com.

[86] Bible, NRSV.

[87] Bible, SBLGNT.

[88] Bible, NRSV.

[89] Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 589, 591.

[90] Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 623.

When Paul exhorts the Corinthians to discern the body, he is not only referring to recognising Christ's body, but also the assembly of people. New Testament scholar Luise Schottroff explains that at the Lord's Supper, "the bodies of the believers are united with the body of Christ," thus "they as a fellowship *are* the body of Christ."[91] Therefore, 1 Corinthians 11:29 means that, "For the one, who eats and drinks without discerning the body [of Christ], eats and drinks judgment on himself."[92] Paul later indicates in 11:30-32 that many people are weak and some have died, as a result of the Corinthians neglecting of one another. He exhorts them that it is better that they examine themselves. These exhortations resemble preaching.

Concluding his instruction, Paul uses the vocative case, addressing the Corinthians calling them ἀδελφοί μου (my brothers, 11:33). Pauline scholar Wayne A. Meeks notes the significance of Paul's use of familial terminology, asserting that

> More than a metaphor is involved here, for the Christians are evidently expected not only to cherish fellow members of the sect with the same care as they would natural siblings, but even to replace natural family ties by those of this new family of God, created by conversion and ritual initiation.[93]

The Corinthians, both the privileged and the poor, were a new family of God who found their identity through the death and resurrection of Christ. Their love and devotion bound them not only with Christ, but also with each other. Christian Scriptures scholar David E. Garland adds that as one family, the Corinthians were supposed to share their resources with one another.[94] Paul gives the Corinthians the advice that when they eat the Lord's Supper, they should ἀλλήλους ἐκδέχεσθε (wait for one another, 11:33). He addresses the believers, who were indulging in excess, by requesting that they eat at home. Paul was effectively shutting down the exclusive dinner parties of the privileged, whereby they were competing for honor amongst

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[91] Luise Schottroff, "Holiness and Justice: Exegetical Comments on 1 Corinthians 11:17-34," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 79 (2000): 60.

[92] My translation.

[93] Wayne A. Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christian* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 129.

[94] David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 422.

themselves. While class distinctions continued to be present in the larger society, he advocated that the table should be an inclusive space.

1.2.4 Implications for the Christian Community

Paul's instructions at the Lord's Table reveal important values of a faith community. Commonly, pastors ask their congregations to examine themselves to prevent them from partaking in communion in an unworthy manner. The focus at the Lord's Supper is often on personal piety and the condition of one's own relationship with God. Many pastors draw upon Calvin's understanding,

> To *eat unworthily* … is to pervert the pure and right *use* of it by our abuse of it.… Some *fornicator* … or *perjurer*, or *drunkard*, or *cheat* … intrudes himself without repentance. Another … will come forward, who is not addicted to any open or flagrant vice, but at the same time not so prepared in heart as became him.[95]

While repenting from one's own sin and preparing one's heart is beneficial, Paul also exhorts us that our relationship with God is intrinsically linked with that of our neighbour. He decries the disgraceful event of believers gorging in excess, while their brothers and sisters in Christ are deprived (1 Corinthians 11:21). The unworthy manner at the Lord's Supper is assumed to be eating the Communion elements without recognising Christ's sacrifice. Considering the broader context of the words of institution, perhaps Paul wanted the Corinthians to recognize everyone at the table and to discern the collective Body of Christ.

The values of an inclusive community that Paul was instilling in the Corinthians is applicable to modern faith communities. Like the Corinthians, we can often be blinded by our own privilege and disregard our neighbours. Our culture encourages indulging in excess and competing for status, which consequently leaves others marginalized and hungry; this is the all-too-familiar story of the "haves" and "have nots." Like the Corinthians, we create divisions among ourselves based upon the differences that separate us. Reflecting on 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, New

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[95] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1, Calvin's Commentaries, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 385.

Testament scholar Sharon H. Ringe contends that the Lord's Supper eliminates our categories because we are uniting in covenant with Christ.[96] Furthermore, communion generates community and exhorts believers to acts of justice.[97] While our modern Eucharist has uniform elements, we can look beyond the sacrament to find contemporary application. Ringe poses reflective questions, asking, "Do we retain food for our own private feasting that in fact is for the sustenance of the whole community? Is the body eaten unworthily when we live in plenty as if that were our due, while neighbors for whom we as the wealthy are called to provide go away hungry?"[98] Paul was urging the faith community to be aware at the Lord's Supper and to realise how they were treating each other. Likewise, before coming to the Lord's Table, Christians can discern the needs of their community and ask if they are caring for the "least of these," who are a part of God's family (Matthew 25:40).

Relating to our present study, the objective of this thesis is to "discern the body," with respect to the Internet and our network of relationships that make up the digital church. Church online is an extension of a faith community's values by recognising those who are beyond the church's walls are also members of the Body of Christ. It allows more people to have a front row seat in the service and participate through the platform features, which will be discussed later. More individuals have an opportunity to come to the Lord's Supper and partake in the sacraments when it is celebrated online. Therefore, having worship services available on social platforms allows the church to be more inclusive and fully live out their identity as the Body of Christ, as everyone is welcome at the virtual table.

1.3 Preaching and Worship—Beyond Physical Presence

The faith community is the Body of Christ, and this network values being inclusive by recognising everyone who comes to the table. The activities of this community are not

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[96] Sharon Ringe, "Hospitality, Justice, and Community: Paul's Teaching on the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34," *Prism*: *A Theological Forum for the United Church of Christ* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1986): 65.

[97] Ringe, *Prism*, 66.

[98] Ringe, *Prism*, 65.

necessarily dependent upon physical proximity. The third section provides instances, wherein preaching and worship occur without bodily presence. Paul used epistles to extend his presence and preach when he could not be physically there, thus his relationship with the early churches was not always dependent upon in-person interaction. Similarly, Peter Damian was able to worship God and celebrate the Eucharist without the physical presence of others. These examples provide guides to reimagine our own understanding of preaching and worship online.

1.3.1 Preaching virtually, Paul's example

Paul greatly cared for the faith communities that he visited, and he made a considerable effort to continue to provide instruction and pastoral care virtually. In his epistles, Paul provided exhortations to the Corinthians, giving them guidance as a faith community. For example, in 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul urges them, saying, "Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose."[99] Concluding his letter in 16:13, he continues to preach with his pen, saying, "Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love."[100]

Along with preaching virtually, Paul indicates different means by which he extends his presence. In 1 Corinthians 16:21, he writes, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand."[101] His descriptive statement emphasizes the physicality of his greeting through the letter. Paul's epistle becomes a touchpoint for the Corinthians, as they have the letter that he created. He also emphasizes his presence that goes beyond physicality. In Colossians 2:5, Paul states that, "For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, and I rejoice to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ."[102] He suggests a spiritual presence through God that transcends

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[99] Bible, NRSV.

[100] Bible, NRSV.

[101] Bible, NRSV.

[102] Bible, NRSV.

the physical world. Deanna A. Thompson, who is a professor of religion, describes Paul's connection with his churches as virtual, in that they did "not always depend on face-to-face interaction."[103]

Paul's visits and homiletical correspondence helped him to develop relationships with different faith communities. At this point, it may be helpful to step away briefly from our consideration of Paul to explore contemporary theories. Sociologists suggest ways to quantify interpersonal bonds and their work has been applied to the apostle Paul by Thompson[104] and others. One example is sociologist Mark S. Granovetter, who identifies interpersonal tie strength as "a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services."[105] Theologian István Czachesz applies this tie strength theory in arguing that Paul's frequent traveling prevented him from maintaining strong ties but allowed him to form a vast number of weak ties and to serve as the link among communities.[106] To the contrary, New Testament scholar Dennis C. Duling suggests that Paul did, in fact, develop strong ties in places where he spent considerable time, such as Ephesus and Corinth. He reasons that "these stays suggest a spatial and social network of some duration of social interaction, one index of intimacy, thus the likelihood of 'strong ties.'"[107] Whatever the strength of Paul's ties to the early churches, it is evident that he had a profound impact on those whom he encountered through his ministry.

While providing virtual correspondence, Paul also candidly expresses his longing to be with these faith communities in-person. For instance, in 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18, he writes that "we were made orphans by being separated from you—in person, not in heart—we longed with great

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[103] Deanna A. Thompson, *The Virtual Body of Christ in a Suffering World* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2016), 39.

[104] Thompson, *Virtual Body of Christ in a Suffering World*, 20.

[105] Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 6 (1973): 1361.

[106] István Czachesz, "Women, Charity and Mobility in Early Christianity: Weak Links and the Historical Transformation of Religions," in *Changing Minds: Religion and Cognition Through the Ages*, ed. István Czachesz and Tamás Biró (Leuven, Netherlands: Peeters, 2011) 143; cf. 151.

[107] Dennis C. Duling, "Paul's Aegean Network: The Strength of Strong Ties," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 43, no. 3 (2013): 143.

eagerness to see you face to face."[108] Homiletician Jason Byassee observes that, when Paul is away from those he cares about, "he doesn't wait to offer them his words until he can be with them. He sends them letters . . . [that] allow him to engage personally without being present personally. They are a poor substitute in some ways. In others they are superior."[109] He suggests that perhaps letters are superior to in-person communication because, in Paul's case, they were preserved.

Virtual communication may be an essential aspect of human nature. American Studies scholar T. V. Reed describes storytelling as a form of virtual reality: whether around campfires, in novels, or at movie theaters, it is "a part of human experience."[110] Preaching utilizes storytelling and performative language to create a new objective reality in the mind of the hearers, thus creating, in a sense, a "virtual reality." Thompson suggests that "it is our nature to utilize technology (the pen, the book, the Internet) to extend versions of ourselves and our world beyond our physical limits."[111] Therefore, the concept of virtual preaching is not new; as Paul's words demonstrate, it is an ancient means of being present and discipling those you care about.

1.3.2 Worshipping virtually, Peter Damian's example

The doctrines and teachings about the mystical presence of the Body of Christ recurs throughout the history of the Christian church. Berger points us to the work of eremitical monk Peter Damian (1007-72), who addresses the question if physical presence is necessary for worship.[112] In his eleventh treatise, *The Book of 'The Lord Be With You,'* he addresses the concern if it is right for monks to recite the liturgy when they are worshipping by themselves, saying "*Dominus*

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[108] Bible, NRSV.

[109] Jason Byassee, "For Virtual Theological Education," *Faith and Leadership* (website), last modified March 2, 2011, https://faithandleadership.com/jason-byassee-virtual-theological-education.

[110] T. V. Reed, *Digitized Lives: Culture, Power and Social Change in the Internet Era* (New York, Routledge, 2014), 21.

[111] Thompson, *Virtual Body of Christ in a Suffering World*, 25.

[112] Berger, *@Worship*, 24.

vobiscum."[113] Within the context of a church service, the priest would normally say *Dominus vobiscum* (The Lord be with you), which uses the second person plural "you."[114] In response, the congregation would reply "And with thy spirit," which is a prayerful request that the Lord will also be with the priest.[115] Damian makes the case that monks can recite the same liturgy that they would in a service, when they worship alone in their cell. Drawing from 1 Corinthians 12:12, he reasons that "we are all one body in Christ and we who dwell in Him cannot be separated from one another in spirit even though we are separated in the flesh."[116] Thus, believers are interconnected together through a virtual network that cannot be undone. This network implies that "the whole church is spiritually present" during the reciting of the liturgy, even when an individual is alone.[117] Damian affirms that,

> Therefore let no brother who lives alone in a cell be afraid to utter the words which are common to the whole Church; for although he is separated in space from the congregation of the faithful yet he is bound together with them all by love in the unity of faith; although they are absent in the flesh, *they are near at hand in the mystical unity of the Church*.[118]

This mystical unity of the Church is also described in other church liturgies. The Apostles' Creed includes a profession of belief in "the communion of saints,"[119] suggesting an expansive notion of communal presence that is not bound by time or place. The same doctrine occurs in many liturgies; for example, in the United Church of Christ's *Book of Worship*, the liturgy for Word and Sacrament similarly describes the communion of saints as being present within the gathered assembly: "We bless you, gracious God, for the presence of your Holy Spirit in the church you have gathered. With your sons and daughters of faith *in all places and times*, we praise you with

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[113] Damian, *Selected Writings on the Spiritual Life*, 53.

[114] Damian, *Selected Writings on the Spiritual Life*, 55-56.

[115] Damian, *Selected Writings on the Spiritual Life*, 56.

[116] Damian, *Selected Writings on the Spiritual Life*, 62-63.

[117] Damian, *Selected Writings on the Spiritual Life*, 63.

[118] Damian, *Selected Writings on the Spiritual Life*, 74. Italics my own.

[119] United Church of Christ, "The Apostles' Creed," *Book of Worship* (Cleveland, OH: United Church of Christ, 2012), 509.

joy."[120] Another version reads "Therefore, *with the entire company of saints in heaven and on earth*, we worship and glorify you, God Most Holy."[121] These Eucharistic prayers speak of a networked Body of Christ that is not bound by chronological time or physical proximity.

Damian's theological framework allowed him and other monks to worship God and celebrate the Eucharist in isolation. In like manner as Damian reimagines his own liturgical practice, digital preaching can also be reimagined as a communal event that transcends time and space. According to Berger, this liturgical understanding "places each assembly within an expansive, even cosmic vision of worship."[122] Digital worship and preaching, from this perspective, have the potential to instill in believers an ancient understanding that has been overlooked in brick-and-mortar settings.

1.4 Conclusion

An expansive and inclusive vision of community has emerged from studying Paul and Peter Damian. While some critics may dismiss digitally mediated worship, this chapter presents an alternative vision demonstrating that the Body of Christ is not bound by temporal, spatial, and physical limits, but it is a virtual network of God. Paul preached virtually with his pen in 1 Corinthians to address the trouble at the table and communicate the values of a Christ-following community. While Graeco-Roman society normalized discrimination through food, Paul would not tolerate such behavior at the Lord's Supper; no longer could the privileged Corinthians have their own "tailgate parties," where they displayed their wealth amongst their peers. Like the voluntary associations that created rules for conduct, Paul established guidelines that valued unity at the Lord Supper, as they could not engage in excess at the expense of others going hungry. Like the Corinthians, we cannot recognise Christ unless we recognise his Body, which includes all those who are a part of it – both in-person and online. Paul's instruction reminds us

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[120] United Church of Christ, "Order for the Service of Word and Sacrament I," *Book of Worship*, 46. Italics my own.

[121] United Church of Christ, "Order for the Service of Word and Sacrament I," 46. Italics my own.

[122] Berger, *@ Worship*, 39.

that our relationship with one another in the Body of Christ is integral to our relationship with God. The values of a biblical community provide a framework that can be applied to digitally mediated worship. Digital worship is a gesture of hospitality, like adding more chairs to the Lord's table so that more people can commune with God and neighbour. The sacred moment of worship becomes more accessible when we include those who are beyond the church's walls. Like Peter Damian, if we worship God through a digital medium, we are not alone but spiritually present with the whole Church, the Body of Christ.

Chapter 2
Theology of the Word

> "Let us learn, then, to come to our Lord Jesus Christ in this way: that is, that the message which is here published by the Angels be to us as a burning lamp to show us the way, that faith lead us, and that we know that it is now God in us, as much as it is God with us. Our God with us is declared when He willed to dwell in our human nature as in His temple. But now it is God in us, that is, *we feel Him joined to us in greater power* than when He showed and declared Himself mortal man."[123]

Greater than the sum of its parts, preaching is more than the oral communication of ancient writing, wherein the speaker interprets, illustrates, and applies it to the hearers. It is more than the arrangement of rhetorical techniques, such as diction, intonation, refrain, and repetition. Rather, preaching has a spiritual aspect, in which the hearers can encounter God, and God can, in turn, communicate with them. Notably, John Calvin (1509-1564) speaks of this spiritual dimension of preaching that goes beyond what can be seen. While the spiritual realm and virtual reality are different ontologically, they both transcend our innate understanding of the physical world, embodiment, and time-space, thus providing an important grounding for this present study.

This chapter aims to use Calvin's theology of the Word to establish a theological foundation for a homiletic for digital preaching, rather than provide a comprehensive historical study of Calvin. To begin this study, it is important to understand those who influenced Calvin's thought, like church father Augustine of Hippo (354-430). Augustine created his own theology of the Word and established standards for interpreting and preaching the Word of God before the Reformation. In writing the first book on homiletics, he pioneered a homiletical methodology of how to preach. Later, Calvin reinforces Augustine's understanding of the Word, but he also builds upon it, reclaiming a fresh authority for it and a new sense of the vitality of Christ in it. In this chapter, I argue that drawing inspiration from Augustine, Calvin understands the Word of God to be proclaimed, sacramental, and lively, which emerges from the working of the Holy

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[123] John Calvin, *The Deity of Christ and Other Sermons*, trans. Leroy Nixon (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950), 48. Italics my own. Sermon on Luke 2:1-14, the Nativity of Jesus Christ.

Spirit. The Holy Spirit, who was at work in the life and ministry of Jesus, is the same Spirit who inspired prophets and apostles. This same Spirit testifies to the minds and hearts of believers that Jesus is Lord, the Holy Scripture is the Word of God, and that Christ is truly present, as he comes clothed in the gospel, in word and sacrament. This research provides a framework for modern preaching, whereby the listeners can receive Christ's grace, virtually. Due to the vast amount of Calvin's writings, a select sampling from the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, his commentaries, and sermons are used to capture a portrait of his understanding of preaching both in theory and practice.

The road map for this chapter will be as follows. The first section explores how Calvin asserts that the Word of God is both Scripture and Jesus Christ in his *Institutes,* along with his understanding of the process of preaching. Calvin redirects our attention to the divine activity that is taking place in the preaching moment, as God's Spirit is involved with every aspect of proclamation, both in the pulpit and in the pew. The second section will delve into Calvin's sacramental understanding of the Word in his *Institutes* and its critical implications for preaching. Calvin understands preaching as a sacramental moment in which the people meet Christ through the proclaimed Word. The third section will explore Calvin's lively awareness of the Word, his use of exhortations, and his consciousness for the hearers, which has implications for both in-person and digital preaching. Calvin had a concern that the people would not just hear his preaching, but they would also be motivated to action. In the end, this chapter provides a historical understanding of preaching which lays the groundwork for more recent homiletical theories and for a consideration of preaching online.

2.1 The Proclaimed Word

In his *Institutes* and other writings, Calvin declares that the Word of God is both Scripture and Jesus Christ. This theology of the Word is foundational to Calvin's preaching, which will be discussed in this section. Additionally, the divine activity that occurs during the preaching event will be explored.

2.1.1 The Word as Scripture

In his *Institutes,* Calvin states that God has communicated to humanity through Scripture. As "daily oracles" are not delivered from heaven,[124] Scripture is the only means by which people have a knowledge of Him and His revelation.[125] Like glasses that help individuals to see, Calvin asserts that Scripture gives us a clear vision of God.[126] He confirms that "the highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it."[127] Even more, Calvin holds the conviction that "God is its Author," as God uses "his own most hallowed lips."[128] God "willed to have his Word set down and sealed in writing," so that "his priests might seek from it what to teach the people."[129] This divine authorship implies that the biblical text is the very Word of God.

Adapting a doctrine of accommodation, Calvin recognises that humans are unable to understand the fullness of God; thus, the Lord accommodates to humanity through the Scriptures. In his *Institutes,* Calvin offers the image of a nurse talking "baby talk" to an infant, so that the child can know that he or she is loved.[130] In a similar fashion, the reality of God exceeds the capacity of humans to grasp. Thus, God adapts God's own communication through the Scriptures to adapt to people's limited capacity, so that they can take in the message. If it is true that Scripture itself, God's own self-revelation, is limited by God's gracious accommodation to people's weakness, it must also be the case for preaching. Calvin believed that preachers should accommodate their teaching to their hearers, like a parent cutting up a child's food. While preaching on the Psalms, he told his hearers, "I shall enforce myself to follow as brief as I can the plain and true meaning

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[124] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Library of Christian Classics, 2 vols, edited by John T. McNeill, translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1960), 1.7.1.

[125] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.6.1.

[126] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.6.1.

[127] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.4.

[128] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.4.

[129] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.8.6.

[130] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.1.

of the text: without continuing in long exhortations. I will only do my best to mince and shred…because we may the better digest them."[131]

In his *Institutes*, Calvin acknowledges with great confidence that "[Scripture] has flowed to us from the very mouth of God *by the ministry of men*,"[132] such as the apostles who were "sure and genuine scribes of the Holy Spirit" as they conveyed the "oracles of God."[133] In his Exodus commentary, Calvin also indicates that Moses was selected by God to be a "witness and historian," thus Moses' "authority is sure and unquestionable."[134] In a sermon on John 1:1-5, Calvin also recognises John as "the instrument and organ of God, as a pen will write in the hand of a man."[135] Theologian Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield asserts that Calvin saw the human writers as "notaries…, who set down in authentic registers … what was dictated to them" from God.[136] Calvin scholar T. H. L. Parker states that for Calvin, "[the] Holy Scripture is a unity because its one author is the Holy Spirit, who remains constant to himself. Its message is one because it is God's one Word or message to mankind."[137]

There is a wide spectrum of opinion within the Reformed tradition about the way Scripture is the Word of God. Even more, the doctrine of Scripture has been a source of vigorous, continual

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[131] John Calvin, *Sermons on Psalms 119 by John Calvin* (Audubon, NY: Old Paths Publications, 1996), 4-5.

[132] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.5. Italics my own.

[133] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.8.9; Augustine, *The Sermon on the Mount Expounded, and The Harmony of the Evangelist*, The Works of Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo: A New Translation, vol. 8, ed. Marcus Dods, trans. William Findlay and S. D. F. Salmond (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1873), 1.1.1. In *the Harmony of the Gospels*, Augustine wrote that the men who were with Jesus held "in remembrance the words heard from His lips," and they transcribed an account about Him.

[134] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses: A Harmony*, Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 1, trans. Rev. Charles William Bingham (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950), Exod. 14:28.

[135] Calvin, *The Deity of Christ*, 18. Sermon entitled "The Deity of Jesus Christ"; Augustine also believed that Scripture was divinely inspired, for it was accomplished by "the fingers of God … who were filled with the Holy Spirit and through His working within them wrote for us the whole of the Sacred Scriptures." Augustine, *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, vol. 1, trans. Scholastica Hebgin and Felicitas Corrigan (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1960), 7.4.

[136] Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1956), 61.

[137] T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 93.

debate of the fundamentalist–modernist controversy. However, in a homiletics dissertation, this does not need to be settled. It is sufficient for our purposes simply to recognise that Scripture is widely accepted as the Word of God in the Reformed tradition. From looking at his commentaries, Calvin does acknowledge the possibility of error, such as the gospel writer attributing the wrong prophet in Matthew 27:9.[138] While rejecting a fundamentalist understanding of inerrancy, Calvin does maintain that Scripture was the Word of God, in the sense of its witness to the gospel rather than in the words themselves.

A critical conviction that undergirds Calvin's theology is that God is the exclusive witness of Himself in His own Word. Hence, the same Spirit, who spoke through the prophets, speaks to humanity through Scripture.[139] In his First Peter commentary, Calvin reiterates that "no mention is here made of the word which lies hid in the bosom of God, but of that which has proceeded from…[God's] mouth, and has come to us" through apostles and prophets.[140] Drawing from the wisdom of the church fathers for his understanding of the Word as Scripture, Calvin refers to Hilary of Poitiers' (310-368) declaration that, "God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word."[141] This statement justifies why God has the predominant agency in the composition of the biblical text, while humans are relegated to the role of scribes. In his Haggai commentary, Calvin extends similar guidance that when pastors preach, "[God] himself should be heard through their mouth[s]."[142] Furthermore, "God's law is to retain its own pre-eminence, and that men blend nothing of their own, but only define what is right according to the Word of the Lord."[143] In a sermon on 2 Timothy 2:16-18, Calvin stresses the sacred nature of Scripture,

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[138] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Harmony of the Evangelists*, Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 3, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1846), 27.9.

[139] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.4.

[140] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, Calvin's Commentaries, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 1 Pet. 1.25.

[141] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.4; cf. Hilary of Poitiers, *The Trinity*, trans. Stephen McKenna (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1954), 1.18.

[142] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, Calvin's Commentaries, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), Haggai, lect. 132, 2.10-14.

[143] Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, Haggai, lect. 132, 2.10-14.

saying "God showeth us plainly that His Word is of such importance that He cannot in any wise have men abuse it, nor take it in vain, neither disguise or profane it."[144]

Calvin looks to Augustine for his understanding that God has an active role in Scripture. He quotes Augustine, who states that we believe "God himself, not men, [who is] now inwardly strengthening and illumining our mind."[145] By utilizing the wisdom of religious authorities, Calvin strengthens his argument on the use of Scripture. Moreover, his high view of the biblical text was based on his understanding of its authority. Biblical theology scholar Ronald S. Wallace notes that "For Calvin the Bible is … the sole authority that must rule the life of the Church.… The preacher of the Word is bound to turn to no other source for his testimony than to the Scripture."[146] While Wallace's claim denotes Calvin's singular reliance on the biblical text, it does not consider that Calvin also utilized the wisdom of the church fathers. Nevertheless, Calvin's understanding of Scripture as divinely inspired gives him a sense of assurance as he preaches.

In his 2 Peter commentary, Calvin conveys that believers have an assurance of Scripture because of "the inward testimony of conscience, the sealing of the Spirit, which far exceeds all evidence of the senses."[147] In his *Institutes*, Calvin determines that "those who wish to prove to unbelievers that Scripture is the Word of God are acting foolishly, for *only by faith* can this be known."[148] Thus, the written Word has a spiritual – albeit virtual – aspect for believers that transcends the physical words. In like manner, in a sermon on Luke 2:1-14, Calvin describes awareness of Christ, writing that "*Our God with us* is declared when He willed to dwell in our human nature as in His temple. But now it is *God in us*, that is, we feel Him joined to us in

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[144] John Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness and Other Selected Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950), 63. Sermon entitled the "Pure Preaching of the Word."

[145] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.3.

[146] Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1953), 99.

[147] Calvin, *Commentary on the Catholic Epistles*, 2 Pet. 1.16.

[148] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.8.13. Italics my own.

greater power than when He showed and declared Himself mortal man."[149] Calvin suggests a kind of spiritual reality that is taking place in believers as they sense his virtual presence.

Modern readers can easily misinterpret Calvin's references about the presence of God and the sacraments. Symbolic and spiritual things could be presumed within our context to be not "real" and a construct of one's imagination. However, for Calvin, the symbolic and the spiritual were not only real; but rather, they were perceived to be more real than the physical. The term "virtual" is an appropriate descriptor of what Calvin meant by these non-material things. Perhaps, modern readers could adopt a similar understanding when considering spirituality in virtual spaces.

2.1.2 The Word as Christ

Along with the Word being Scripture, Calvin also recognizes the Word as Jesus Christ. In his *Institutes*, Calvin notes that God the Father created the eternal Word "beyond" the beginning of time and "has perpetually resided with him;" therefore, "his eternity, his true essence, and his divinity are proved."[150] The Word is "the everlasting Wisdom, residing with God, from which … all oracles and all prophesies go forth."[151] Calvin clarifies that the Word "abides everlastingly one and the same with God, and is God himself."[152] In a sermon on John 1:1-5, Calvin preaches this same theology, stating "when mention is made of God the Father and of His Word, we say then that all things are made by God and through His Word, and this word 'Word' is attributed only to Jesus Christ."[153]

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[149] Calvin, *The Deity of Christ*, 48. Sermon on the Nativity of Jesus Christ. Italics my own.

[150] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.8.

[151] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.7.

[152] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.7.

[153] Calvin, *The Deity of Christ*, 27. Sermon entitled "The Deity of Jesus Christ."

As God does not transmit his glory to another, Calvin declares that Christ, God's exclusive son, is "the eternal God."[154] In his *Isaiah* commentary, Calvin articulates that God made his revelation known through "his eternal Word and only begotten Son," thus reflecting his understanding of the Word of God as Jesus Christ.[155] Instead of revealing his divine glory, Christ "emptied himself" in a self-humbling act by taking the body of a servant, which concealed his deity beneath a "veil of flesh."[156] In a homily on Luke 2:1-14, Calvin uses similar imagery to describe Christ's humanity, noting that "He clothed Himself in our flesh and He made Himself our brother."[157] Following a Chalcedonian orthodox understanding, Calvin recognized that Christ's "divinity so joined and united with his humanity that each retains its distinctive nature unimpaired, and yet these two natures constitute one Christ."[158] In his John commentary, Calvin also notes that Christ had a human nature and that He shared this commonality with humanity.[159]

Wallace notes that Calvin understood Christ as the source of all revelation in Scripture.[160] According to Calvin, the people of both the old and new covenants had knowledge of "Christ as the Mediator," which brought unity to the testaments and allowed them to be a means of participation in His promise.[161] Like his church father predecessors, Origen and Augustine, Calvin believed not only that Christ was a historical subject of the Scriptures, but also that Christ had a present agency in helping him to interpret the biblical text.[162] Calvin asserts that "Christ

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[154] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.9.

[155] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 1, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 6.1.

[156] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.13.2.

[157] Calvin, *The Deity of Christ*, 36. Sermon on the Nativity of Jesus Christ.

[158] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.14.1.

[159] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 2, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 17.22.

[160] Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine*, 27.

[161] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.10.2.

[162] Origen wrote that "We have the mind of Christ, that we may know the things that were freely given to us by God...which the Spirit teacheth." Origen, *Origen on First Principles*, trans. G. W. Butterworth (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1936), 4.2.3 (Latin); Augustine believed that Christ had a present agency in teaching and revealing Scripture. He clarified that a person's discernment of truth does not come from "the outward sound of the speaker's words." Instead, the *real* teacher is Christ, who instructs and "is said to 'dwell in the inner

himself has restored the right understanding of the law."[163] He explains that, "When we say that this is the meaning of the law, we are not thrusting forward a new interpretation of our own, but we are following Christ, its best interpreter."[164] The next section applies Calvin's understanding of the Word as both Scripture and Christ to his theology of preaching.

2.1.3 The Process of Preaching

When a pastor preaches from a pulpit, there is more happening at the moment of proclamation than meets the eye. As God is the exclusive witness of Himself, the Holy Spirit has an active role in the creation, transmission, and reception of the preached Word. In his *Institutes*, Calvin recognizes that individuals cannot believe in Christ without first being captivated by God's Spirit.[165] As previously mentioned, Scripture is "self-authenticated," needing no rational analysis to validate it, as the Spirit has the capacity to educate inwardly. [166] He states that God's Word "cannot penetrate into our minds unless the Spirit, as the inner teacher, through his illumination makes entry for it."[167] Thus, the prophets, through the Spirit's power, communicate to "penetrate into our hearts" and "to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded [from God]."[168] Likewise, before pastors can preach the Word, God's Spirit must first inspire their hearts with the message they should preach.

Additionally, the hearers cannot accept the preached Word without it being "sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit."[169] Calvin clarifies that, "*The same Spirit*, therefore, *who has*

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man.'" Augustine, *The Teacher*, The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, vol. 59, trans. Robert P. Russell (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1968), 11.38; Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.8.7.

[163] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.8.7. This quote is his chapter heading. Italics my own.

[164] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.8.7.

[165] Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.34.

[166] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.5.

[167] Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.34.

[168] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.4.

[169] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.4.

spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded."[170] He asserts that God's Spirit is presently at work speaking through the vessels of His preachers and sealing the meaning of the Word upon the hearts of the hearers.

Preaching historian O.C. Edwards argues that, for Calvin, preaching cannot be assumed to be God's Word, nor that God is speaking through the preacher; but rather, preaching is made God's revelation through the power of the Holy Spirit.[171] Furthermore, I. John Hesselink, a scholar of Calvin, asserts that "Calvin's notion of the internal, secret witness (*testimonium*) of the Spirit to the authority of the Bible is one of his few original contributions in the history of Christian thought."[172] He further qualifies that while reformer Martin Luther mentioned it, Calvin actually developed the Holy Spirit's inner witness as a distinct doctrine.[173] Pastor Gerald Booy also indicates that Calvin's "doctrine of the inner testimony of the Spirit, is a breath of fresh air," and "a gift to the church," providing timeless relevance for believers.[174]

In his *Isaiah* commentary, Calvin states that "The word *goeth out of the mouth* of God in such a manner that it likewise 'goeth out of the mouth' of men; for God does not speak openly from heaven, but employs men as his instruments."[175] Thus, God "Himself" is communicating to the people when the preacher is speaking. Preachers are divine agents through whom God

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[170] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.4. Italics my own.

[171] O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, vo1. 1 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 313-314; T. H. L. Parker, *The Oracles of God: An Introduction to the Preaching of John Calvin* (London and Redhill: Lutterworth, 1947), 55.

[172] I. John Hesselink, "Calvin, the Holy Spirit, and the Mystical Union," *Perspectives: A Journal of Reformed Thought*, 13, no.1 (January 1998): 15-16.

[173] Hesselink, "Calvin, the Holy Spirit, and the Mystical Union," 16.

[174] Gerard Booy, "The Holy Spirit in the Thoughts of John Calvin," in *Calvin@500: Theology, History, and Practice*, eds. Richard R. Topping and John A. Vissers (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 44.

[175] Calvin, *Isaiah*, 55.11; Similarly, Augustine understood that "When God works wonders through His preachers, He lightens through the clouds, strikes fear through them, and waters with rain." Augustine, *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, vol. 2, trans. Scholastica Hebgin and Felicitas Corrigan (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1960), 35.8; Thus, using the metaphor of a cloud as the medium that transpires weather, Augustine understood the role of a preacher as a passive instrument, in whom God has the primary agency. A. D. R. Polman, *The Word of God According to St. Augustine*, trans. A. J. Pomerans (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), 131.

communicates to the people. In the same manner, Wallace conveys that Calvin's hope is that the preacher's message will also become a divine message "that proceeds from God Himself."[176]

Along with God's communication through the preaching moment, Calvin believed that Christ the Mediator is active at the moment of proclamation.[177] Regarding preaching, Calvin states that Christ "claimed this office as his own; for he really performs it by his disciples."[178] Calvin believed that proclamation is the means by which Christ's grace is transmitted to the people.[179] As he explains in his *Romans* commentary, God's divine commands and promises can be conveyed to the people, particularly through preaching. Calvin proclaims that God "so speaks, that his command becomes a reality."[180] Because of the implication that God is speaking during the preaching moment, Parker affirms that, for Calvin, the authority of preaching does not exist within the preacher, but rather within the proclamation of Scripture and "the authority of God 'Himself.'"[181] Calvin's understanding of the Word of God as proclamation draws on the thought of Augustine whom Calvin held in high regard. Augustine preaches that "The reader goes to the lectern, but it is Christ who is not silent. The preacher explains the text; if he says what is true, it is Christ speaking."[182] Calvin asserts that God is speaking in the sermonic event through the vessels of "His" preachers. He held the conviction that God's words are transmitted during proclamation, and that Christ is also present among the hearers, allowing them to receive Christ's grace.

Scholars have noted Calvin's emphasis on the Holy Spirit in preaching and hearing of the Word. Practical theologian Richard Lischer recognises a cyclical process in Calvin's understanding of

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[176] Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine*, 83.

[177] Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine*, 83.

[178] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to The Hebrews*, Calvin's Commentaries, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 2.11.

[179] John Calvin, *Opera Selecta*, ed. Peter Barth, vol. 1 (Monaco: Kaiser, 1926), 505.

[180] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to The Romans*, Calvin's Commentaries, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 3.4

[181] Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, 41.

[182] Augustine, *Sermons*, 17.1.

the Spirit's role: the written Word educates the people about the Spirit, and in turn, the Spirit confirms the validity of the written Word.[183] In addition, he recognizes that for Calvin, the work of the Spirit is involved with every aspect of preaching, including the "sermon preparation, delivery, and reception."[184] As God is the only witness of Himself, there is no element of the process in which God is not at work. Wallace asserts that the Holy Spirit is the actual means by which the preacher's words become God's word. Moreover, it is only by the Spirit's agency that sermons can be truly powerful.[185] Parker adds that, for Calvin, the authority of preaching does not exist within the preacher, but rather within the proclamation of Scripture and "the authority of God 'Himself.'"[186]

Through his study of the Word, Calvin formed his understanding of the importance of Scripture, Christ's divinity, and the implication of preaching. Preachers and congregations can easily become preoccupied with the human element of the preaching moment. Nevertheless, Calvin redirects our attention to the divine activity that is taking place in the sermonic event. God's Spirit is involved with every aspect of proclamation, both in the pulpit and in the pew. Thus, for Calvin, preaching goes beyond the proclamation of the Word: it also has a sacramental nature, and the next section explores how Calvin understood the Word as sacramental.

2.2 The Sacramental Word

Calvin understood the Word of God to have a sacramental nature, which indicates a spiritual dimension that transcends beyond the physical world. Many scholars have recognized this theme in Calvin's writings and sermons, and they have drawn their own conclusions. A sacramental perspective provides a rich theological framework for the practice of preaching and compliments digital proclamation.

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[183] Richard Lischer, ed. *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 362.

[184] Lischer, *Company of Preachers*, 362.

[185] Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine*, 89.

[186] Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, 41.

2.2.1 Understanding Sacrament

In his *Institutes*, Calvin defines a sacrament as "a testimony of divine grace toward us, confirmed by an outward sign, with mutual attestation of our piety toward him."[187] He states that sacraments allow people to reorient their attention beyond the physical realm to the divine mysteries that lie hidden.[188] Calvin recognises the Lord's Supper and baptism as ordinary sacraments.[189] He recognizes that the Lord educates by His Word, verifies it through the sacraments, and prepares our minds and hearts to receive it through the power of the Holy Spirit.[190] Through his sermons, Calvin educates his congregation on this understanding, which is contrary to the Roman Catholic perspective of his time. For instance, in a message on Matthew 28:1-10, he denounces transubstantiation, which is the conviction that the bread and wine are transformed into Christ's flesh and blood. Rather, he proclaims that the communion elements are "sure and infallible" tokens that signify that we are nourished *spiritually* by Christ.[191] In a homily on Acts 1:1-4, Calvin indicates that the communion elements are "symbols" which signify to us that "He dwells in our souls."[192] In his liturgy preceding the words of institution, Calvin would pray what is often called "*the Reformed Sursum Corda*," saying, "Therefore, lift up your hearts on high, seeking the heavenly things in heaven, where Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father; and do not fix your eyes on the visible signs which are corrupted through usage."[193] This prayer invites the hearers to look beyond the mere communion elements to the spiritual realm, and it demonstrates how God lifts us beyond the limitations of physical presence.

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[187] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.1.

[188] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.5-6.

[189] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.20.

[190] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.4.8.

[191] John Calvin, *The Deity of Christ*, 196. Sermon on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[192] John Calvin, *The Deity of Christ*, 208. Sermon on the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus.

[193] Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western church* (New York: New American Library, 1961), 223.

Additionally, witty rhetorical questions are used to teach about the sacrament of Baptism; for instance, he asked his hearers, "When I baptize, is that to say I have the Holy Spirit up my sleeve to give it?"[194] Answering his own question, Calvin indicates that "just as I take water to baptize, Jesus Christ accomplishes what I signify."[195] The sacraments are more than what meets the eye, but they have a spiritual – albeit virtual – element that is taking place. While the water, wine, and bread are symbols, God through Christ is spiritually and invisibly at work in these sacred events. Calvin articulates the critical relationship between the communication of the Word and the sacraments: a "sacrament is never without a preceding promise but is joined to it as a sort of appendix."[196] He raises the importance of preaching for imparting meaning and fostering faith. Unlike the popes, who would speak of the sacraments in a "hoarse whisper" in Latin, Calvin believes that sacraments require clear preaching in the common vernacular to facilitate understanding.[197]

While Calvin understood the Lord's Supper and baptism as sacraments, he also understood the proclaimed Word as sacramental, whereby the hearers are enabled to receive Christ's grace and presence. In his *Institutes*, Calvin urges his readers to "let it be regarded as a settled principle that the sacraments have the same office as the Word of God: to offer and set forth Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace."[198] This conviction that the proclaimed Word presents Christ is evident in his preaching; for instance, in a sermon on Acts 1:9-11, Calvin "presents Christ" to his congregation in a homiletical refrain, proclaiming,

> Although I am weak, there is Jesus Christ Who is powerful enough to make me stand upright. Although I am feeble, there is Jesus Christ Who is my strength. Although I am full of all miseries, Jesus Christ is in immortal glory and what He has will some time be given to me and I shall partake of all His benefits. Yes, the devil is called the prince of this world; But what of it? Jesus Christ holds him in check, for He is King of heaven and

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[194] John Calvin, *The Deity of Christ*, 215. Sermon on Acts 1:4-5, the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus.

[195] John Calvin, *The Deity of Christ*, 215.

[196] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.3.

[197] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.3-4.

[198] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.17.

> earth. There are devils above us in the air who make war against us. But what of it? Jesus Christ rules above, having entire control of the battle.[199]

This sermon utilises a "contrapuntal"[200] technique that mimics dialogue by acknowledging opposing voices that ask, "but what of it." In essence, Calvin acknowledges the critics, who silently cast doubt, thinking "yabbut," that is "yeah…but,"[201] and he responds by proclaiming Christ's agency and power over adversity. Along with presenting Christ, he also utilises the metaphor of movement[202] by instructing his hearers to "come to Jesus," which signifies a strengthening with their relationship with God. In a homily on Matthew 28:1-10, Calvin invites his hearers with a series of exhortations saying "*let us come* by faith straight to Him without pretense … *We must come* boldly and without fear … Let us know, then, that the Son of God will adapt Himself to our limitations when *we come* to Him in faith."[203] While the hearers are not physically traveling, Calvin invites them to progress in their devotion to God.

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[199] Calvin, *The Deity of Christ*, 238. Sermon on the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus.

[200] David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 47-48; Randall C. Zachman, *John Calvin as Teacher, Pastor, and Theologian: The Shape of His Writings and Thought* (Grand Rapid, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 172. Zachman identifies this sermonic technique from Calvin as "imagined interior monologue," which attempts to verbalise the hearers' internal dialogue.

[201] Stephen Farris, "Calvin and the Preaching of the Lively Word," in *Calvin@500: Theology, History, and Practice*, eds. Richard R. Topping and John A. Vissers (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 119.

[202] Nancy Lynn Cocks, "Metaphors and Models in John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*: A Feminist Critique," (PhD diss., Knox College at the University of Toronto, 1989), 172. Cocks briefly mentions Calvin's theme of movement as he persuades believers to progress in their relationship with God.

[203] Calvin, *The Deity of Christ*, 190-191. Sermon on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Italics my own; Also, see Calvin's Acts 1:4-5 sermon for a metaphor of movement, where he exhorts his hearers, saying, "let us come straight to Jesus Christ, recognizing that He is our all … Then it is certain that we shall go not only a step, but that we shall continue to walk, until we shall have arrived at the goal which is proposed to us." Calvin, *The Deity of Christ*, 220. Sermon on the Ascension of Jesus Christ.

2.2.2 Scholars' Perspectives on Calvin's Sacramental Word

Scholars have highlighted different aspects of Calvin's sacramental understanding of preaching.[204] Reformed theology scholar Dawn DeVries explains that, before the Reformation, medieval sermons emphasized moral urging and catechetical instruction through preaching on the creeds and prayers. Medieval preaching functioned as a teaching moment that prepared the people for the sacrament of Holy Communion, which is how they received God's grace. As DeVries illustrates, the proclaimed Word was the prescription, and the sacrament of Communion was the exclusive medicine prior to the Reformation.[205]

However, DeVries stresses that for Calvin, preaching is sacramental and more than an educational and preparatory event,[206] which means the sacrament is an "appendage" to the proclaimed Word.[207] In his John commentary, Calvin asserts that, "Christ is clearly exhibited to us in the Gospel … and that faith has its own look, by which it perceives him as present."[208] DeVries determines that for Calvin, "The preaching event was the primary means of grace. The whole drama of salvation unfolded as the gathered people listened to the sermon."[209] This drama is evident in Calvin's commentaries and sermons. For instance, Calvin asserts in his Roman's commentary that "preaching is an instrument for effecting the salvation of the faithful, and though it can do nothing without the Spirit of God, yet through his inward operation it produces

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[204] B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 82-86; Dawn DeVries, *Jesus Christ in the Preaching of Calvin and Schleiermacher*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 14-21; Paul Scott Wilson, "Reformed Preaching and the Conundrum of Calvin's Example," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 26, Supplement 1 (November 2010): 68.

[205] DeVries, *Jesus Christ*, 14-15; Elmer Carl Kiessling, *The Early Sermons of Luther and Their Relation to the Pre-Reformation Sermon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1935) 9-41.

[206] DeVries, *Jesus Christ*, 16.

[207] DeVries, *Jesus Christ*, 15; Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.3. Calvin indicates that the sacrament's purpose is to "confirm" and "seal" the promise in Scripture.

[208] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 1, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 3.14

[209] Dawn DeVries, "Calvin's Preaching," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 110.

the most powerful effects."[210] When preaching on the Ascension, Calvin vividly describes that, "the majesty of the glory of God is not only as the brightness of the sun, but more than a hundred thousand suns if they were in the world."[211] He further exhorts his hearers to "recognize that we are nothing, but all majesty is in Him."[212] In a sermon on Pentecost, Calvin assures his hearers that, "if we call upon the Name of God we shall have salvation; even in the midst of the greatest troubles and divisions which could possibly be; even when hell would be ready to swallow us, there is a refuge which is assured to us."[213] These sermons illustrate that preaching was more than static rhetoric on ancient writing, but rather it is a means of ushering people into the presence of God.

Gerrish, who is a scholar of historical theology, also argues that Calvin had a sacramental understanding of the Word. However, contrasting with DeVries's perspective, he believes that "Calvin felt no antagonism between what we may call the 'pedagogical' and the 'sacramental' functions of the word."[214] Rather, these two purposes of the word work together in preaching.[215] Gerrish also recognizes that for Calvin, the Word of God becomes a "public event," as catechetical teaching encouraged people to worship together.[216] Additionally, in his *Institutes*, Calvin concludes that "when we hear the sacramental word mentioned, let us understand the promise, proclaimed in a clear voice by the minister, to lead the people by the hand whenever the sign tends and directs us."[217] From this passage, Gerrish determines that Calvin's use of "*verbum sacramentale*" (sacramental word) signifies preaching and furthermore, this proclamation "not

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[210] Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to The Romans*, 11.14.

[211] Calvin, *The Deity of Christ*, 234. Sermon on Acts 1:9-11.

[212] Calvin, *The Deity of Christ*, 234.

[213] John Calvin, *The Deity of Christ*, 275. Sermon on Acts 2:18-21.

[214] Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude*, 82.

[215] Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude*, 82.

[216] Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude*, 82.

[217] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.4.

only *makes* a sacrament but also, as an efficacious means of grace, *is* a sacrament."[218] Just as the sacramental word directs people in the sign's meaning and invites Christ's presence, Calvin believed that the preaching moment has this incarnational capacity. For Calvin, the people are invited into Christ's presence by faith through the preaching of God's Word.

Unlike DeVries and Gerrish, who emphasize the Word as sacrament, homiletician Paul Scott Wilson directly concludes that for Calvin, preaching *is* a sacrament. He states that Calvin had "three purposes of preaching, all centred on Christ and related to salvation: preaching is to offer Jesus Christ, preaching is sacrament, and preaching is inspired doctrine."[219] Wilson draws this understanding from Gerrish's scholarship. Additionally, he finds evidence in the *Institutes,* when Calvin discusses his instructions for the sacrament of communion. Wilson determines that Calvin appears to make no distinction between the preached Word and the words of institution and prayer offered before the Lord's Supper, as they share the same office.[220] Calvin gives specific instructions that the preaching of the Word precedes the communion event.[221] Furthermore, Calvin instructs in his *Institutes* that "the Sacrament cannot stand apart from the Word. For whatever benefit may come to us from the Supper requires the Word … there is need of preaching."[222] Calvin recognized that Communion is sealing the preached Word and grounding the people in faith.[223] He also classifies the Eucharistic prayers as "living preaching," which "edifies its hearers, penetrates into their very minds, impresses itself upon their hearts … and reveals its effectiveness in the fulfillment of what it promises."[224]

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[218] Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude*, 86.

[219] Wilson, "Reformed Preaching," 68.

[220] Paul Scott Wilson, "Preaching and the Sacrament of Holy Communion," in *Preaching in the Context of Worship*, eds. David M. Greenhaw and Ronald J. Allen (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 52; Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.43.

[221] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.43.

[222] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.39.

[223] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.3.

[224] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.39.

As previously mentioned, Calvin's theology of preaching is evident in his sermons, particularly the objective of offering and presenting Christ to the hearers.[225] In a sermon on Acts 1:9-11, Calvin proclaims that, "[Jesus Christ] is at the right hand of God … [and] He is always ready to stretch out to us His hand."[226] Christ is not only offered to the hearers, but He is eagerly reaching out. Interestingly, a theme of virtual presence is also evident in this sermon; Calvin proclaims that, "Just as God is through all and in all things invisibly, Jesus Christ communicates Himself to us. And when we are united to Him, our souls are nourished by the substance of His body (although He is up there in heaven), but this is done by the power of faith and by the Holy Spirit."[227] Thus, Christ transcends the limits of the physical world, and in essence, believers are connected virtually to Him through the working of the Holy Spirit.

In her analysis of Calvin's sermons, DeVries examined four of them: two from each testament.[228] As she acknowledges, her short analysis of four homilies is by no means comprehensive.[229] Perhaps, it is not responsible to make assumptions about Calvin's preaching with such limited evidence. Nevertheless, through her analysis, DeVries discovers that Calvin does not speak about Christ in his Old Testament messages. Yet, she does acknowledge that he does make references to the New Testament.[230] In the end, DeVries concludes that "If the purpose of the preached Word is to 'offer and present Christ,' then it has not achieved its purpose if an entire sermon can make no mention of Jesus Christ."[231] Despite her criticism, DeVries does acknowledge that Calvin was limited by the boundaries and constrains of the biblical text. Considering her critique, Wilson offers another perspective: in Calvin's sermons, "the gospel is more assumed than

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[225] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.17.

[226] Calvin, *The Deity of Christ*, 238. Sermon on Ascension of Jesus Christ.

[227] Calvin, *The Deity of Christ*, 240.

[228] DeVries, *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, 112.

[229] DeVries, *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, 112.

[230] DeVries, *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, 116.

[231] DeVries, *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, 120.

proclaimed."[232] This perspective is a fair assessment; when a sermon from the Old Testament is preached, the faith community has the understanding that this message is presented with the full canon of Scripture in mind. The congregation may be hearing an Old Testament story, but they do so with a memory of Christ in the background.

Considering the modern implications of the sacramental Word, Wilson believes that contemporary preachers should accept Calvin's perspective of "preaching as sacrament," which highlights the most fundamental aspect of preaching: "through the sermon Christ comes."[233] He asserts that with Calvin's understanding, preaching is "an event of encounter that strengthens faith and life as much as being instruction about it."[234] If pastors treated the preaching moment as a sacrament, preaching would be more than an auditory lesson but an experience, whereby the people meet Christ through the proclaimed Word and by the working of the Holy Spirit. Congregations desire sermons that are more than soundbites of information, but an opportunity to meet with Christ. Moreover, when considering the *Sursum Corda*, one could argue that in heart, mind, and spirit, the hearers of the proclaimed Word are also lifted to heavenly places. Thus, for digital preaching, listeners are not just watching on a screen and with others around the world, but when the Word is rightly preached, they are lifted to the presence of Christ. An experience with the sacramental word is not a passive experience, but it has a lively effect, which the next section explores.

2.3 The Lively Word

Calvin believed that the proclaimed Word should not just be spoken, but also heard by the congregation. He recognized that preaching was not a passive activity, but it required a response. His lively awareness of the Word and consciousness for the hearers have critical implications for the practice of preaching.

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[232] Wilson, "Reformed Preaching," 71.

[233] Wilson, "Reformed Preaching," 76.

[234] Wilson, "Reformed Preaching," 76.

2.3.1 Hearing Sound Doctrine

For Calvin, it is not enough that the Word is preached, but it must be heard and acted upon. In his *Institutes*, he asserts that, "Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached *and heard*, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."[235] Notably, Calvin's concern for the hearers is different than our modern homiletical understanding. One of the challenges of reading Calvin is the tendency to read our modern concerns and sensibilities back into his writing. As a result, we can inadvertently neglect to appreciate the historical context within which these concerns drove him. Calvin did not operate under modern understandings of the hearers like the New Homiletics' "turn to the listener," which will be explored in chapter 3; but rather, he worked on an entirely different epistemology.

Through his preaching and writings, Calvin's objectives are to increase his hearer's biblical literacy and promote godliness in Geneva. He perceived that the religious climate of his day left "no place in it for sound doctrine."[236] Thus, Calvin composed his *Institutes* to educate King Francis I of France and the people about Christ in a way he deemed acceptable.[237] In his *Institutes*, Calvin writes that "My purpose was solely to transmit certain rudiments by which those who are touched with any zeal for religion might be shaped to true godliness."[238] He saw the Scripture as doctrine that needed to be communicated clearly to the people. Calvin understood the positive perspective of biblical law and saw a beneficial aspect for believers.[239] Furthermore, he recognized "the gospel to be a clear manifestation of the mystery of Christ."[240] Communication of sound doctrine was critical for his ministry, both in writing his *Institutes* and

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[235] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.9. Italics my own.

[236] Calvin, *Institutes*, "Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France," 1.

[237] Calvin, *Institutes*, "Prefatory Address," 1.

[238] Calvin, *Institutes*, "Prefatory Address," 1.

[239] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.9.2.

[240] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.9.2.

in preaching his messages. The written Word of God was the subject of his sermons, while proclamation was the means of communication.

Through his sermons, Calvin conveys to his hearers the values for pursuing godliness. He uses the metaphor of cleanliness to indicate godliness. In a homily on 2 Timothy 2:20-21, Calvin declares that the people are His temples, thus he exhorts them to maintain "all pureness."[241] There is a virtual component to being a divine vessel, in which God dwells within the people through the Holy Spirit.[242] God's virtual residence has a prerequisite of holiness; as Calvin declares that "God will not dwell in a filthy place; His house must be pure and holy: whatsoever cometh near Him must be sanctified."[243] Thus, godliness comes when the people do the "good works" of obeying God's will and "answering His holy calling."[244] In another sermon on 1 Timothy, Calvin uses the cleanliness metaphor in declaring that "there is nothing but rottenness in us: I speak not of the body only, but more particularly of the soul, which is still more infected."[245] He stresses that the people can "cleanse themselves" and live in godliness if they are "separated from sin" and the behaviours of the wicked.[246] In a message on Titus 1:7-9, Calvin also describes the qualities of godliness as being holy, upright, and separate "from all the pollutions of this world."[247] Christians must be categorically different from unbelievers in their behaviour and conduct, which indicates their godliness. Calvin's metaphor of cleanliness to denote godliness draws upon biblical imagery of being cleansed from sin, such as Psalm 51.

Calvin used the preaching moment as an opportunity to impart sound doctrine. In a sermon on 2 Timothy 3:16-17, he defines that doctrine is "to know God," to "put our whole trust in Him," and

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[241] Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness*, 153. Sermon entitled "Vessels Unto Honor."

[242] Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness*, 153.

[243] Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness*, 153.

[244] Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness*, 153.

[245] Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness*, 119. Sermon on 1 Timothy 3:14-15, entitled "Behavior in the Church,"

[246] Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness*, 151. Sermon on 2 Timothy 2:20-21, entitled "Vessels Unto Honor."

[247] Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness*, 166. Sermon entitled "The Character of the Faithful."

"to know by what means He is our Savior: namely, in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ."[248] This knowledge of God comes from the written Word, which reforms the lives of its readers, so that the world may recognise them as "the servants of God."[249] Calvin's objective is for the believers to apply the written Word to their lives as a self-corrective measure to avoid God's condemnation. Calvin describes that through an encounter with God's Word, we will "be awakened out of sleep" and "examine our whole lives," becoming conscious of our own "filthiness" and judge ourselves.[250] In his Titus 1:7-9 sermon, Calvin exhorts his hearers, proclaiming, "we must live in obedience to the will of God that men may know we have renounced the world.[251] As noted in this sermon and previous ones, he indicates a delineation that occurs as believers separate themselves from the world. Believers are instructed to cling to the truth as "the devil" conspires to have them "shake" it off.[252] Historian François Wendel asserts that for Calvin, believers' motivation and decisions are influenced by Christ who is within them.[253] Wendel further affirms that for Calvin, "The grace that God accords to his elect in Jesus Christ is irresistible, and is accompanied by gifts that enable them to struggle effectually against sin and to make progress on the path to holiness."[254] Moreover, "the elect" are given the ability to persevere in their pursuit to holiness.[255]

Calvin has a great concern for his hearers, which is reflected in the lively word that he preaches. Through his messages, he aims to impart doctrine from the written Word and exhorts his hearers

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[248] Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness*, 135. Sermon entitled "The Proper Use of Scripture."

[249] Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness*, 138.

[250] Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness*, 136.

[251] Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness*, 162. Sermon entitled "The Character of the Faithful."

[252] Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness*, 162.

[253] François Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 247.

[254] Wendel, *Calvin*, 245.

[255] Wendel, *Calvin*, 245.

to live a godly life that is contrary to the world. The next section explores Calvin's use of exhortations in greater length.

2.3.2 Understanding Exhortations

Calvin recognized that sermons serve a purpose and warrant a response from the people. In his *Institutes,* he envisioned that the "teaching of the law" through Christ has the capability of "teaching, admonishing, reproving, and correcting."[256] Calvin understood that the law has three functions. The preparatory and the civil functions are the first and second uses.[257] He believes the third use of the law has the primary emphasis, and it serves its purpose among believers, who already have God's spirit within them.[258] Wilson states that Calvin's third use of the law "increases one's will and readiness to obey God's command."[259] Reformed theology scholar Randall C. Zachman also indicates that for Calvin, preaching is more than instruction, but a means of bringing forth "the meaning of Scripture to bear on every aspect of the lives of the congregation, so that they feel the force of its teaching, and so that it bears fruit in their lives."[260]

Calvin perceived the law of God as a positive aspect of faith. He articulated his understanding of the law, stating,

> [David] adverts not only to the precepts, but to *the promise of grace* annexed to their performance, which alone causes that which is *bitter to become sweet*. For what would be less amiable than the law.… David particularly shows, that *in the law* he discovered the Mediator, without whom there is *nothing pleasant or delightful*.[261]

From Calvin's perspective, the law is the source of the goodness of all things. By meditating on the law, believers will learn to abide by its teachings and be spared from the rocky road of

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[256] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.7.14.

[257] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.7.8-10.

[258] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.7.12.

[259] Wilson, "Reformed Preaching," 72.

[260] Zachman, *John Calvin as Teacher, Pastor, and Theologian*, 162.

[261] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.7.12. Italics my own.

transgressions. Calvin also evoked a positive reason for knowing the law: it already resides in the hearts of believers. Using the imagery in Jeremiah and Hebrews, he indicates that believers "have the law written and engraved upon their hearts by the finger of God."[262] As his *Institutes* excerpts suggest, Calvin encourages a positive understanding of the law, thus leading people to God's divine instruction.

Because of his understanding of God's law, Calvin used exhortations in his sermons, recognizing them as a critical element in his preaching. He instructs the people on how they should respond to receiving a sacrament, stating "we in turn *attest our piety* toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels and before men."[263] The people should not receive the proclaimed Word passively; rather, they should be compelled to respond with action. Exhortations were a critical component of Calvin's sermons, as they motivated his hearers towards action. He expressed that they should not just receive instruction, but also exhortation.[264] Calvin articulates that through studying the law and hearing these admonishments, a person "will be excited to obedience … and restrained from the slippery path of transgression."[265] Yet, he indicates that people's flesh can potentially impede their efforts towards God's righteousness. The solution, however, is the exhortations of God's law, which functions "like a whip to an idle and balky ass, to arouse it to work."[266] Calvin argues that the "constant sting" of God's law will not allow one to be stagnant.[267] His imagery of the whip and the sting suggests that such appeals to God's law were perceived as unpleasant, uncomfortable, or painful to hear.

Nevertheless, God's law is essential for believers, as it educates them on what is right. Yet, the believers' relationship with the law is now different, as it is not able to torment them, as Calvin

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[262] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.7.12.

[263] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.1. Italics my own.

[264] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.7.12.

[265] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.7.12.

[266] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.7.12.

[267] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.7.12.

suggests.[268] He asserts that believers are "under the law of grace" and "engrafted in Christ." Through Christ's grace and Spirit, they are released from the law's curse, and instead, they have it written upon their hearts.[269] With this change in relationship to the law, Calvin recognizes the beneficial aspect of it for teaching God's commandments. He carefully clarifies that his exhortations are not merits, whereby a person receives salvation, as that only comes from God's mercy. Calvin acknowledges that these appeals are found in Scripture, offering examples from the Apostle Paul. His reason for following these biblical exhortations is that "God may be glorified in us."[270]

2.3.3 Scholars' Perspectives on Calvin's Exhortations

From a contemporary perspective, Calvin's preaching could be understood and perceived as austere, due to his emphasis on the law. Homiletician Stephen Farris asserts that Calvin's lengthy exhortations are "the greatest weakness of Calvin's sermons," and they appear "to swallow up the gospel." [271] However, Farris qualifies this observation by recognizing that we do not know Calvin's sermon delivery, or the matter at which he spoke.[272] Conceivably, Calvin could have spoken his exhortations in such a manner that they would have been palatable for his hearers. Additionally, Farris elsewhere contends that for Calvin, the third use of the law "is neither hammer nor mirror but rather much loved guide," as "the law provides instruction."[273] In illustrating this perspective of preaching, Farris offers the analogy of warning his son when working with an electric jig saw, saying, "You could hurt yourself very badly with this. Don't let your fingers get anywhere near the blade. Keep your hands above the wood at all times. Make

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[268] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.7.14.

[269] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.8.57.

[270] Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.16.3.

[271] Farris, *Calvin@500*, 126.

[272] Farris, *Calvin@500*, 126.

[273] Stephen Farris, "Preaching Law As Gospel: Some Reflections on and from Psalm 119," *Papers of the Annual Meeting* (Toronto, ON: *The Academy of Homiletics*, 1998), 5.

sure the electric cord is out of the way of the blade."[274] Thus, the third and principal use of the law has an enabling function that not only guides people in the right path, but it allows them to walk where they would otherwise never be able to go. Therefore, the use of the law in preaching not only limits us so that we are kept safe, but it makes freedom possible.[275]

Like Farris, Wilson reasons that, for Calvin, the "third and principal use of the law *is* essentially gospel."[276] As previously noted, the law is where goodness originates, making what is bitter sweet. He notes that our context could inadvertently cause a misunderstanding of Calvin. Wilson speculates that, "Our own cultural resistance to authority may prevent us from hearing Calvin in a positive way."[277] Perhaps, Calvin understood that his exhortations were given in a spirit of loving concern for what the Scriptures commanded the people to do.

Systematic theologian Merwyn S. Johnson offers a similar perspective in understanding Calvin's exhortations. He suggests that, for Calvin, "The law … functions as an indicator of the character and activity of God."[278] He also explains that "Exhortation recalls the imperative mood of a command and may even entail posing a threat or emphasizing the consequences of a certain course of action."[279] Like Farris, Johnson gives a similar example of a warning: "Stop the car! before you go through the intersection, hit a car, get hurt, or kill someone!"[280] Yet, Calvin's sermonic exhortations were not all rebukes; many were positive appeals. He was inviting the people to join him in drawing closer to God through awareness, humility, and repentance. Calvin most commonly begins his exhortations with the imperatives "we must" and "let us."[281] To

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[274] Farris, "Preaching Law As Gospel," 6-7.

[275] Farris, "Preaching Law As Gospel," 8.

[276] Wilson, "Reformed Preaching," 65.

[277] Wilson, "Reformed Preaching," 74.

[278] Merwyn S. Johnson, "Calvin's Handling of the Third Use of the Law and Its Problems," in *Calviniana: Ideas and Influence of Jean Calvin*, vol. 10, ed. Robert V. Schnucker (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies, 1988), 46.

[279] Johnson, *Calviniana*, 47.

[280] Johnson, *Calviniana*, 47.

[281] Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, 116-117, 119.

illustrate his exhortations better, here are ten selected examples from various sermons. In a message on Deuteronomy 5:16, Calvin suggests how people must conduct themselves among their neighbours.

> Therefore, *let us* hold on to the fact that in order to live with our neighbors, we each have to correct this [tendency toward] arrogance and presumption and not retain it in our hearts, but *we must* learn to be humble and modest; *we must* realize that it is [even] our responsibility to be subject to the least, as Saint Paul explains it. And in order to do that *we must* take account of our own worth.[282]

In his sermon on Job 38:1-4, Calvin exhorts the people to seek the wisdom in the written Word.

> Yet *let us* remember what is here shown us: When we speak of God, *we must* not take license to chat and babble what seems good to us; but *let us* know that he has revealed his counsel in the Holy Scripture, that both great and small may submit to adore it.[283]

In a homily on Psalm 119:1-8, Calvin suggests an invitation to praise God, without whom life is despairing.

> For *we must* all confess that our life is miserable, if it tend[s] not to the praise and glorifying of God. *Let us* now see how we may praise him: *We must* be exercised in his judgments, that is, in the rule which he hath set down unto us.[284]

In a message from Matthew 28:1-10, he offers a positive invitation for the people to approach God boldly.

> *let us* come by faith straight to Him without pretense. And in so doing so *let us* be sure that this message belongs to us and is addressed to us. *We must* come boldly and without fear, but not without respect (for *we must* be touched with fear in order to adore the majesty of God). But, anyway, *let us* not he frightened as if we were altogether overcome with distrust. *Let us* know, then, that the Son of God will adapt Himself to our limitations when we come to Him in faith.[285]

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[282] John Calvin, *John Calvin's Sermon on the Ten Commandments*, trans. Benjamin W. Farley (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 140. Italics my own.

[283] John Calvin, *Steward of God's Covenant: Selected Writing*, eds. John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne (New York: Random House, 2006), 373. Italics my own.

[284] Calvin, *Sermons on Psalms 119*, 19. Italics my own.

[285] Calvin, *The Deity of Christ*, 191. Italics my own.

In a sermon on Luke 2:1-14, Calvin exhorts his congregation and himself to the simple actions of prayer and contentment in Jesus Christ.

> *We must* endure many annoyances, *let us* hold it as a certainty that we shall never cease to have peace toward our God. *Let us* pray to Him that He will make us experience it by His Holy Spirit, since that is one thing that surpasses all human understanding and *let us* so learn to be content with our Lord Jesus Christ and the spiritual benefits of which He makes us sharers, that we may be able to bear patiently all the miseries and afflictions of this world.[286]

In a homily from John 1:1-15, Calvin appeals that the people need to attend the school of God to hear what "He" has to say.

> However, *we must* remember that we are here speaking of things so high that all human sensibilities must be thrown down and that *we must* treat them in humility, applying them in their true sense, that *we must* not be too curious, that *we must* not have that foolish imagination which has until now prevailed in the world but that *we must* come to the school of God to listen to what He has to tell us and to flee every proposition of men which is contrary to what is released to us by the Holy Spirit.[287]

In a message on Acts 2:1-4, Calvin declares the people's need for God due to their sinful nature.

> However, *we must* be awakened, since we are too stupid, and *we must* also be led to obey God, being stripped of all presumption, knowing well that there is only all misery in us, that we are only mud and rottenness, indeed, even that there is only corruption in our souls until God has renewed us.[288]

In a sermon on Galatians 3:26-29, Calvin appeals to the hearers to deny themselves and accept Christ.

> Thus ye see that *we must* leave ourselves behind us when we come before God, and *we must* take upon us the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, yea we leave ourselves behind us. Not that we should not perceive our own misdoings and be rightly humbled and sorry for them: but [that we should do the clean contrary, and] yet notwithstanding take it for a full

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[286] Calvin, *Deity of Christ*, 50. Italics my own.

[287] Calvin, *Deity of Christ*, 20. Italics my own.

[288] Calvin, *The Deity of Christ*, 246. Italics my own.

> and resolute certainty, that God accepteth us when we come unto him as in the person of his only Son.[289]

In a homily on 2 Timothy 2:16-18, Calvin encourages his hearers to exercise discernment in relation to others and to accept "the simplicity of the gospel."

> *We must* learn to take heed, and walk fearfully and carefully. *Let us* view these things as a looking-glass set before our eyes, that we may see those who seemed to be passing for good Christians, fallen; having in themselves nothing but wickedness, using detestable speeches, having nothing but filthiness in all their lives. Seeing God hath placed these things before us, *let us* take waring thereby, and awake and walk in the simplicity of the gospel, that we may not become a prey to Satan.[290]

In a message on Titus 1:15-16, Calvin appeals to his hearers that they need to abstain from sinful behaviors, which God would not approve.

> *We must* call upon God in sincerity, and put our whole trust in Him; *We must* give up pride and presumption, and resort to Him with true lowliness of mind that we be not given to fleshly affections. *We must* endeavor to hold ourselves in awe, under subjection to God, and flee from gluttony, whoredom, excess, robbery, blasphemy, and other evils.[291]

As shown above, Calvin's exhortations are not a trivial occurrence, as they can be found in multiple sermons based on various Old and New Testament books. Depending on the biblical text of a sermon, his exhortations appear to have many different objectives and calls to action.[292] As noted in the excerpts, Calvin most commonly uses his exhortations with the imperatives "we must" and "let us." By speaking in first person plural imperative, he is including himself as a recipient of the sermon and its intended message. By not speaking in the second person, perhaps Calvin is suggesting a kinder, less judgemental approach, as he is calling himself to the same action.

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[289] John Calvin, *Sermons on Galatians* (Audubon, NJ: Old Paths, 1995), 491. Italics my own.

[290] Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness*, 63. Italics my own.

[291] Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness*, 78. Italics my own.

[292] Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, 149. Parker cautions against attributing a single homiletical approach or movement to Calvin's preaching, such as "statement of text, exegesis, interpretation, exposition, application, [and] exhortation." Rather, Parker maintains that Calvin's homiletical approach was "determined by the movement of the text."

Taking into consideration his understanding of the Word as proclamation, Calvin realized that God's Spirit was communicating to the people through these appeals. These exhortations were also based upon and in response to the written Word. Calvin did not want the people merely to hear it, but he wanted them also to be motivated to action. His desire for action in response to a sermon is a yearning of preachers in any age. Whether individuals hear sermons in-person or online, they should be inspired to action or to have a change in perspective. In addition, preachers should follow Calvin's lead by including themselves as recipients of the proclaimed Word, and they should respond to its appeals alongside their communities.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored how Calvin recognised the Word of God as proclaimed, sacramental, and lively, which helps us better understand what is taking place in the sermonic event. Amid a social media culture that sees preachers as religious influencers, we can easily become preoccupied with the persona of the preacher. However, Calvin redirects our attention to the divine activity that is taking place in the preaching moment. God's Spirit is involved with every aspect of proclamation, both in the pulpit and in the pew. Calvin has a deep conviction to promote biblical literacy and sound doctrine, amid the false teachings of his day. Today, amid the prevalence of misinformation on social media, the preaching moment – both in-person and online – provides an opportunity to impart a message of hope and good news. Additionally, preaching should be more than soundbites of information, but as Calvin expressed, a sacramental moment in which the people meet Christ through the proclaimed Word. Through the preaching of the Word, Christ transcends the limits of the physical world, and in essence, believers are connected virtually to Him through the working of the Holy Spirit. Thus, God's power to speak to us through preaching is not limited by the bounds of physical presence. To claim that the gospel cannot be present beyond physical proximity would be to deny the power of preaching itself, to which Calvin offers such eloquent witness. Furthermore, Calvin had a concern that the people would not just hear his preaching, but they would also be motivated to action. One of the great hopes of preachers is that through the power of the Holy Spirit, they will inspire change. Calvin exhorts us towards such reform both in ourselves and in others. With this historical

understanding of preaching, we have a foundation for more recent homiletical theories, including preaching online.

Chapter 3
Homiletical Ecclesiology and Community

> "Preaching as ordinarily understood is one-way communication in which the preacher receives a minimum of feedback. His listeners cannot question him, raise doubts, or express themselves; their role is a passive role. Preaching, as communication, is an incomplete process unless it is supplemented with dialogue."[293]

In understanding what preaching is, it is important to realise what it is not. Preaching should not be understood as a monological event, nor should it be considered a form of one-way communication. Rather, preaching should be conceptualized as a dialogical activity that occurs in community. Even if the preacher is the only one speaking, the congregation is communicating back to the preacher through their eye contact, facial expressions, body language, and attentiveness. Looking out at the congregation, preachers can get a sense of how their message is being received—whether positively or negatively. If individuals are falling asleep or making expressions of disgust at the sound of the sermon, they are certainly communicating their own message back to the preacher. Moreover, on digital platforms, preachers can sense their audience's reception to their message through the online engagement through comments and reactions.

Over the past sixty years, homileticians have negotiated the relationship between preachers and hearers and have conveyed their understanding of the Christian community. Various preaching movements have brought an awareness to those who comprise the community, both in and beyond the church, such as the turn to the listener and the other(s). These approaches have helped to move the sermon from being a passive event to having dialogical qualities. In this chapter, I argue that looking at the New Homiletic and postmodern homiletics, preaching scholars have envisioned an expansive ecclesiology that attempts to make the sermon more collaborative and give voice to the hearers' particularity and lived experience, which provides a framework for proclamation in the age of social media.

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[293] Clyde H. Reid, *The Empty Pulpit: A Study in Preaching as Communication* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 102.

The road map for this chapter will be as follows. The first section discusses the historical context of the crisis and questioning that led to the New Homiletic, which was a "turn to the listener." The writings of Clyde H. Reid, David James Randolph, Fred B. Craddock, Eugene L. Lowry, and Thomas G. Long show how community was valued in the New Homiletic and how it was conceptualised as "the hearer." Consideration of this earlier "turn to the listener"[294] provides a foundation for understanding subsequent turns.

The second section discusses the development of postmodern preaching, which can best be understood as a "turn to the other(s)." John S. McClure identifies a category for this homiletical approach which he called other-wise preaching. Postmodern preaching offers a revision on prior understandings of community as it values particularity over appeals to common human experience. Three themes are highlighted to show how community is valued in postmodern preaching. First, McClure's roundtable approach will be discussed in conjunction with Lucy Atkinson Rose and O. Wesley Allen's conversational preaching. Second, the development of contextual preaching is traced starting with Leonora Tubbs Tisdale to Eunjoo Mary Kim and David Schnasa Jacobsen. Third, Sarah A. N. Travis' metamorphosis preaching provides a framework for reconceptualizing the church beyond the establishment of Christendom.

The third section discusses the "turn to digital preaching," the most recent development in homiletics. Casey Thornburgh Sigmon has created a classification scheme for the theory and practice of digital preaching that she calls *homilecclesiology*, which is a conversational homiletic. With digital preaching, the preaching event goes "beyond the limits of the liturgical event, sanctuary space, and face-to-face encounter."[295] Homilecclesiology fosters community by opening the preaching event to more individuals beyond the time-space limits of in-person worship. In disrupting the binary between the pulpit and pew, this framework encourages the voices of the community through digital dialogue in comment sections, by tweeting, and through

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[294] Hans Malmström, "Engaging the Congregation: The Place of Metadiscourse in Contemporary Preaching," *Applied Linguistics* 37, no. 4 (August 2016), 562.

[295] Casey Thornburgh Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly: A Process Homilecclesiology for a Digital Age" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2017), 142.

other technological means.[296] Sigmon's expansive ecclesiology is rooted in relational networks[297], which provide a foundation for reimagining a homiletic that incorporates digital media theory.

3.1 The New Homiletic: a "Turn to the Listener"

The New Homiletic is a preaching philosophy that has had a significant impact on North American preaching, particularly in mainline Protestant churches. This section will explore the historical context that inspired this movement and attempt to offer a working definition of this preaching philosophy to capture relevant themes for the present study. Additionally, four homiletical approaches are highlighted here that are of value for digital preaching. Consideration of this "turn to the listener"[298] theory provides a foundation for understanding the subsequent turns.

3.1.1 Historical Context

The New Homiletic originated during a time of crisis[299] and questioning[300] in the late 1950's and continued into the subsequent decades. Preaching historian O. C. Edwards argues that "Trust was eroded on every hand" and that, amid the debacles of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, a significant portion of the American public lost faith in its leadership.[301] Americans realised that successive administrations had deceived them into believing that the war was being waged for an admirable cause and that they would be victorious. Furthering the public's

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[296] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 13, 142, 205.

[297] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 142.

[298] Malmström, "Engaging the Congregation," 562.

[299] O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, vo1. 1 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 798.

[300] Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 3rd ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1979), 4.

[301] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 798.

disappointment, President Richard Nixon's operatives burglarised and wiretapped the Democratic Party headquarters as part of his 1972 re-election effort.[302]

On an individual level, the broader cultural ethos was characterised by an increased emphasis on the self and individuals' "uniqueness."[303] Jean M. Twenge and others have traced the beginning of this trend to the 1960s, when American books show an increase in egocentric language, such as the phrases "all about me," "personalize," and "I am special."[304] Americans were also delaying or abandoning the institution of marriage, and those who did marry postponed having children.[305] Epitomizing the liberation from previous societal norms, thousands of young people indulged in "sex, drugs, and rock and roll" at the 1969 Woodstock festival.[306] In addition, consumerism increased the notion that material possessions serve as the key marker of success; thus, a popular bumper sticker of the time declared "The one who dies with the most toys wins."[307] Along with this distrust in institutions came doubts regarding the capacity of language to communicate reality, depict meaning,[308] or sustain social movements.[309]

Along with the social climate, the influence of mass media and technology were also a significant influence that spurred the New Homiletic. Edwards notes that television was an intimate mechanism that was shaping people's consciousness, and computers were being

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[302] Kenneth T. Walsh, "The 1960s: Polarization, Cynicism, and the Youth Rebellion," *U.S. News* website, last modified March 12, 2010, https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2010/03/12/the-1960s-polarization-cynicism-and-the-youth-rebellionredirect.

[303] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 799.

[304] Jean M. Twenge et al, "Increases in Individual Words and Phrases in American Books, 1960-2008," *PLOS One*, no. 7 (2012): 1, 4, doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0040181.

[305] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 799.

[306] Debbie White, "Free Love: Stunning Woodstock Pics," *The Sun*, last modified August 14, 2019, https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/9722418/stunning-woodstock-pics-show-sex-drugs-rockroll-generation-exploded-60s-scene-50-years-ago-this-week/.

[307] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 799.

[308] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 799.

[309] Craddock, As One Without Authority, 5.

integrated into everyday life.[310] Words were perceived to have a diminished effect as television was replacing the aural with the visual.[311] Preaching scholar Clyde H. Reid emphasizes the impact of radio and television by indicating electronic communication impacted how individuals think and feel.[312] Homiletician Don M. Wardlaw adds that television encouraged a connection between people at a global scale, which "ushered pluralism into every family den."[313] Hence, people were no longer fulfilled by preachers merely reciting biblical doctrines; but rather, they desired a relevant message that address the problems in their technological society.[314]

Among members of the public, church influence and involvement decreased along with trust in religious authority and teachings.[315] In 1967, Reid reflected about the state of church authority saying, "the minister no longer can command a hearing simply on the basis of his being a minister. People do not listen to his words as they once did … [t]he minister now needs to discover his new role, and this is probably all to the good."[316] Within the church, members of the clergy began to doubt the helpfulness of preaching in the lives of their parishioners. Homiletician Fred B. Craddock acknowledges this sentiment: "We are all aware that in countless courts of opinion the verdict on preaching has been rendered and the sentence passed."[317] He admits that preaching is "not entirely innocent of the charges brought against [it]."[318] Craddock recounts the disturbing trend of those "who are going AWOL from the pulpit" and others who continue to

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[310] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 798.

[311] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 800.

[312] Reid, *The Empty Pulpit*, 57.

[313] Don M. Wardlaw, "Homiletics and Preaching in North America," in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 243-252, eds. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 248.

[314] Wardlaw, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 246.

[315] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 799.

[316] Reid, *The Empty Pulpit*, 56.

[317] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 1.

[318] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 1.

preach out of obligation without recognising it as a valuable tool.[319] Not surprisingly, many seminaries during this time gave little attention to the study of homiletics, while some institutions began to identify preaching as a standalone discipline with its own curriculum.[320] Regarding the preaching from this period, Craddock notes that, "where the expectation is low, the fulfilment is usually lower."[321]

3.1.2 Defining the New Homiletic

As a reaction to the political, social, and religious context discussed above, scholars of preaching devised innovative approaches to proclamation that have become known as "the New Homiletic."[322] One of the first in North America to use the term and write on this movement was David James Randolph in his 1969 book *The Renewal of Preaching*. He suggests what this emerging homiletical approach will do, stating,

> In line with the new hermeneutic, a new homiletic would understand the uniqueness of the homily to lie in its character as event. The new homiletic would be a discipline which would serve both as a creative stimulus and as a critical apparatus for authentic preaching. Its subject matter would be reality, as exposed by the biblical text. The new homiletic would be an active part of the theological enterprise, and would at the same time necessarily engage itself in the field of the world.[323]

Fellow homileticians were also writing about the New Homiletic, such as Richard Eslinger who promoted this approach in the mid-1980s.[324] Paul Scott Wilson has defined the temporal scope of

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[319] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 2.

[320] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 3.

[321] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 5.

[322] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 799.

[323] David James Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1969), 1.

[324] Richard Eslinger, *A New Hearing: Living Options in Homiletical Method* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1987), 11.

this movement as running from the late 1950s to the 2010s, offering that now there are few publications on this subject.[325]

With the vast amount of literature spanning many decades, the task of defining this homiletical era is daunting. Edward suggests that the New Homiletic proposed strategies "are bound together more by diagnosis than prescription."[326] Scholars of preaching, who were dissatisfied with the homiletical status quo, offered their own distinct approach to proclamation.[327] Their proposals are neither "mutually exclusive," nor do they encompass a sole, unified homiletic.[328] Nevertheless, what unites these approaches together is that they rejected the prior preaching establishment, which was exemplified by John A. Broadus' preaching manual, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*.[329] Thus, homileticians offered their own alternatives as a revision. Edwards determines that none of these New Homiletical proposals ever "succeeded in establishing themselves as the ruling paradigm."[330]

To understand the New Homiletic with its various approaches, it is helpful to grasp the prior philosophy. Craddock characterises the prior traditional preaching as a deductive movement, meaning that it was moving from the "general truth to the particular application or experience."[331] A preacher begins a deductive sermon by "stating the thesis, breaking it down

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[325] Paul Scott Wilson, "Beauty and the Delayed Romantic Revolution of the New Homiletic," *The 2018 Academy of Homiletics Workgroup Papers*, Academy of Homiletic website (members-only content), 53, 54 n. 36. Examples include Scott Hoezee, *Actuality: Real Life Stories for Sermons That Matter* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014); Peter Jonker, *Preaching in Pictures: Using Images for Sermons That Connect* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015); Stephen Farris, *So Tell Me a Story: The Art of Storytelling for Preaching and Teaching* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018).

[326] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 799.

[327] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 800.

[328] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 820-1.

[329] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 799; John Albert Broadus, *A Treatise On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (New York: A.C. Armstrong, 1891).

[330] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 821.

[331] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 54.

into points, or sub-theses, explaining and illustrating these points, and applying them to the particular situations of the hearers."[332]

In a paper presented at the Academy of Homiletics, Wilson similarly describes the old homiletic as not being "concerned with beauty" but rather as "governed by mechanical forms" such as "expository, verse by verse, point form, topical, and doctrinal" approaches.[333] In practical terms, these sermons were "propositional using persuasive argument"; specifically, they were "meant to convince hearers of something to be believed or undertaken."[334] The old homiletic sermons also tend to convey truth as objective and "faith as information."[335] This established form of preaching had been the standard method for centuries until the New Homiletic.

Wardlaw describes the paradigm shift in preaching from the old homiletic to the new. The consciousness of preaching moved "from an analytical development concerned with timeless truth to a development that has movement."[336] Like the movement from right-brained to left-brained, sermons went from being analytical and linear to being "imaginative and intuitive."[337] Technically speaking, the content of sermons changed from a series of propositional points to narrative movements or stages, as exemplified in the approaches of David G. Buttrick and Eugene L. Lowry.[338] Significantly, Wardlaw observes that sermons shifted "from being authoritarian" and created in seclusion to being "relational" and "more collaborative."[339]

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[332] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 54.

[333] Wilson, "Beauty and the Delayed Romantic Revolution of the New Homiletic," 54.

[334] Wilson, "Beauty and the Delayed Romantic Revolution of the New Homiletic," 54.

[335] Paul Scott Wilson, "The New Homiletic," in *The New Interpreter's Handbook of Preaching,* 656-660, eds. Heather R McMurray and Paul Scott Wilson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010) ProQuest Ebook Central, 656.

[336] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 801.

[337] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 801.

[338] Edwards, *A History of Preaching,* 801; Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000); David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987).

[339] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 801, 823 n. 8. Wardlaw's observations about the New Homiletic were communicated to Edwards in a letter on April 26, 2000. Edwards recognises Wardlaw's reflection to be "more satisfactory" than Lowry's. For contrast, see: Eugene L. Lowry, "The Revolution of Sermonic Shape," in *Listening*

Likewise, Wilson describes sermons of the New Homiletic as being inductive messages with organic structure, narrative plot, and dynamic language, which implies a horizontal understanding of authority by not dictating definitive truth. Additionally, these sermons convey truth as contextual, and the preaching moment is recognised as a "transformational experience."[340] While not exhaustive, these descriptions offer a general overview of the tendencies, values, and character of the New Homiletic. The next section offers selected approaches of the movement which provide foundational theories for preaching online.

3.1.3 Relevant Themes of the New Homiletic

The New Homiletic has been known as "a turn to the hearer" because it brought awareness of those experiencing the proclaimed Word from the pews. This preaching philosophy fosters an expansive ecclesiology that attempts to make the sermon more collaborative by allowing the hearers to better engage and experience the sermon. Five themes of the New Homiletic are presented here, which provide a foundation for later movements.

A forerunner to the New Homiletic, Reid was one of the earliest scholars calling for a new way of preaching. In his 1967 book *The Empty Pulpit*, he criticizes preaching and recognises it as a communication failure due to "the absence of dialogue."[341] The action of dictating information to hearers is not communication, but rather, it is a "monological illusion."[342] Furthermore, traditional preaching implies that the speaker is the only one with "the truth, the answers, and the insights."[343] Reid reasons that "Preaching, as communication, is an incomplete process unless it

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to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred Craddock, ed. Gail R. O'Day and Thomas G. Long (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 93-112.

[340] Wilson, *The New Interpreter's Handbook of Preaching,* 656.

[341] Reid, *The Empty Pulpit*, 9, 106.

[342] Reid, *The Empty Pulpit*, 86.

[343] Reid, *The Empty Pulpit*, 78.

is supplemented with dialogue."[344] This perspective has been influenced by the changing perspectives of authority and the rise of mass communication through television and radio,[345] which was discussed in the previous section. Reid draws a connection between communication and community, reflecting that "without significant two-way communication, we cannot expect a deep sense of community to appear in our churches."[346] The implications of this perspective give an understanding of the priesthood of all believers by acknowledging that the preacher does not have the definitive perspective.[347]

Translating his theory into practice, Reid offers several proposals of how two-way engagement can be implemented into church programming,[348] such as pre-sermon and post-sermon discussion groups that facilitate a conversational feedback loop.[349] While offering these possible solutions, Reid also acknowledges "the threat of returned communication" and the appeal to continue the status quo of the monological sermon.[350] Interestingly, he does not suggest that the preaching moment itself could be an opportunity for exchange between the preacher and congregation. Reid's contribution identified the shortfall of traditional preaching, which led to a greater consciousness of the hearers in the preaching event. Preaching on digital applications does allow for the hearers to participate through the comment section and through reactions, which will be explored later.

The next homiletical approach is from Randolph, who was previously mentioned above. He recognises the sermon as an event, which implies that the preaching moment is a means of

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[344] Reid, *The Empty Pulpit*, 102.

[345] Reid determines that "the minister no longer can command a hearing simply on the basis of his being a minister," *The Empty Pulpit*, 56.

[346] Reid, *The Empty Pulpit*, 115.

[347] Reid, *The Empty Pulpit*, 78.

[348] Reid, *The Empty Pulpit*, 106.

[349] Reid, *The Empty Pulpit*, 106-11.

[350] Reid, *The Empty Pulpit*, 98.

"encounter, engagement, and dialogue."[351] Like Reid, Randolph indicates "the end of 'monologue' in the pulpit"; but rather, preaching is a "kind of participatory experience in which those present know themselves involved, even though only one man may be vocalizing at the time."[352] His assertion that the sermon is a dialogue appears peculiar if the preacher is the only one speaking. Randolph does note that dialogue sermons have had a resurgence; however, he does not give much attention to advocating for this approach. Nevertheless, he recommends that "the essence of dialogue lies in the quality of exchange, the stroking of meaning back and forth."[353] While acknowledging that preachers may superficially know their congregants,[354] Randolph does not offer a solution to resolve this gap in knowledge beyond the preacher being involved in the community.[355] Unlike Reid, Randolph does not offer opportunities for the hearers to respond to the preached Word through discussion groups.

For his own homiletical approach, Randolph stresses the importance of particularity and contextuality. He indicates that "a true sermon is an address to a particular people at a particular time in a particular place; it is not a general word to the universe."[356] Drawing on the principles of the New Hermeneutic[357], sermons of the New Homiletic strive to bring the biblical text's meaning into the hearers' situation, instead of exclusively using the text to extract meaning.[358] Instead of using a stern exhortation that whips the will of the hearers, preachers can use

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[351] Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching*, 7.

[352] Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching*, 7.

[353] Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching*, 67.

[354] Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching*, 47.

[355] Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching*, 93-94.

[356] Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching*, 44-45.

[357] Randolph notes that "The alleged dichotomy between 'formal theology' and 'the people in the pews' poses a threat to this preaching. The new hermeneutic aids in this rebirth and overcomes the threat by imparting a new understanding of reality, one that champions preaching as the way to interpret the gospel so that it is addressed to contemporary man." *The Renewal of Preaching*, 24.

[358] Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching*, 23.

imagination as a means of persuading hearers to a new perspective.[359] Practically, Randolph encourages a developing sermon structure, which allows the sermon to initially win the interest of its hearers and advance towards a climax.[360]

In *As One Without Authority*, Craddock recognises that the rebirth of preaching is found in "the rediscovery of its communal character."[361] He affirms that "preaching increases power when it is dialogical, when speaker and listener share in the proclamation of the Word."[362] Instead of having universal references to Scripture and humanity, the sermon should be cultivated from the dialogue between a particular congregation and a specific text.[363] The preacher is leading the congregation "into the experience of hearing the message of Scripture *for their situations*,"[364] while the listener is invited to participate in the sermon by completing its meaning.[365] This approach values the community of hearers by giving them agency to participate in the journey traced by the sermon and, ultimately, to reach their own conclusions rather than simply accepting those endorsed by the speaker.[366] Like Randolph, Craddock also values contextuality and dialogue. However, while having an awareness of the hearers, Craddock's approach does not facilitate opportunities for the hearers to engage in actual dialogue.

Similar to Randolph offering a progressive structure, Craddock advocates the use of an inductive approach, whereby the preachers take their hearers on a journey through their sermons and only reveal an insight at the end.[367] In practice, a sermon should have an element of "incompleteness" and not be exhaustive in dictating truth; rather, it should share a perspective in an open

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[359] Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching*, 92.

[360] Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching*, 126.

[361] Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 31.

[362] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 19.

[363] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 130.

[364] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 128.

[365] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 64.

[366] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 62.

[367] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 803.

manner.[368] Preachers should compose their sermons using the "ordinary vernacular"[369] of their community, knowing that "God can use the local idiom."[370] Craddock suggests using "evocative imagery" in sermons, so that the people in the pew can "see and hear" what the preachers have "seen and heard."[371] Additionally, an "overhearing" technique can help everyone to "listen" to the text objectively without being personally addressed, which allows individuals the freedom to identify with the people in the text.[372] This approach to preaching honors the listeners by giving them agency to participate in the journey traced by the sermon and, ultimately, to reach their own conclusions rather than simply accepting those endorsed by the speaker.[373] In the end, Craddock respects the fact that individuals have distinct opinions and perspectives which they will continue to have even after the sermon.[374]

The principles of Craddock's approach are still applicable for digital contexts. Sermons on social media must command the attention of individuals scrolling by on their mobile devices, which is accomplished by having an engaging message that respects the role of the listener. Craddock's advice that sermons should share a perspective in an open manner rather than trying to dictate a truth[375] is particularly helpful in the post-modern, open-air contexts of social media platforms.

In *Doing Time in the Pulpit,* Lowry explains the phenomenon of the different kinds of time that a faith community experiences during the sermon. Building on to previous notions of preaching as an event, he suggests that "a sermon is an ordered form of moving time."[376] He distinguishes

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[368] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 64.

[369] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 46.

[370] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 52.

[371] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 92.

[372] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 137.

[373] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 62.

[374] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 157.

[375] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 64.

[376] Eugene L. Lowry, *Doing Time in the Pulpit: The Relationship Between Narrative and Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1985), 8.

two aspects of time that coincide in the preaching event. One aspect, *chronos*, is linear and a non-repeatable moment in time that can be measured in hours, minutes, seconds, and so on.[377] For instance, churches can hold services on a Sunday from 10:30 to 11:30 AM EST. The participants are also immersed in a different kind of time, *narrative time*, during this hour. Narrative time focuses on the event, to such a degree that those who are experiencing it do not notice the passage of the other type of time (i.e., *chronos*). Lowry suggests that sermons unfold in narrative time when they capture listeners so completely that they do not continually monitor *chronos* time.[378] He offers as a secular comparison the common experience of exiting a movie theater and realising suddenly how much chronological time has passed. In this manner, Lowry asserts that "both chronological and inner times can be transcended and transformed by the power of narrative time."[379] His understanding of preaching as an event in time with all its various aspects is a critical contribution to the conceptualisation of sermons.

Drawing from Lowry, all "times"—whether *chronos*, *narrative*, or what theologians call *kairos*—have the potential to be present within the Internet and in digital preaching. Lowry's description of a sermon as an "ordered form of moving time"[380] implies that, if a sermon is preached on Zoom and not recorded, its characteristics are like those of a traditional in-person message unfolding in a linear, non-repeatable moment in *chronos* time.[381] This occasion would also be defined as a synchronous preaching event. On the other hand, when a sermon is preached on Facebook Live and the replay is posted so that it can be watched and commented on whenever viewers wish, it exists beyond a single moment in time. The sermon replay would be defined as asynchronous preaching. Moreover, synchronous and asynchronous preaching can also be a part of narrative time, if a message is delivered in a particularly engaging way because

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[377] Lowry, *Doing Time in the Pulpit*, 62.

[378] Lowry, *Doing Time in the Pulpit*, 63.

[379] Lowry, *Doing Time in the Pulpit*, 32.

[380] Lowry, *Doing Time in the Pulpit*, 8.

[381] Lowry, *Doing Time in the Pulpit*, 62.

the listeners can lose track of the passage of their *chronos* time.[382] Through the power of God's Spirit, the digital sermon, whether synchronous or asynchronous, has the potential to be a part of *kairos* time, which means "the right time"[383] in a theological sense, in which "God's time breaks into human history."[384] Beyond Lowry's framework, the conception of time has a greater complexity on the Internet, as its depended on functioning infrastructure and connection. Additionally, time in digital spaces can be ephemeral because online content can be deleted. Social media users can also elect to deactivate or delete themselves from the platform, in a sense erasing an event in digital time.[385] For the purposes of this present study, it is sufficient to say that Lowry's various iterations of time provide value and relevance for today—in both in-person and digital contexts.

In *The Witness of Preaching*, Thomas G. Long proposes the image of "preacher as *witness*," which—he claims—represents "the true character of Christian preaching."[386] Through this approach, he reveals an understanding of the relationship between the preacher and hearers within his framework of preaching. Because churches place a high value on "hearing the truth of God's promise and claim through the Scripture;" they entrust their preachers to go "to the Scripture for that truth."[387] This approach values the formal education of ministers as trained workers,[388] while also recognising that the preachers originated from and continue to be a part of the faith community as believers themselves. Faith comes full circle, as the congregation has initially imparted the '"old, old gospel story"' to their preachers, and now the faith community is

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[382] Lowry, *Doing Time in the Pulpit*, 63.

[383] Lowry, *Doing Time in the Pulpit*, 32.

[384] Lowry, *Doing Time in the Pulpit*, 64.

[385] For more information: Tero Karppi, *Disconnect: Facebook's Affective Bonds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

[386] Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 2nd ed., (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 45.

[387] Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 48.

[388] Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 48.

commissioning these spiritual leaders to proclaim the gospel anew.[389] Long envisions preaching as an event, whereby the people encounter a divine presence, and "hear God's voice speaking" to them, amid their situations.[390] With his understanding, faith communities have agency, insofar as they have selected their ministers to go to the Scripture "to search, to study, and to listen obediently on their behalf."[391] Long rejects the claim that the preacher goes to the biblical text in isolation; but rather, they go to the Scriptures with a perspective of their faith communities. As witnesses, the preachers return to their communities and testify to what they have seen, heard, and experienced through the written Word.[392] For more traditional homileticians, this homiletic dispels the notion of the passive hearers, as it acknowledges that they have tasked their preachers to go to the Scriptures on their behalf. Thus, the hearers are not passive as they anticipate and desire to hear what the preacher has to say.

While one can appreciate the biblical image of witness[393], Long conceptualises preaching as a task that must be outsourced to trained individuals, who have come from the community. This approach puts significant confidence in the preacher's ability to know the individuals within their congregation; however, this assumption may not be reality. Long's homiletic also assumes a level of pastoral authority, which may not be culturally applicable today as it was decades ago. The next section discusses how preaching scholarship has continue to evolve into new movements that build upon and depart from the New Homiletic.

3.2 Postmodern Preaching: a "Turn to the Other(s)"

In his 2001 book *Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics*, John S. McClure determines that a significant movement has occurred within preaching scholarship. He notes that,

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[389] Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 7.

[390] Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 49.

[391] Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 49.

[392] Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 49.

[393] For example, see: Isaiah 43:8-13

"homiletics has left the house built by pre-modern rhetorical reason and by Enlightenment reason, and is well on its way toward epistemologies and forms of reason that transgress the fact-value dichotomy and modernity as a whole. Even the New Homiletic has been left far behind, and there seems to be no looking back."[394] McClure asserts that these postmodern proposals "turn preaching toward its other(s)."[395] Wilson also notes the emergence of this movement that incorporates ethics into homiletics, which positively influences the church by bringing an awareness of the marginalized and welcoming the stranger.[396] This section explores four postmodern methods that offer a greater awareness of those within the faith community and the global society beyond the church, which provides a foundation for digital preaching.

3.2.1 Other-wise Preaching

McClure creates a classification scheme called "other-wise preaching" for this ethical initiative in homiletics. This postmodern philosophy encompasses the values of the other approaches covered in this section. Rather than appealing to "common human experience" that is the lynchpin of the New Homiletic[397], other-wise preaching aims to focus on particular lived experiences of actual individuals to counteract "experiential and ecclesial hegemonies within church and culture."[398] Furthermore, the assumption of common experience enforces an oppressive and limited understanding of knowledge on others.[399]

According to McClure, other-wise homiletics strives—rather ambitiously— "to place the totality of homiletics under deconstructive erasure so that preaching might be transformed by a profound

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[394] John S. McClure, *Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2001), 132.

[395] McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, 1.

[396] Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 145.

[397] McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, 47.

[398] McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, 48-49.

[399] McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, 105.

awareness of the proximity of preaching's 'others.'"[400] Furthermore, it has "an ethical concern to reorient preaching toward the 'other,' to situate preaching as a radical act of compassionate responsibility."[401] This approach implies that preachers should consider marginalized perspectives when discerning a biblical text[402] and lead their hearers in an "exiting," that is "going under erasure," from their previous understandings.[403] During the preaching moment, faith communities encounter countertestimony (that is, the perspective of others) that impacts their worldview.[404] This approach to preaching aims to deconstruct assumptions and make room for multiple realities. Furthermore, it encourages a widening of the Christian community as it fosters an awareness and concern beyond itself. McClure envisions the church experiencing "the glory of the Infinite in the vulnerable faces of others."[405]

Practically, McClure recommends that Christian communities should encounter perspectives and realities beyond themselves. As other-wise preaching is "other-inspired and other-directed,"[406] this approach necessitates using biblical resources from marginalised voices, such as those that are "gendered, global, postcolonial, and other-situated."[407] Preachers are encouraged to seek out biblical characters who "hover in the margins" and inquire about the text, asking "Who doesn't speak? Who's missing? Who goes nameless? … What contradictions open the text toward other-wise interpretations?"[408] After studying alone, preachers should have roundtable discussions about the text with those inside and outside the church to assist in the sermon preparation.[409]

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[400] McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, xi.

[401] McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, 7.

[402] McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, 101.

[403] McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, 152.

[404] McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, 149.

[405] McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, 45.

[406] McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, xi.

[407] McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, 139.

[408] McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, 139.

[409] McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, 146.

Interestingly, McClure indicates that, "*we're* not all men, not all white, not all middle class, not all English-first-language, and so on."[410] However, he does make an unfortunate assumption that the homileticians or preachers, who are preaching other-wise, are not marginalized voices. This belief is conveyed when he posits that through other-wise preaching, individuals experience God in the faces of others.[411] Consequently, he others the others, particularly the preacher or scholar who is marginalised. Nevertheless, McClure's philosophy has been a significant contribution to homiletical scholarship in the twenty-first century. The following approaches strive to preach other-wise, thus bringing a greater awareness of the community—both in and beyond the church.

3.2.2 Conversational Preaching

Despite its name, conversational homiletics does not entail conversation in the traditional sense of being an active dialogue during the sermon; nevertheless, it seeks to honour the voices and perspectives of the faith community. This section presents three conversation-inspired proposals.

Before writing about the classification scheme of *Other-wise Preaching*, McClure proposed a collaborative, roundtable preaching approach, which embodied other-wise values. He asserts that this approach seeks to "cultivate within the theological imagination of our Christian communities an understanding of the *other*, the stranger, as the potential bearer of wisdom and insight."[412] It also offers a revision to approaches in the New Homiletic, which assume common experience and knowledge between the preachers and hearers.[413] McClure notes that appeals to commonality can inhibit people from actually experiencing another's perspective.[414] Furthermore, both the old and New Homiletic did not succeed in creating a truly "communal

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[410] McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, 49. Italics my own.

[411] McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, 45.

[412] John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 18.

[413] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 42-3.

[414] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 43.

approach" to preaching that is able to investigate and convey the gospel.[415] Thus, the roundtable approach to preaching strives to make the monological sermon more participatory and dialogical in nature without having an actual dialogue during the preaching event.[416] McClure determines that earlier attempts of "dialogue preaching" were unsuccessful, such as when preachers would simulate conversation through a "staged dialogue," which left the hearers to be overhearing spectators.[417]

Like Reid, McClure proposes that leaders have pre-sermon discussions with a selected group from the congregation and community who offer diverse perspectives. These sessions provide an opportunity for individuals to discuss the weekly preaching text and communicate their own interpretation of it.[418] This roundtable approach to preaching honors the community by seeking the perspectives of others, without merely assuming commonality. Furthermore, preachers consider the roundtable members as fellow brainstormers and collaborators of the sermon, instead of a focus group to be consulted.[419] This roundtable approach helps pastors to recognise that they can learn from the valuable perspectives of others.[420] Furthermore, it implies a revised theology of the Word, in which the interpretation of Scripture should be "discerned by the community rather than by individuals,"[421] which the Reformation reaffirmed this inclusive belief of "the priesthood of all believers."[422] McClure gives a vision of a inclusive ecclesiology, asserting that "The Word of God, therefore, is a communal Word when it is discerned, not from the center of the community by professional preachers, but from the margins of the community

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[415] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 45.

[416] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 47.

[417] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 40.

[418] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 49.

[419] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 23, 65.

[420] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 23.

[421] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 21.

[422] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 22.

by a collaboration of everyday preachers who are developing as maturing Christian disciples."[423] Thus, the congregation has a greater sense of agency as they are able to have initiative in their own formation as a faith community.[424]

Translating homiletical theory into practice, McClure provides guidelines for collaborative, roundtable preaching. The roundtable group should consist of no more than ten individuals, who serve a four-month period. The membership should consist of a diverse selection of those within the church and community, even those who are not Christians.[425] Additionally, the group should be diverse in terms of gender, age, social location, and interests, particularly in making sure to include marginalized individuals.[426] McClure recommends that the group and its membership is openly communicated to the congregation[427], so that congregates can convey sermon feedback to group members.[428]

During the roundtable meeting, the group members are encouraged to not only encounter the biblical text, but also engage in conversation about each other's perspective.[429] The conversation remains "open-ended" without seeking to have a decisive biblical interpretation.[430] After the roundtable meeting, the preachers should seek to recreate the dynamics of their discussion and their engagement with the biblical text through the sermon.[431] Instead of providing a verbatim account of the group's discussion, roundtable-inspired sermons must draw on them either

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[423] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 23.

[424] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 50.

[425] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 62.

[426] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 61.

[427] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 63.

[428] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 63.

[429] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 68.

[430] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 52.

[431] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 74.

through direct description or indirect imitation.[432] McClure indicates that "imitation" means conveying the dynamics and language of the roundtable conversation without referring to it directly.[433]

Like McClure, Lucy Atkinson Rose created her own proposal in *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church.* She acknowledges that her "proposal clearly builds on, even while it seeks to push beyond" the New Homiletic,[434] which she has termed "transformational preaching."[435] She notes that the New Homiletic "build[s] on the power of sermonic language to 'do' or 'perform' a text, to create a new reality, or to transform values, worldviews, or ways of being in the world."[436] However, conversational preaching is cautious of the "persuasive character of language," particularly when preachers convey things as universal when they are actually "particular and individual."[437] Rather than trying to change the hearers, her postmodern approach "seeks to engage the community of faith in its central, ongoing conversations"[438] and acknowledge the perspective of individuals' experience from their social location.[439]

Rose describes conversational preaching as "communal, nonhierarchical, personal, inclusive, and scriptural."[440] This approach is "conversational," as the preaching emerges from and echoes the ongoing discussions between the preacher and the congregation.[441] Rose sees preaching as

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[432] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 72-3.

[433] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 73.

[434] Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox, 1997), 85.

[435] Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 59

[436] Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 110.

[437] Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 110.

[438] Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 111.

[439] Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 9.

[440] Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 121.

[441] Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 96.

"rooted in a relationship of connectedness and mutuality between the preacher and the worshipers."[442] She reflects that while the sermon is spoken generally by one person, "exploring the Word and deciding its meanings, its claims, and its direction-pointings are the responsibilities of the priesthood of all believers—that is, the entire community of faith both locally and globally."[443] The community is comprised of individuals, who have diverse perspectives and worldviews,[444] and marginalised individuals are left "without power, status, or voice."[445] The implications of her ecclesiology take seriously the priesthood of all believers as they are tasked with discerning God's word, and as the community lifts up those that Jesus identifies as the "least of these."[446]

O. Wesley Allen offers his own conversational homiletic that is a critique of the New Homiletic and a revision of Rose's proposal. He argues that sermons of the New Homiletic exhibit "the power of language to shape, define, and even create reality,"[447] and they offer "a specific experience of the gospel"[448] for the hearers. While the New Homiletic has recognised the proclaimed Word as an "event", Allen asserts that due to God's omnipresence, "we no longer view the sermon as a unique event in which God's presence is conveyed to those gathered."[449] Rather, his conversational homiletic identifies the preachers' responsibility and the sermon's objective is "to point to the divine presence"[450] and "to help congregations re-member" God's

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[442] Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 3.

[443] Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 4.

[444] Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 128.

[445] Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 128.

[446] Matthew 25:40, NRSV; Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 122.

[447] O. Wesley Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers: A Conversational Approach to Proclamation and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 53.

[448] Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers*, 58.

[449] Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers*, 44.

[450] Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers*, 44.

presence.[451] Allen reflects that "we ultimately perform exegesis not to get a better view of the text but to get a better view through the text."[452] He recognises that these sermons can use biblical text as a lens to comprehend and address the human condition, rather than merely communicate "what the text says or the experience it offers."[453]

Allen criticizes Rose's assertion that preaching can be non-hierarchical, by noting that the preacher's voice is privileged through the monological sermon.[454] He points out that hierarchy is not necessarily negative, as people often seek wisdom and advice from others.[455] The preacher's sermon should emerge from the conversations within the congregation, rather than the preaching being the prompt for discussion.[456] His homiletic acknowledges that preaching is "a shared responsibility of the church offered through a matrix of theological, religious, political, and personal conversations."[457] He stresses the "cumulative effect" of conversational sermons over time and their potential for influencing change.[458]

Allen recognises "the church as a community of theological conversation"[459] that shares the responsibility of the gospel's proclamation with the preacher.[460] This ecclesiology envisions "individuals [who] gather to proclaim their experiences and interpretations of God, self, and the world in a give-and-take process of making meaning."[461] This implies that God is present everywhere; therefore, "everyone has experienced God and can participate in [the] give-and-take

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[451] Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers*, 45.

[452] Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers*, 69.

[453] Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers*, 69-70.

[454] Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers*, 39.

[455] Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers*, 40.

[456] Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers*, 14.

[457] Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers*, 15.

[458] Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers*, 52.

[459] Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers*, xiii.

[460] Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers*, 15.

[461] Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers*, xiii.

God-talk."[462] In valuing community, Allen encourages preachers to engage in "reciprocal listening" with their congregations, which opens them up to the possibility of changing their perspective.[463] Practically, sermon texts and topics should be relevant to the congregational discussions[464] and help to "move the conversation in new directions."[465] Allen recommends that preachers work on multiple sermons at a time in a staged, overlapping approach to provide continuity so that people can recognize the connections between sermons.[466]

A conversational homiletic is well-suited for digital preaching as it honours the voices and perspectives of the hearers. Moreover, preaching online can also facilitate a greater degree of conversation in the preaching moment through the platform features, like the comment section and reactions. Preachers can also use social media to engage in a virtual roundtable discussion about the biblical text. These elements allow people to communicate back to the preacher and the other hearers, which could provide a greater degree of communication. Preachers can leverage these features to foster dialogue between themselves and the social media users who are experiencing the preaching event.

3.2.3 Contextual Preaching

Paying careful attention to the hearers' context is a longstanding value in preaching, as it honours the uniqueness of communities. In *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, Leonora Tubbs Tisdale asserts that "preaching as local theology is a 'hearer-oriented event,'"[467] which values the congregation's theological perspective and how the people "shape and feed the theology

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[462] Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers*, 44.

[463] Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers*, 41.

[464] Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers*, 66.

[465] Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers*, 67.

[466] Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers*, 76-78.

[467] Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, Fortress Resources for Preaching (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 45.

which finds its voice in the pulpit."[468] Pastors should exegete not only Scripture, but also their congregations and their unique subcultures by studying their faith communities like "amateur ethnographers."[469] Tisdale describes contextual preaching as a dance that "values both textuality and contextuality, both faithfulness to the Gospel and fittingness for the congregation."[470] Her approach to contextual preaching represents an effective "turn towards the listener" since it reveals the unique narrative of each faith community.

Tisdale identifies a pulpit-pew gap that is present between the preachers and their congregations. Preachers should not assume their sermons are meaningful and accessible to their hearers; rather, preachers should methodically study their congregations[471] and create fitting messages that reflect the language and particularity of the people.[472] Tisdale recognises the sermon is "a participatory act in which the preacher models a way of doing theology that meets people where they are, but that also encourages them to stretch themselves by trying … new patterns of belief and action."[473] She describes a vision of the church as a folk dance, in which preachers through their contextual sermons encourage others to participate.[474] Her ecclesiology celebrates the particularity of God's people and the nature of the gospel to become "incarnate within the real subcultural world its hearers inhabit."[475]

Tisdale advocates that preaching should be "more fitting, seriously imaginable, and transformative for local congregations."[476] She recommends that pastors can gather information

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[468] Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 42.

[469] Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 90.

[470] Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 121.

[471] Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, xii.

[472] Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 127, 129.

[473] Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 125.

[474] Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 143.

[475] Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 129.

[476] Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 55.

from members who serve as the "resident theologians,"[477] who can provide insight into the situation and culture of a church.[478] Cultural data, texts, environment, and congregants' actions should be taken into account[479] to identify a congregation's "worldview, values, and ethos."[480] Preachers should better communicate by composing sermons that reflect this gathered knowledge. Additionally, sermons should use "simple, plain, conversational speech"[481] and incorporate illustrations that reflect the congregation's reality.[482] The aim of contextual preaching is to "enflesh the gospel" in the congregation's ordinary, lived experience.[483]

In *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, Eunjoo Mary Kim proposes "trans-contextual" preaching, which is a revision of Tisdale's approach.[484] Kim claims that Tisdale's understanding of context is monolithic as she "sees congregational culture as a united whole."[485] In contrast, transcontextual preaching attempts to safeguard a faith community from solely focusing on itself,[486] by recognising that the local congregations have an interconnected relationship with the greater world.[487] Kim argues that a transcontextual method "moves beyond particularity to reach interdependent relationships between one's own and the concerns of others."[488]

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[477] Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 132.

[478] Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 132.

[479] Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 64-77.

[480] Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 77.

[481] Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 127.

[482] Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 129.

[483] Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 130.

[484] Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 14-15.

[485] Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 13.

[486] Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 17.

[487] Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 16.

[488] Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 17.

While the New Homiletic is recognized as a turned to the hearer, postmodern homiletics invites a turn to "the Other."[489] Kim's transcontextual preaching aims to name "God's humanizing activities in the world and seeks to understand and embrace the Other, even when that Other exists beyond our horizons."[490] This approach recognises how individuals' social location impacts how they understand Scripture and people who are different from themselves.[491] The sermon's objective is to invite the listeners "to become agents for change, actively participating in the shaping of a new reality of humanization,"[492] which "is a communal effort to construct a new worldwide community to which we all belong and must contribute."[493] Kim raises the distinction that "beautiful preaching" is more than aesthetic, but it has substance as it aims "to connect the human spirit to the divine Spirit, enabling us to live by building affinity and solidarity with others."[494]

Kim has an expansive view of the Christian community, which is informed by the "web of interconnectedness" that has been created by globalisation with the mobilization of communication, commerce, and culture.[495] She asserts that "Whatever God is doing in and through the *koinonia*, God is doing also in the world,"[496] and thus Christians should broaden their understanding of God's work and presence, instead of merely confining it to the Christian fellowship.[497] Notably, Kim highlights Nathan Mitchell's prediction that online faith communities may lead to '"a new understanding of community' and will shake the organization of the church profoundly."[498] Furthermore, community is no longer confined to "face-to-face"

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[489] Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 3-4.

[490] Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 64.

[491] Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 73, 81.

[492] Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 64.

[493] Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 50.

[494] Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 109.

[495] Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, xi.

[496] Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 23.

[497] Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 23.

[498] Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 40.

interaction, but it can be formed by "face-to-screen" virtual communication.[499] Preaching should be inclusive and recognise the diversity of the listeners with their various experiences.[500] Her ecclesiology envisions an inclusive Christian community, which sees beyond itself to the experience of others and imagines a shared global vision.[501]

Kim honours community through an interpathic approach, in which preachers consider how individuals read the biblical text, considering their "race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality, and so forth."[502] Like Reid and McClure, she suggests a communitarian reading of Scripture as a church activity and a pre-sermon exercise. This roundtable reading of Scripture does not privilege a particular understanding; rather, it considers all perspectives, particularly marginalised voices.[503] Kim considers the viewpoint of those who are absent, as well as encouraging non-church individuals to join the discussion group.[504]

While offering an important perspective, Kim's critique on Tisdale is not entirely fair. Tisdale's understanding of contextual preaching was influenced by her ministry context, social location, and time. As a white American, Tisdale may not have the personal exposure to the experiences of globalisation, immigration, and racial marginalisation as Kim, who is a first-generation Asian American, who immigrated to the United States from Korea.[505] Furthermore, when Tisdale published her book in 1997, globalisation had not manifested itself to the extent that it was in 2010, when Kim published her book. Moreover, the Internet and digital devices were not yet readily accessible to the public. Tisdale's contextual method was based, largely in part, to her experience co-pastoring four dairy farm churches with her husband.[506] Like many preachers,

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499 Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 39.

500 Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 106-07.

501 Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 109.

502 Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 68, 74.

503 Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 74-75.

504 Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 74.

505 Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 85, 125.

506 Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 2.

both Tisdale's and Kim's homiletical method are contextual to their social location and lived experience.

In the multi-author work *Theologies of the Gospel in Context: The Crux of Homiletical Theology*, David Schnasa Jacobsen recognises preaching as a theological endeavour that "requires naming gospel while honoring the otherness of texts, the uniqueness of situations, and the particularities of context."[507] His approach is a revision of prior understandings of preaching as merely "a rhetorical move from text to sermon."[508] Like Kim, Jacobsen claims that Tisdale's understanding of context is "described more or less monolithically."[509] Jacobsen recognises a community's context as being made of differing perspectives that both inform and impact the group as a whole.[510] For Tisdale, contextual preaching means that "the Gospel" message is delivered in the language and imagery of the people.[511] However, Jacobsen recognises that the gospel itself is not a fixed entity, but rather it is contextual to its recipients.[512] Depending on the particular community, the gospel could mean reconciliation, liberation, promise, prosperity, and/or Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.[513]

Adding to the contextual discussion, Travis observes a distinction between the Gospel (capital G) and the gospel (small g): the former refers to "God's action in Jesus Christ crucified and risen, revealed in Scripture and through the Holy Spirit," while the latter denotes "how we name and interpret what God has done and is doing in the world."[514] For Travis, postmodern, postcolonial preaching is "concerned with the well-being of all who are caught in the web of

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[507] David Schnasa Jacobsen, ed., *Theologies of the Gospel in Context: The Crux of Homiletical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 1.

[508] Jacobsen, *Theologies of the Gospel in Context*, xi.

[509] Jacobsen, *Theologies of the Gospel in Context*, 4.

[510] Jacobsen, *Theologies of the Gospel in Context*, 5.

[511] Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 127, 129.

[512] Jacobsen, *Theologies of the Gospel in Context*, 2.

[513] Jacobsen, *Theologies of the Gospel in Context*, 3.

[514] Sarah A. N. Travis, "Deconstructing a Gospel of Reconciliation: Locating Trouble and Gospel in Postcolonial Preaching," in *Theologies of the Gospel in Context: The Crux of Homiletical Theology*, ed. David Schnasa Jacobsen (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 66.

colonialism/imperialism."[515] As a revision of Wilson's trouble-grace homiletical paradigm[516], her homiletic challenges the church to look beyond itself and consider the perspectives of grace and trouble beyond the gathered community.[517] Preachers should seek "to locate the good news that will offer joy to those in the room," as well as giving life for those outside.[518] Preachers should look beyond their gathered community,[519] by considering: if a particular message "is good news for my community … is it good news for others? And if it is not good news for others, is it still good news for my community?"[520]

Travis urges preachers to recognise that proclamations of truth are both "complicated" and "partial," as "more than one thing can be true in relation to any given text or contemporary situation."[521] Preachers should make room for the complexity of multiple and competing truths to honor various perspectives; thus, sermons should include diverse experiences of trouble and grace.[522] Travis envisions the sermon as a "third space," where "truth can be negotiated" and individuals can better grasp other perspectives.[523] The listeners can "ponder their own ambiguous location in the midst of empire" and the "trouble and grace in their own lives."[524] The preacher and the hearers can discern "what God is doing in the world, ensuring that … [they] are not merely affirming human action and naming it grace."[525] This homiletical approach honors the

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[515] Travis, *Theologies of the Gospel in Context*, 67.

[516] Paul Scott Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching, Revised and Updated* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2018).

[517] Travis, *Theologies of the Gospel in Context*, 67.

[518] Travis, *Theologies of the Gospel in Context*, 83.

[519] Travis, *Theologies of the Gospel in Context*, 67.

[520] Travis, *Theologies of the Gospel in Context*, 69.

[521] Travis, *Theologies of the Gospel in Context*, 78.

[522] Travis, *Theologies of the Gospel in Context*, 78.

[523] Travis, *Theologies of the Gospel in Context*, 78.

[524] Travis, *Theologies of the Gospel in Context*, 78.

[525] Travis, *Theologies of the Gospel in Context*, 78.

human community by giving voice to multiple perspectives, those within and outside the faith community.

Contextual preaching in digital settings is more complex and expansive than traditional preaching from the pulpit. When preachers speak on an open social platform such as Facebook, they address not only their parishioners but also those scrolling by, such as their friends and followers on social media. For instance, inside jokes and references specific to their congregations may alienate other visitors.[526] Thus, preachers need to be aware of the multiple audiences for their digital sermons and to identify the needs of each.

3.2.4 Metamorphosis Preaching

In *Metamorphosis: Preaching after Christendom*, Travis proposes a postmodern homiletic, in which sermons seek to deconstruct the Christendom narrative and shift churches to a post-Christendom perspective.[527] Her approach understands that North American churches are experiencing "decline and disestablishment."[528] Rather than focusing on sermonic techniques that aim for entertainment, metamorphosis preaching helps the hearers to cope with the church changing and in adopting a different identity through a new narrative.[529] This approach is also "other-wise" as it seeks to be mindful of various biblical perspectives, even prompting preachers to consider how other communities hear a particular text, such as comparing how settler and indigenous Christians interpret texts differently.[530] The new narrative of the church is "shaped

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[526] Justin Trapp, "The Ulimate Guide to Taking Sermons Digital," *Pushpay* (blog), last modified July 3, 2020, https://pushpay.com/blog/guide-to-making-church-sermons-digital/.

[527] Sarah Travis, *Metamorphosis: Preaching after Christendom* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), 88.

[528] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 5.

[529] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 87.

[530] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 80

communally," whereby it is "spoken out by preachers who are in active conversations with listeners, neighborhoods, and the global context."[531]

Travis observes how the church has aligned itself with empire by "instilling its hierarchies, assumptions of superiority and universality, and control of private and public life."[532] Alternatively, she proposes that the church depart from a Christendom self-understanding of "triumphalism, privilege, and a sense of permanence"[533] to a new realisation as "an incarnate, vulnerable, creative body."[534] A post-Christendom community is not "tied to a particular place but will learn to share life with others at the margins."[535] Rather than being chaplains to empire,[536] preachers can assist "as midwives" in bringing about a post-Christendom narrative,[537] which is created by being in conversation with their hearers, their community, and knowing the larger global context.[538] Her homiletical ecclesiology imagines the church being light and nimble, as it is "effective and content with less resources," even selling its buildings and becoming "vulnerable to a culture that is not particularly church-friendly."[539]

Travis proposes a homiletical approach that helps faith communities to shift to a post-Christendom perspective. Her "metamorphosis" method has four homiletical aims. First, the sermon "names our discomfort, despair, and dislocation in relation to the story of Christendom"[540] and seeks to deconstruct the Christendom illusion "with its promises of glory,

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[531] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 84.

[532] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 34.

[533] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 43.

[534] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 14.

[535] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 97.

[536] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 95.

[537] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 59.

[538] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 84.

[539] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 103.

[540] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 88.

safety, certainty, and permanence."[541] Second, a provisional perspective is presented that "reinterprets" the previous one.[542] Third, the sermon invites the hearers to envision practically how the new narrative will be implemented in their church. Last, this approach is mindful of the fear and sorrow that comes with change, even if the change is desired within the community.[543] Metamorphosis preaching is mindful of the various biblical perspectives, even prompting preachers to consider how other communities hear a particular text.[544]

A metamorphosis homiletic could help faith communities adapt to a new digital environment for church ministry, amid the decline of churches in North America.[545] Metamorphosis preaching allows preachers to be midwives who create a new narrative of the church.[546] This approach could include "new ways to imagine Christian community,"[547] and perhaps that includes a church not being bound to a physical building.[548] While church online may not be located in a traditional sanctuary, it does not mean that it is no less genuine, and meaningful.[549]

3.3 The "Turn to Digital Preaching"

Thus far, the theories and approaches that have been discussed are assumed to be for in-person settings as this has been the default communicative mode for preaching. A new homiletical turn has emerged with the integration of technology into daily life, and it's use for preaching. Casey

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[541] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 88.

[542] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 88.

[543] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 88.

[544] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 80.

[545] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 5.

[546] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 59.

[547] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 87.

[548] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 97.

[549] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 98.

Thornburgh Sigmon was one of the first in the Academy of Homiletics to consider a homiletic for our technological world. This section will explore her approach, which will provide a foundation for the present work of networked preaching.

3.3.1 Homilecclesiology

Sigmon draws on feminist theologian Anna Case-Winters' critique of a "God-world" binary, which indicates the Divine is superior to humanity.[550] Adding to this binary, Sigmon fits the pulpit and pew in the paradigm,[551] in which the pastor is the authoritative speaking party, who stands in a high pulpit, while the congregation is the silent, submissive one, who receives the sermon from down below.[552] This binary can be a potential breeding ground for abuse, and scholars of homiletics have fought against this power structure.[553] The Academy of Homiletics has attempted to resolve the power imbalance of this binary between the preacher and the hearers.[554] For instance, homileticians have proposed "more collaborative and reciprocal modes of preaching and being a preacher," which started with the New Homiletic and has continued with postmodern preaching.[555] Sigmon determines that the previous proposals did not dismantle "the preacher-cult paradigm," but rather "sought to dress the binary of pulpit and pew in dialogical fashion in each decade."[556] However, these homiletical approaches failed to question the binary itself, and she suggests a "new wearer of the clothes," that is, a dismantling of the binary.[557]

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[550] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 7.

[551] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 8.

[552] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 5.

[553] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 10.

[554] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 13, 25.

[555] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 13.

[556] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 25.

[557] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 16.

Offering a solution, Sigmon proposes a classification scheme for the theory and practice of digital preaching that she calls *homilecclesiology*, which is a conversational homiletic. Drawing from McClure, this digital proclamation is "other-wise," as the preaching event goes "beyond the limits of the liturgical event, sanctuary space, and face-to-face encounter."[558] Homilecclesiology is an expansive understanding of the church as it opens the preaching event to more individuals beyond the time-space limits of in-person worship. Furthermore, it is rooted in relational networks, rather than conventional institutional identity.[559] Sigmon envisions digital preaching as a practice that is "radically horizontal, fluid, and spontaneous."[560] In giving voice to the community, this approach encourages "mutual response-ability in the preaching event(s)"[561] through the comments section and by tweeting.[562] The preacher acts as the conversation leader, so that the community takes part in the proclamation.[563] Homilecclesiology affirms that there are "as many pulpits as there are people in our congregations."[564] Sigmon draws on the process approach of Marjorie Suchocki's theology of preaching, where God's Word is "whispered, proclaimed, and received."[565] Moreover, God is not distributed through hierarchical institutions; but rather, this divine whisper is radically inclusive.[566] Thus, a process ecclesiology implies that God "as companion of the world … talks with us (all)."[567]

Writing in a pre-pandemic era, Sigmon encourages the church and the academy to engage with the *gadflies* of the digital age. By calling these new ideas gadflies, she is aware that these

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[558] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 142.

[559] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 142.

[560] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 142.

[561] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 142, 216.

[562] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 205.

[563] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 216.

[564] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 216.

[565] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 75; cf. Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Whispered Word: A Theology of Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999).

[566] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 165.

[567] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 165.

cutting-edge proposals might not be welcome guests, either in the academy or in the local church.[568] She proposes three ways to disrupt the pulpit-pew binary, which give voice to the community and make sermons more dialogical in nature.[569] Similar to Reid and McClure's roundtable pulpit, Sigmon encourages preachers to first seek their social network's perspective of the biblical text and sermon topic on social media, which gives the people opportunities to offer their own opinions before the preached sermon.[570] Platforms are also an educational space for Bible study, in which both preachers and their social network can learn from each other.[571] Second, using a "hybrid" model, preachers can also use technology, like Google documents or hashtags, to facilitate parishioner response in in-person sermons.[572] The final proposal is for preachers to engage in synchronous online preaching,[573] which the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated it into mainstream use.

Interestingly, Sigmon does not offer a differentiation between in-person and online sermons, in terms of their composition and development. However, I contend that current homiletical approaches require a revision and a reorientation for preaching today in a networked age. Digital preaching should be decidedly different from in-person sermons. Preaching the gospel on social media is not business as usual; it requires a theological (re)imagining and creative approaches to be noticed on the digital street corner amid memes, partisan political posts, and selfies. As previously discussed, when considering the context of the user, preaching online makes the work of contextualizing the message more complex. Furthermore, in-person networked preaching needs to be adaptive considering the influence of media on our attention, culture, and entertainment. Chapter five will offer practical guidance for crafting sermons, and examples of networked preaching will be provided in both digital and in-person settings.

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[568] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 4.

[569] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 205.

[570] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 149.

[571] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 149.

[572] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 210.

[573] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 205.

While proposing a dialogically minded homiletic, Sigmon also does not offer sermons as examples for her readers. In offering ethical objectives for homiletics, Wilson argues that "homiletics exists to serve the preaching needs of the church … [and] homiletics arises out of and leads to actual sermons."[574] In applying these principles, I will not only offer theoretical frameworks for the academy, but also provide examples for both in-person and digital preaching to help church pastors. Additionally, a hybrid preaching approach will also be discussed for preachers who simultaneously preach to a *dual* audience of hearers who are in-person and online.

3.4 Conclusion

While the good news of Jesus Christ may be a timeless message, the theory and practice of proclaiming that message has taken many different twists and turns in the past six decades. Through his study of the Academy of Homiletics, Wilson observes that, "Homileticians have not even reached agreement on what makes a good sermon."[575] While his observation may be true, it is also true that sermons are a performative art, which means that sermonic beauty is in the eye of the beholder. From exploring the various proposals, some observations can be gathered. Notably, homileticians have created preaching approaches in response to their historical context, social location, and lived experience. Many scholars have sought to revise their colleagues' ideas and have renegotiated the relationship between preachers and hearers. Through the various turns to the hearer, to the other(s), and to digital preaching, preaching scholars created ways to make the preaching event more dialogical in nature. With each new turn, the sermon has become more collaborative, has given voice to the hearers, and recognised their lived experience. With the turn to digital preaching, the hearers now have a greater "response-ability" in the preaching event.

At the end of her dissertation, Sigmon invites other homileticians to join her in engaging in digital homiletics and join her in this journey. In a humble request, Sigmon reflects that, "Time will tell what impact this engagement with the gadfly of disruptive technological innovation will

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[574] Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 152.

[575] Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 2.

mean to our discipline and our ministry. But a proposal is all that it is. And it awaits the refinement of proposals and conversation partners that are to come."[576] Her prophetic invitation was in 2017 before the unprecedented circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, when preachers were compelled to rely on digital means to preach the Word. Hence, I seek to answer her invitation and the following chapters will attempt to build upon her proposal.

Like other homileticians, I stand on the shoulders of scholars who have come before me and take their approaches into consideration in crafting my proposal. The values of the New Homiletic, postmodern homiletics, and Sigmon's *homilecclesiology* have influenced a new consideration of digital community and digital preaching, which inspired this present work. Chapter 5 will explore how my own proposed homiletic, networked preaching, has been influence by the methodologies discussed above. My approach recognises the complexity of context on social media platforms and in dual hybrid preaching, in which the preacher communicates simultaneously to both online and in-person audiences. Additionally, networked preaching values a conversational homiletic that gives voice to the other(s) without assuming commonality. Networked preaching is also inherently inductive as the preacher invites people to join them on a journey. These sermons contain an element of suspense that entices individuals to continue watching and engaging.

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[576] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 219.

Chapter 4
Digital Media Theory and Christian Community

> Hypermedia and transparent media are opposite manifestations of the same desire: the desire to get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real. They are not striving for the real in any metaphysical sense. Instead, the real is defined in terms of the viewer's experience; it is that which would evoke an immediate (and therefore authentic) emotional response. Transparent digital applications seek to get to the real by bravely denying the fact of mediation; digital hypermedia seek the real by multiplying mediation so as to create a feeling of fullness, a satiety of experience, which can be taken as reality.[577]

Thus far, we have explored various understandings of community and connection. Drawing from biblical and liturgical studies, chapter 1 considered an expansive vision of community in 1 Corinthians, in which the Body of Christ is not bound by temporal, spatial, and physical limits, but it is a "virtual" network of God. Next, drawing on historical theology, chapter 2 explored Calvin's understanding of preaching as a sacramental event in which the people meet Christ through the proclaimed Word, which also transcends the limits of the physical world. Offering a survey of homiletics, chapter 3 followed the initiatives to make the preaching event more dialogical in nature and the efforts to create a more expansive ecclesiology. Thus far, this research in biblical studies, liturgy, theology, and homiletics are all close neighbours; however, this present study necessitates venturing to disciplines outside of the realm of theological studies.

In *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, Howard Rheingold gives a rationale for an interdisciplinary methodology when studying digital communities. He determines that "[e]ach different discipline fails to see something that another discipline sees very well."[578] Thus, Rheingold proposes the need for collaboration, appealing that "[w]e need to think together here, across boundaries of academic discipline, industrial affiliation, nation, if we hope to understand and thus perhaps regain control of the way human communities are being

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[577] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 53.

[578] Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), xxxi.

transformed by communications technologies."[579] Drawing from Rheingold, Heidi A. Campbell has also adapted this approach when studying online faith communities, incorporating practical theology, sociology, and technology/media studies.[580] Similarly, this chapter is using an interdisciplinary approach to better understand digital faith communities by incorporating media theory and sociology. These additional outside perspectives provide a richness to the discussion of communities online, as it advances beyond our common knowledge as media users.

To begin our study, it is critical to remember at the heart of all communities is a need for connection. As humans, we have a primal need for connection with another soul as we journey through this life together. We desire to communicate and express ourselves freely, knowing that someone else is listening and understands. We yearn to share our experiences, our wisdom, our feelings, our secrets, and in turn, we listen and express our empathy and understanding back to others. Perhaps, our neighbour's experience can echo our own reality or even open our eyes to something new. The human experience is not something that we go through in isolation; but rather, we intuitively share our lives with each other. Communication—whether verbal or nonverbal—is how we find connection with one another. We begin communicating at the day of our birth and continue throughout the duration of our lives. This interpersonal connection is what ties individuals to each other, and it is the essential glue that holds communities together.

Technology can also aid in bringing humans together. With the advent of the telephone, television, mobile phone, and internet, humans have used this technology to communicate and find connection with each other. Social media platforms have promoted the promise of a greater sense of connection through its technology. Today, we are connected to each other through networks, both in person and online. Despite the understandable criticism, technology became the safest way to create and maintain connections during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before exploring digital communities, some foundational conceptual frameworks must be established. Thus, the road map for this chapter will be as follows. Section one begins with a

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[579] Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, xxxi.

[580] Heidi A. Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online: We are One in the Network* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), xviii, 76.

preliminary discussion dispelling the assumptions concerning digital and physical life. Next, a description of a networked community is provided through the lens of tie strength theory. Different perspectives on ties will be considered, particularly on how to identify and measure these connections. [581] The composition of ties is provided, along with how they manifest themselves in digital spaces. A discussion is offered on how religious communities provide an environment for cultivating ties as they experience emotional intensity, disclosure, mutual sharing, and reciprocal giving. Additionally, the qualities of communities online are examined. Scholars have not reached a consensus for defining community online; however, they have identified similar qualities for both religious and secular contexts.[582]

The second section explores the experience of communities which occur in both secular and faith-based contexts. The theories of immediacy, hypermediacy, and remediation helps aid in the building of ties. *Immediacy* refers to the transparency of media, whereby the media are perceived to have been erased, leaving the individual "in the presence of the objects represented."[583] This phenomenon of *immediacy* is experienced when people forget that they are interacting with someone or experiencing an event through a digital device, such as talking via video call or watching a livestreamed video. Instead, they feel as if they are fully present with their loved one or at the event. *Hypermediacy* is the reverse sense that the "knowledge of the world comes to us through media;" thus, the individuals are aware that their experience is "in and of the presence of media," and this mediated experience "is itself an experience of the real."[584] The phenomenon of *hypermediacy* is experienced when individuals use GIFs, post reactions, filters, and backgrounds, such as those on Zoom and TikTok. Individuals are conscious that they are interacting and operating through technology. In-person church services are a form of media that have remediated the narratives and wisdom of Scripture, which originated from an oral and written tradition. Radio, television, and the internet *remediate* both in-person services and Scripture,

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[581] Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 6 (1973): 1361; Peter V. Marsden and Karen E. Campbell, "Measuring Tie Strength," *Social Forces* 63, no. 2 (December 1984): 490, 498.

[582] Nancy K. Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015), 83-4; Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 27, 187.

[583] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 70.

[584] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 70-71.

refashioning them to fit their platforms. The terms remediate and remediation indicates that the movement from one form to another is not an equal transfer; but rather, the medium impacts the message and experience. Drawing from Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, the hope of online worship is that individuals will no longer be aware of the platform that is mediating their experience,[585] or alternatively, the mediated interaction will "create a feeling of fullness, a satiety of experience, which can be taken as reality."[586] Additionally, this section traces how scholars have defined presence between people in digital spaces, which aids in the building of ties.

Lastly, bringing theory into practice, this section presents an example of digital engagement between a preacher and her congregation, and it examines the specific ways in which they interact during an online worship service. Pink Robe Chronicles has been selected as an example because it is a networked community that has effective engagement between a preacher and a congregation. While the livestreaming of services has become commonplace during the COVID-19 pandemic, many leaders do not utilize the comments section and reactions as a means of engaging viewers in participation. Thus, PRC is presented as an example of effective engagement in this regard between a preacher and her congregation. While Melva L. Sampson, the curator of PRC, has offered a case study of her faith community, she does not give attention to how the comment section and emoticons are used in her services.[587] The users' interactions using these tools *remediate* the activities associated with brick-and-mortar churches. This remediation indicates that the movement from offline to online is not direct but, rather, is impacted by the digital medium itself.[588] Furthermore, the engagement of congregations through the comments section and emoticons suggest ways in which churches can develop community and perceived co-presence in digital settings.

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[585] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 23-24.

[586] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 53.

[587] Melva Sampson, "Going Live: The Making of Digital Griot and Cyber Assemblies," *Practical Matters Journal* 12 (Summer 2019): 1-18.

[588] Swagato Chakravorty, "Mediation," *The Chicago School of Media Theory* (blog), accessed December 10, 2020, https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/mediation/.

The tie strength theory is the central conceptual framework through which I will explore the experiences and activities of communities. In this chapter, I argue that through textual interaction and emoticons, digital media remediates (and reconceptualizes) how we communicate, sustain relationships, and understand community, which suggest ways that churches can develop community in digital settings. Additionally, the differentiating factor between digital faith-based communities from other networks will be discussed. For the Academy of Homiletics, this education provides a necessary theoretical framework to make worship and preaching more effective in digital spaces. Teaching these theories will help pastors implement strategies to help build community, both online and in person.

4.1 Understanding a Networked Community

We live in a networked age, where there are no longer distinct boundaries between our online and offline lives; rather, we simultaneously and seamlessly communicate in both. Technology has influenced our perception of relationships, community, and what seizes our attention. Sociology and media theory provide concepts that better help us piece together a portrait of a networked community. Notably, interpersonal ties are the critical adhesive that binds everyone together in a networked community. This section helps us describe community by identifying its essential characteristics and qualities, which is critical knowledge for preaching effectively in our network society.

4.1.1 Blurring Between Digital Life and Physical Life

A common assumption is that the digital world is not "real"; instead, it is artificial and inferior to the physical world. This binary was expressed by French philosopher and sociologist Jacques Ellul in 1985 in *The Humiliation of the Word*. He reflects that "No longer are we surrounded by fields, woods, and rivers, but by signs, signals, billboards, [and] screens.… And when the screen shows us a living reality, such as people's faces or other countries, this is still a fiction."[589] Ellul

[589] Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 228.

critiques the synthetic reality of images, suggesting a favouring of the physical world. In 2019, Franz A. Foltz and Fredrick A. Foltz, modern followers of Ellul's philosophy, reflect that communication mediated through technology is inferior, as it loses "the richness of face-to-face conversation."[590] This perspective of technological inferiority continues to the present day.

By contrast, other scholars do not see this assumption as an adequate representation of the digital world. After the emergence of new technologies like the mobile phone, social media theorist Nathan Jurgenson asserted in 2011 that "digital dualism," is no longer appropriate, that is, maintaining a strict binary between virtual life and physical life. No longer should the digital world be understood as "virtual" and the physical world be perceived as "real."[591] Jurgenson asserts that this reasoning is inadequate, as the difference between the physical and digital self is increasingly diminished. Alternatively, he suggests that each person should recognize him- or herself as "an augmented self," which means having a bodily and digital existence that reflect and impact each other.[592] Similarly, religion and media scholar Christopher Helland recognized in 2013 that people are no longer making a distinction between the online and offline world; instead, being "online" is a part of everyday life and society. The rituals of checking email, Google searching, and connecting with friends on social media are now seamlessly integrated into our daily life.[593]

With the blurring between virtual and physical life, some scholars believe that virtual life is, in fact, "real." Unlike Ellul's perspective of the screen, McKenzie Wark identified in 1994 that the television and telephone create "a new kind of experience," which is "no more or less 'real.'"[594] Rather, he recognizes them as "a different kind of perception, of things not bound by rules of

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[590] Franz A. Foltz and Fredrick A. Foltz, *Faith, Hope, and Love in a Technological Society* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018), 49.

[591] Nathan Jurgenson, "Digital Dualism versus Augmented Reality," The Society Pages (blog), last modified February 24, 2011, https://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2011/02/24/digital-dualism-versus-augmented-reality/.

[592] Nathan Jurgenson, "Digital Dualism versus Augmented Reality."

[593] Christopher Helland, "Ritual," In *Digital Religion*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell (New York: Routledge, 2013), 25.

[594] McKenzie Wark, *Virtual Geography: Living with Global Media Events* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), vii.

proximity."[595] Building on this perspective in 2011, media scholar Beth Coleman identifies a new framework of X-reality, which resolves the binary between virtual and physical life. She explains that, "X-reality describes a world that is no longer distinctly virtual or real, but, instead, representative of a diversity of network combinations."[596] Coleman indicates that people are operating in this reality through their daily engagement with technology.[597] Adding to Coleman's X-reality concept, religion and media scholar Kathryn Reklis asserted in 2012 that "virtual or digital space is just a differently mediated way of being real."[598] For example, when people engage on social media like Facebook or Twitter, they are not entering into virtual reality; rather, they are utilizing technology as a medium "to be present across time and space."[599]

Along with our online and physical worlds, the strict delineation between people and technology has also been blurred. However, this separation is difficult to make because of the adoption of modern innovations. Teresa Berger points out that "body technologies have become naturalized in our experience"; thus, users do not perceive them as "artificial."[600] Examples of these body technologies are hearing aids, contact lenses, joint implants, and cosmetic surgery.[601] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, people could be defined as cyborgs if their biological capabilities have been extended by technological means.[602] While some people may not accept the designation of cyborg, what is evident is that humanity is not purely unaided by technological advancements.[603]

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[595] Wark, *Virtual Geography*, vii.

[596] Beth Coleman, *Hello Avatar: Rise of the Networked Generation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 19-20.

[597] Coleman, *Hello Avatar*, 20.

[598] Kathryn Reklis, "X-Reality and the Incarnation," New Media Project at Christian Theological Seminary, last modified May 10, 2012, http://www.cpx.cts.edu/newmedia/findings/essays/x-reality-and-the-incarnation.

[599] Reklis, "X-Reality and the Incarnation."

[600] Teresa Berger, *@ Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 20.

[601] Berger, *@ Worship*, 20.

[602] "Cyborg, n," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed April 26, 2020.

[603] Berger, *@ Worship*, 20.

In addition, parishioners may not realize that their worship experience in a brick-and-mortar setting is mediated and enhanced by light and sound equipment. As Berger points out, all liturgical practices are mediated.[604] Dong Gay and Ron Rienstra, who are scholars of theology and preaching, respectively, explain that, "No worship occurs without media and mediation."[605] Whether it is candles, vestments, microphones, or hymnals, all worship services are dependent upon some amount of technology.[606] One could also argue that the acoustics of buildings, such as ceiling design or the use of sounding boards, are forms of technology, which mediates the sound of worship. Like a fish swimming in water, we are not fully aware of the countless inventions we have adopted and habitually use. Forms of technology enhance the reality of our world and worship settings.

Some may only see the virtual world as a medium for communication that can establish and reinforce relationships, and it is not an essential part of human existence. Despite the assumptions of the virtual world, many scholars argue that digital life is a "real" experience, which seamlessly interconnects with the physical world. With ease, we are simultaneously engaging in X-reality, being digitally and physically present. While some scholars argue the blurring between the virtual and physical realms, others maintain that there is still a meaningful distinction between these realities. The concept of strong and weak ties will now be discussed as a possible framework for understanding relationships and community which are fostered online.

4.1.2 Tie Strength Theory

Tie strength theory can explain how connections between individuals are fostered and communities are formed into networks. In his seminal work published in 1973, sociologist Mark S. Granovetter identifies a metric for assessing the strength of interpersonal ties between people as "a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy

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[604] Berger, *@ Worship*, 20.

[605] Dong Gay and Ron Rienstra, "Veering Off the Via Media: Emerging Church, Alternative Worship, and New Media Technologies in the United States and United Kingdom," *Liturgy* 23, no. 3 (2008): 40.

[606] Gay and Rienstra, "Veering Off the Via Media," 40.

(mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services."[607] These ties can be "strong, weak, or absent." He assesses that the reason that a weak tie is "weak" is because of the lack of "overlap in … friendship circles."[608] Thus, strong ties would mean that people have multiple mutual friends, and weak ties means that they have fewer shared friends. While some scholars focus on the potential of strong ties, Granovetter asserts that weak ties have a better ability to disperse information as they "can reach a large number of people, and traverse greater social distance."[609] For instance, a rumor will reach more people through weak ties because they have fewer mutual friends. Individuals in strong tie networks may hear the rumor multiple times, as they have common friends.[610] Granovetter also assesses those individuals are most likely to hear about a new job from a weak tie connection than from a strong one, as weak ties "are more likely to move in circles different from our own and will thus have access to information different from that which we receive."[611]

Many scholars have built on Granovetter's seminal work, notably Peter V. Marsden and Karen E. Campbell, who quantify tie strength by calculating the tie characteristics of "closeness, duration, frequency, breadth of discussion topics, and confiding" within three communities.[612] They determined that "a measure of 'closeness,' or the emotional intensity of a relationship" is the superior indicator of tie strength as it is not contaminated by other variables.[613] Interestingly, the framework of strong and weak ties is translatable to virtual communities and relationships. Eric Gilbert and Karrie Karahalios conducted a quantitative study on Facebook for which they measured intimacy, intensity, duration, social distance, services, emotional support, and structure of relationships as aspects of tie strength and used them to predict the strength of ties among

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[607] Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," 1361.

[608] Granovetter, "Strength of Weak Ties," 1362.

[609] Granovetter, "Strength of Weak Ties," 1366.

[610] Granovetter, "Strength of Weak Ties," 1366.

[611] Granovetter, "Strength of Weak Ties," 1371.

[612] Peter V. Marsden and Karen E. Campbell, "Measuring Tie Strength," *Social Forces* 63, no. 2 (December 1984): 490.

[613] Marsden and Campbell, "Measuring Tie Strength," 498.

individuals with an 85% accuracy. They concluded that "tie strength manifests itself in social media."[614] Gilbert and Karahalios offer a helpful definition for understanding tie strength, stating that

> Strong ties are the people you really trust, people whose social circles tightly overlap with your own. Often, they are also the people most like you.… Weak ties, conversely, are merely acquaintances. Weak ties often provide access to novel information not circulating in the closely knit networks of strong ties.[615]

These descriptions also mirror the popular understanding of relationships; strong ties are those you trust, and weak ties are simply acquaintances.

Sociologist Zeynep Tufekci suggests that the Internet has the capacity to strengthen ties between people by facilitating "more frequent, trivial 'ambient' communication," which is "the bedrock of strong-tie formation,"[616] for instance, people posting about regular occurrences on social media, such as their random thoughts or their new avocado toast. Interestingly, this ordinary, mundane information is often evident in conversations with family and friends.[617] Similarly, posting frequent status updates on Facebook and posting pictures on Instagram allows people to be connected to those they care about. Perhaps, what is most hopeful from Tufekci's observations is that tie strength is dynamic, implying that weak ties have the capacity to become stronger.[618] Thus, social media platforms can provide an opportunity for strengthening ties through spending time and sharing our lives together online. This virtual interaction fosters emotional intensity and a sense of closeness, which the metrics of tie strength suggest.

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[614] Eric Gilbert and Karrie Karahalios, "Predicting Tie Strength with Social Media," *CHI '09: Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, Association for Computing Machinery (April 2009): 211, 216, 219.

[615] Gilbert and Karahalios, "Predicting Tie Strength with Social Media," 212.

[616] Zeynep Tufekci, "What Gladwell Gets Wrong: The Real Problem Is Scale Mismatch (Plus, Weak and Strong Ties Are Complementary and Supportive)," Technosociology: Our Tools, Ourselves (blog), last modified September 27, 2010, http://technosociology.org/?p=178.

[617] Tufekci, "What Gladwell Gets Wrong."

[618] Tufekci, "What Gladwell Gets Wrong."

Similarly, interpersonal ties can be built among faith communities online, and the elements for building a bond between individuals are present in digitally mediated spaces. Bala A. Musa notes that a sense of community and *koinonia* (fellowship) are fostered in virtual religious spaces through "strengthen[ing] emotional and relational connection."[619] For instance, people can experience emotional intensity together through the preaching event, corporate prayer, and worship music. Online small groups provide opportunities for disclosure of prayer requests and mutual sharing through discussion. The faith community also provides opportunities for reciprocal services, as individuals can take part in church programming and give back to the community through giving their time and resources. As participants get to know each other, they naturally extend their interaction beyond church events to other digital platforms. For instance, individuals may extend their communication beyond the church service on Zoom to expanding their engagement on other applications, like Facebook, Instagram, or WhatsApp.

4.1.3 Qualities of Communities Online

Nancy K. Baym indicates that there is no universal definition of community.[620] However, she does offer five characteristics of digital community, namely a "sense of space, shared practice, shared resources and support, shared identities, and interpersonal relationships."[621] Participants tend to perceive platforms as "spaces"[622] and integrate that language, such as saying "thank you for this space" in a Zoom meeting.

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[619] Bala A. Musa, "Reimagining Place and Presence in the Virtual Church: Community and Spiritual Connection in the Digital Era," *Digital Ecclesiology: A Global Conversation*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell, Texas A&M University Libraries (website). Published August 21, 2020, 56.

[620] Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 83.

[621] Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 84.

[622] Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 84.

Similarly, Campbell states that there is no universal understanding of community;[623] instead, each group's self-understanding and function is contextual.[624] Campbell identifies the qualities of digital faith communities as care, value, consistent and intimate communication, and a shared faith.[625] This framework is "more concerned about how individuals are treated than about the structure or focus of the community."[626] She argues that these online groups are redefining the concept of community, which is no longer contingent upon physical proximity or other social factors.[627] Rather, these online communities are relationship-oriented[628] and provide supplemental "personal interaction and friendship" that is not available in their in-person churches.[629] This *retribalizing* phenomenon illustrates that the "basic emotional needs of humanity [are] to be connected to others, to know and be known."[630] Online communities function as a virtual *third place*, whereby individuals feel "a sense of belonging," and "they experience friendship, affirmation, and emotional investment there."[631]

However, when considering online connections, Baym indicates an important dynamic that occurs as people develop interpersonal ties online called *hyperpersonal communication*, whereby individuals make assumptions about others based on the limited cues they receive. This digital environment "leave[s] a great deal of room for presenting … [one]self and imagining the other."[632] Baym notes that when meeting others online, "it is easy to fill in the blanks about their other traits with ideals."[633] This phenomenon in communication is a self-attempt to build ties

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[623] Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 27.

[624] Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 104-05.

[625] Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 187.

[626] Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 187.

[627] Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 26.

[628] Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 193.

[629] Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 178.

[630] Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 189.

[631] Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 179.

[632] Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 145.

[633] Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 145.

based on one's imagination; unfortunately, one's imagined perception of another may not match with reality. This *hyperpersonal communication* can occur in both secular and faith-based contexts. In the end, both Baym and Campbell's qualities of communities help to foster the bond among its members, which the metrics of tie strength suggest.

4.2 Experiences of a Networked Community Online

One of the challenges of digital media is understanding how to conceptualise these experiences. An assumption would be to believe that the perspectives and activities of the physical world are merely transferred to digital spaces; for instance, in-person preaching is merely converted to digital platforms like Facebook and Zoom. Another myth is to believe that digital experiences are inferior to their in-person counterparts. However, these rigid assumptions do not fully encapsulate the dynamics of what is taking place in both digital and physical spaces; but rather, a nuanced approach is necessary. Thus, this section explores the theories of *remediation*, *immediacy*, *hypermediacy*, presence, and spatial re-orientation, which work in synergy in the forming and maintaining of ties.

4.2.1 Remediation, Immediacy, Hypermediacy

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin simply define remediation as: "a medium is that which remediates."[634] One type of media attempts "to rival or refashion" prior forms,[635] and every generation of media seeks to reform individuals' sense of reality.[636] An important characteristic is that "for our culture … mediation without remediation seems to be impossible," as media are always referring to prior forms.[637] For example, in-person church services are a form of media

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[634] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 65.

[635] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 65.

[636] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 61.

[637] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 271.

that have remediated the narratives and wisdom of Scripture, which originated from an oral and written tradition. Radio, television, and the internet remediate both in-person services and Scripture, refashioning them to fit their platforms.

Immediacy refers to the transparency of media, whereby the media are perceived to have been erased, leaving the individual "in the presence of the objects represented."[638] For instance, individuals can experience immediacy in digital worship and forget that they are participating via Zoom or Facebook. They could feel as if the worship experience is "real" and present to them, which reinforces the feeling that their experience is "authentic."[639] Immediacy can also be invoked through hearing a story and having an emotional response,[640] such as hearing the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, which this experience is further a variable of tie strength. In the end, the hope of digital worship is that individuals will not only achieve immediacy with each other as a faith community, but also experience immediacy with God through the preaching of Scripture. As discussed in chapter 2, Calvin's theology of the Word expresses the conviction that God "Himself" is communicating to the people when the preacher is speaking.[641] Thus, in worship online, the preacher remediates the words spoken by God, and the digital platform remediates the preacher's words.

Hypermediacy is the reverse sense that the "knowledge of the world comes to us through media."[642] Thus, the individuals' are aware that their experience is "in and of the presence of media" and this mediated experience "is itself an experience of the real."[643] Practically, hypermediacy is exhibited on digital platforms through features like backgrounds, reactions, GIFs, typed comments, and filters. Individuals are fully conscious that they are interacting and

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[638] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 70.

[639] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 70.

[640] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 149.

[641] In his *Isaiah* commentary, Calvin states that "The word *goeth out of the mouth* of God in such a manner that it likewise 'goeth out of the mouth' of men; for God does not speak openly from heaven, but employs men as his instruments." John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 1, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 55.11.

[642] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 70-71.

[643] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 70-71.

operating through technology. Furthermore, Bolter and Grusin identify that both "hypermedia and transparent media are opposite manifestations of the same desire: the desire to get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real."[644] This "realness" is perceived from individuals' perspective and their emotional response to the media.[645]

Bolter and Grusin provide a theoretical framework for understanding how people experience digital spaces. They argue that "media reform reality itself," as they give "an alternative visual world and [insist] on that world as the locus of presence and meaning for us."[646] The goal of digital platforms is to create "a sense of presence,"[647] and the sensations of *immediacy* and *hypermediacy* have the same objective, which is "to get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real."[648] This "realness" of presence is determined from the users' perspective as they experience an emotional response through media.[649] *Immediacy* and *hypermediacy* fosters the building of ties by enhancing our encounter with others in digital spaces through authenticity and emotional response. The hope of online worship is that individuals will no longer be aware of the platform that is mediating their experience,[650] or alternatively, the mediated interaction will "create a feeling of fullness, a satiety of experience, which can be taken as reality."[651] I would describe digitally mediated worship as fulfilling—or at least pacifying—our desire for connection with God and neighbour. If individuals cannot be in-person for church or be with their loved ones, they can find a sense of satisfaction or at least comfort with being connected with them online.

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[644] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 53.

[645] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 53.

[646] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 61.

[647] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 22.

[648] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 53.

[649] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 53.

[650] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 23-24.

[651] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 53.

Challenging Bolter and Grusin, Alexander R. Galloway offers a structure of "layering" to conceptualise mediation. In this framework, the initial layer is "cinema," the next layer is "bits and bytes," and the final layer is "algorithm." Thus, the composition of media is similar to "Russian nesting dolls" or *mise-en-abîme*, which means that "an outside that leads to an inside, which leads to another inside, and on and on."[652] These layers of the interface are a part of a larger social landscape that represents connection between "subject and world," "surface and source," and "critique and the objects of criticism."[653] While Bolter and Grusin discussed the potential to "achieve the real" through *immediacy* and *hypermediacy*, Galloway has a more critical view of media, in which the users cannot fully participate; but rather, the cinematic nature of media causes an individual to be "an invisible half-participant."[654] He explains the phenomenon stating that "the self becomes a viewing self, and the world becomes a world viewed."[655] When considering remediation, Galloway considers that the computer is significantly different from other forms of media because it "simulates" the metaphysical arrangement," rather than "facilitates" it.[656] Moreover, the computer does not remediate other types of physical media; but rather, "it remediates metaphysics itself."[657] Thus, the computer should be best identified as a "metaphysical medium."[658] Galloway rejects the remediation theory due to the incorrect "feedback loop" in which media are identified as non-media.[659] While Galloway presents an insightful technical perspective, Bolter and Grusin's theory of remediation helps to capture users' aspiration to achieve "the real," whether through *immediacy* or *hypermediacy.*

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[652] Alexander R. Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012), 8.

[653] Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 8.

[654] Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 11.

[655] Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 11.

[656] Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 20.

[657] Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 20.

[658] Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 20.

[659] Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 21.

4.2.2 Presence

Presence is one of the phenomena that individuals can experience with others in digital spaces. Media scholars in both the twentieth and twenty-first century noted this perceived sense among individuals when using various technologies. Matthew Lombard and Theresa Ditton defined presence as "the perceptual illusion of nonmediation,"[660] as participants perceive an experience as immediate and authentic.[661] The phenomenon of presence fosters "continuous (real time) responses of the human sensory, cognitive, and affective processing systems" within participants.[662] Practically, as more senses are engaged through digital media, the potential for people to experience the sensation of presence increases, such as feeling a greater sense of presence on a video call verses a phone call.[663] Thus, individuals may feel a heightened sense of presence during a worship service on Zoom if they can see and be seen by others on camera. Furthermore, this sense of presence can increase as they engage by hearing others and participating through talk, text, and reaction features. Lombard and Ditton indicate that various variables in technology and circumstance can either foster or diminish a person's perception of presence.[664] This research confirms that people can feel a sense of human connection in digital spaces, which further verifies the efficacy of online worship and the possibilities for improvement.

Building on Lombard and Ditton, Baym suggests using Social Presence Theory, which is the phenomenon of perceiving other participants as "real and present" through media.[665] Similarly, Media Richness Theory evaluates technology's "richness" for its capacity to transport information. This fullness of presence is determined by four metrics: "the speed of feedback, the ability to communicate multiple cues, its use of natural language rather than numbers, and its

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[660] Matthew Lombard and Theresa Ditton, "At the Heart of It All: The Concept of Presence," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 3, no. 2 (1997): 9.

[661] Lombard and Ditton, "At the Heart of It All," 1.

[662] Lombard and Ditton, "At the Heart of It All," 9.

[663] Lombard and Ditton, "At the Heart of It All," 11.

[664] Lombard and Ditton, "At the Heart of It All," 1.

[665] Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 60.

ability to readily convey feelings and emotions."[666] For instance, video and telephone calls are an example of "rich media," which would be best for resolving interpersonal conflict.[667] In contrast, text message is a "lean media," which is an appropriate means of notifying a friend that you will arrive late.[668] This theory of media's richness further supports the notion that engagement of the human senses increases presence.

Like Baym, Karin Knorr Cetina also recognises the value of engagement speed in her concept of "response presence," which captures users' motivation to participate through the platform. Response presence refers to the obligation to interact or respond to others in a digital space within a perceived appropriate amount of time.[669] Participants must be regularly monitoring the activity of the platform to achieve an effective interaction.[670] For instance, individuals on a Zoom call simultaneously need to monitor the discussion that is happening on mic and in the chat and to respond promptly. Individuals' interactivity on digital platforms indicates their participation and presence as community members.

Considering the richness of media, Anthony Giddens writes of the phenomenon of individuals preoccupied by communicating with distant others through such technological media as the telephone to the exclusion of those in proximity. He observes that "a person may be on the telephone to someone twelve thousand miles away and for the duration of the conversation be more closely bound up with the responses of that distant individual than with others sitting in the same room."[671] Building on Gidden, Kenneth J. Gergen identifies a preoccupied state called "absent presence," whereby a person is "physically present but is absorbed by a technologically

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[666] Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 60.

[667] Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 60-61.

[668] Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 60-61.

[669] Karin Knorr Cetina, "The Synthetic Situation: Interactionism for a Global World," *Symbolic Interaction* 32, no. 1 (2009): 74.

[670] Cetina, "The Synthetic Situation," 74.

[671] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991), 189.

mediated world."[672] Thus, individuals' attention is diverted from their physical location to their technological devices.[673] Antonio Diaz Andrade confirms that when individuals are talking on the phone with their loved ones, their "subjective understanding of co-presence overshadows their physical co-location," with co-presence being defined as "a human perception of being close to others who are not in corporeal proximity."[674] Drawing on Andrade's study, Teresa Berger highlights the importance of synchronicity in digital worship and suggests that perceived co-presence is a defining aspect of digital worship, though she does not demonstrate how it is executed in actual faith communities.[675] The purpose of the present study is to fill this gap in the research.

Presence is a critical aspect of community online because it helps individuals to feel they are not alone, but they are together as a community. It confirms the feeling that the event is an authentic experience. Even if they are not physically present, they can become absorbed in the digital environment to the extent they are absent to their physical environment. The church service online is a synthetic situation, as the participants gather in time instead of a physical place.[676] The interaction and responses between participants through the comment section and by talking on mic fosters the phenomenon of presence, which helps them to develop closeness, despite not being in physical proximity. Presence through digital media fosters the building of ties by enhancing our encounter with others in digital spaces. Rich media allows people to pick up more social cues through audio-visual content, which can increase the tie variable of emotional intensity. Moreover, individuals will perceive that they are spending time together through the media, which can increase the tie variable of time.

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672 Kenneth J. Gergen, "The Challenge of Absent Presence," in *Perpetual Contact: Mobile Communication, Private Talk, Public Performance*, eds. James E. Katz and Mark A. Aakhus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 227.

673 Gergen, *Perpetual Contact*, 227.

674 Antonio Diaz Andrade, "From Physical Co-location to Perceived Co-Presence: 'I Feel Close to You when I Use My Mobile,'" *Pacific Asia Journal of the Association for Information Systems* 6, no. 1, article 2 (2014): 1, 7.

675 Berger, *@ Worship*, 106.

676 Cetina, "The Synthetic Situation," 79.

Contributing to the discussion, I propose that *emotional presence* is a powerful form of connection, which can be experienced in both in-person and digital contexts. A common assumption is that being in-person produces a superior form of presence, which may not be the case. For instance, consider the child who is enthusiastically attempting to talk to a parent who is currently distracted. While the parent and child are in corporal proximity, they are not fully present with one another, which is a form of "absent presence." Thus, physical presence does not imply emotional availability or presence. In contrast, even while not being in the same room, two individuals could have a video call and have a profound emotional connection. I define *emotional presence* as a state of connection and consciousness that fully occupies one's attention, which can also lead to vulnerability and closeness. For meaningful religious experiences for both online and in-person, the individuals must be open to the experience and be emotionally present to the event. Digital communities are not just a safe alternative during a pandemic, but they also provide a way of finding human connection with another. If individuals allow themselves to be emotionally present, these experiences can be genuine and life-giving.

While writing this dissertation, I found significant support and encouragement through virtual co-working and academic support groups. Thus, I am studying the very social phenomenon that I am living. Similarly, churches online are also communities of practice where individuals find spiritual and community support. This research on presence is important because it validates the lived experience of myself and others who operate in a networked society. Presence between people in digital spaces can be a real and authentic social phenomenon that is created by multi-sensory, synchronous, and/or responsive technologies, which fosters emotional investment between human actors.

4.2.3 Spatial Re-Orientation

Spatial re-orientation is a sensation whereby individuals can experience being together with others in digital spaces. Lombard and Ditton offer the concept of "presence as transportation," in which individuals perceive that they are in a digital space "together."[677] Participants can feel like

[677] Lombard and Ditton, "At the Heart of It All," 5.

they are "in the same room" or that it is a "real face-to-face meeting."[678] The greatest hope for virtual environments is that people, regardless of their geographic location, will be able to come together in a shared digital space.[679] Building on this concept of presence, Cetina identifies digital interactions as "synthetic situations" in which individuals "meet in time rather than in a place"; as a result, "response presence" and "temporal rules of coordination" become critical aspects of communication.[680] Response presence refers to the obligation to interact or respond to others in a digital space within a perceived appropriate amount of time.[681] Likewise, the hope of online church is that the participants will perceive that they are worshiping together in a virtual sacred place. This sensation of "togetherness" helps to foster the ties among the participants.

Campbell gathered testimony from individuals who participated in faith-based groups online in the late 1990s. While using email and chat rooms, the participants experienced a sense of presence when sharing prayer requests and praying together online. One participant reflected that "you feel like you are all in the same room,"[682] which confirms Lombard and Ditton's theory. Campbell further draws the connection between "the spiritual world" and "the Internet," identifying them as "otherworldly" spaces that "[transcend] offline experience."[683] These online communities have a collective desire to "search for transcendent meaning that goes beyond the screen and even beyond the offline world, touching on another recognized level of reality."[684]

Religious perspectives can also help individuals to conceptualize church online. Musa suggests that digitally mediated worship not only includes the perceived co-presence of others, but also

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[678] Lombard and Ditton, "At the Heart of It All," 6.

[679] Lombard and Ditton, "At the Heart of It All," 6.

[680] Cetina, "The Synthetic Situation," 79.

[681] Cetina, "The Synthetic Situation," 74.

[682] Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 134.

[683] Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 149.

[684] Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 186.

encompasses the presence of God[685] and the Communion of Saints, which chapter 1 discusses.[686] This holy presence is possible because Christ dismantled the necessity "between religion and the concern for any sacred geography, temple, and cult."[687] Thus, digital worship includes not only those present online, but also "the whole church across time and space [that] is gathered at every Eucharist."[688] For example, French priest Teilhard de Chardin prays to God, saying, "I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols.… I, your priest, will *make the whole earth my altar*."[689] A. W. Tozer identifies that Christian worship is not dependent upon being at a specific location; instead, "We *carry our sanctuary with us*. We never leave it."[690] These perspectives broaden the possibilities of where worship can take place and what materials are necessary. Worship of God is not dependent upon being at a church building; but rather, it is a perspective of spatial re-orientation that individuals can adopt when participating in digital spaces.

4.3 Activities of a Networked Community

Whether faith-based or secular, communities have established activities that they engage in, which capture their purpose and social norms. This engagement helps to reinforce their identity as a community, and it help strengthen their ties among each other. As discussed earlier, ties are

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685 Bala A. Musa, "Reimagining Place and Presence in the Virtual Church: Community and Spiritual Connection in the Digital Era," *Digital Ecclesiology: A Global Conversation*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell, Texas A&M University Libraries (website). Published August 21, 2020, 57.

686 Hebrews 12:1 (NRSV), "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us."

687 Matthew John Paul Tan, "Online Church, Common Good, and Sacramental Praxis," *Digital Ecclesiology: A Global Conversation*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell, Texas A&M University Libraries (website). Published August 21, 2020, 62.

688 Tan, "Online Church," 62.

689 Aline Amaro da Silva, "The Diverse Ways of Being Church in the Digital Society and in Times of Pandemic," *Digital Ecclesiology: A Global Conversation*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell, Texas A&M University Libraries (website). Published August 21, 2020, 11. Italics my own.

690 Musa, "Reimagining Place and Presence," 53. Italics my own.

the critical adhesive that binds a networked community together. This section explores how participation and sharing contributes to the building and maintaining of community.

4.3.1 “Active” Participation

Participation in digital spaces is not a straightforward topic, but it is a complex matter with many facets. Mirko Tobias Schäfer offers categories for understanding user participation. *Explicit participation* is described as voluntary and intentional,[691] and it primarily refers “to the appropriation of technology by users and the development of technical skills,” such as modifying an Xbox.[692] This intentional participation also includes “posting and creating content.”[693] Roughly applying Schäfer’s research to church online, individuals can actively participate through posting comments and reactions in online worship. Whether engaging or not through the application, they are involuntarily engaging in *implicit participation* by merely clicking on the worship video and watching it.[694] Implicit participation entails capturing users’ actions into data that platforms can use and exploit.[695]

Adding to implicit participation, Lombard and Ditton believe that involvement does not necessarily require interactivity. They offer the example of people watching a live event and how they can become intensely concentrated on it and feel “a sense of participation.”[696] The viewers may experience various emotions, such as “curiosity, anxiety, anticipation, [and] hope.”[697] In this case, participation is a state of mind that is not necessarily dependent on the participants’ actions that are exhibited through the medium.

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691 Mirko Tobias Schäfer, *Bastard Culture!: How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 120.

692 Schäfer, *Bastard Culture!*, 52.

693 Schäfer, *Bastard Culture!*, 52.

694 Schäfer, *Bastard Culture!*, 52.

695 Schäfer, *Bastard Culture!*, 51-52.

696 Lombard and Ditton, “At the Heart of It All,” 19.

697 Lombard and Ditton, “At the Heart of It All,” 19.

danah boyd[698] and Henry Jenkins offer their own viewpoints on participation. boyd identifies the prerequisites for participation as "agency, the ability to understand a social situation well enough to engage constructively, the skills to contribute effectively, connections with others to help build an audience, emotional resilience to handle negative feedback, and enough social status to speak without consequences."[699] The general inclination is to prefer "active engagement" over "consumption," for instance comments and reviews verses "liking" and voting.[700] However, boyd questions, "What does it mean to be a part of the system without necessarily giving back? Can someone be a valuable and participatory lurker?"[701] Jenkins responds by cautioning against enforcing our own viewpoints regarding online participation and significance, as we do not want platforms determining "for us … what constitutes valuable participation."[702]

When considering lurkers, Baym suggests that those who read but do not post,[703] are in fact participating through "listening," which is an important aspect of digital communities.[704] However, active engagement through contributing content gives individuals a greater feeling of belonging to the group.[705] Furthermore, engagement is an important aspect of strengthening ties, as Baym notes that "our messages are the tool with which we build and tinker with our connections."[706] Thus, active participation helps to build the bond between faith community members online.

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[698] Her name is not capitalized.

[699] Henry Jenkins, Mizuko Ito, and danah boyd, *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era: A Conversation on Youth, Learning, Commerce, and Politics*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 19.

[700] Jenkins et al., *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era*, 63.

[701] Jenkins et al., *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era*, 63.

[702] Jenkins et al., *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era*, 64.

[703] Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 97.

[704] Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 97.

[705] Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 98.

[706] Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 145.

Whether in digital or in-person contexts, Teresa Berger reminds us that "the full, conscious, and active participation of all worshippers is not the basic reality of every liturgy ever celebrated."[707] She asserts that participation is dependent upon the capacity of the platform's interface and the individuals.[708] For instance, some applications allow individuals to participate synchronously by typing their prayer requests and commenting with "Amen."[709] Active participation in worship is not necessarily linked to one's engagement with the application. For example, a person could prayerfully meditate on the spoken word of prayer, liturgy, and Scripture, rather than reading it or engaging through the interface, such as through a Facebook post.[710] Individuals could actively participate in worship by praying aloud, raising their hands, or dancing.[711] While this participation may not be evident on the platform, they are actively engaging in worship on a theological level. Furthermore, Berger problematizes the notion of "active participation" or *actuosa participatio* by noting its link to "modern construals of the self," which privileges "stable, bounded, self-determining, unencumbered, … able-bodied, neuro-typical, and dominantly male" self-identities.[712] Rather, digital environments are conducive for postmodern understandings of the self as "fluid, porous, opaque, de-centered, and often gender ambiguous."[713] Berger determines that "there is no abstract, universal account of active participation, only concrete, particular, embodied active participants."[714] Thus, a man with dementia watching a televised church service in his care facility could be participating.[715] Participation through observation is not a new concept, but rather, it can be found in the

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[707] Berger, *@ Worship*, 10.

[708] Berger, *@ Worship*, 20-21.

[709] Berger, *@ Worship*, 22.

[710] Berger, *@ Worship*, 18, 22.

[711] Berger, *@ Worship*, 22.

[712] Berger, *@ Worship*, 23.

[713] Berger, *@ Worship*, 23.

[714] Berger, *@ Worship*, 23.

[715] Berger, *@ Worship*, 23.

medieval belief of "ocular communion" of the Eucharist.[716] Like Berger, Silva, who is situated in a Catholic context, encourages individuals to participate physically and mentally in digital mediated worship.[717] She warns against trivializing church online and watching it passively, as "if we were watching a movie while drinking coffee"; but rather, "our entire being must be in tune" with the worship event.[718] Silva instructs individuals to participate actively by physically assuming the same postures of kneeling, standing, sitting, watching, listening, praying, and even salivating for the Eucharist.[719]

Affirming the importance of participation, Campbell determines that "true community" requires active engagement, which entails contributing to the community's conversation.[720] She concludes that the people's digital engagement "served as a supplement or bridge to certain aspects of community life from which they felt disconnected in their offline lives," due to isolation, disability, or a desire to connect with like-minded people who are not present at their physical location.[721] Campbell observes that participation has attributes of being honest and consistent, with individuals experiencing acceptance, recognition, and displaying care and closeness through their messages.[722]

In conclusion, participation is a complex concept that does not have a universal consensus. What makes participation "active" is dependent on one's perspective. Engagement with the platform is desirable and necessary particularly among human actors. However, this notion of active participation is complicated when we consider that church online is an interplay of human actors, technology, and the Divine actor. Through the following discussion, digital participation can

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716 Berger, *@ Worship*, 25.

717 Aline Amaro da Silva, "The Diverse Ways of Being Church in the Digital Society and in Times of Pandemic," *Digital Ecclesiology: A Global Conversation*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell, Texas A&M University Libraries (website). Published August 21, 2020, 11.

718 Silva, "The Diverse Ways of Being Church," 11.

719 Silva, "The Diverse Ways of Being Church," 11.

720 Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 69.

721 Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 177.

722 Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 181.

involve a vertical relationality between God and individuals in religious practices, which may or not be exhibited "actively" through the interface.

4.3.2 Sharing

"Sharing" is a form of participation that is an important value of online communities.[723] Nicholas A. John identifies that sharing is a key behaviour exhibited on social media as it encompasses the platform's activities, such as giving status updates or distributing media content.[724] These digital spaces help individuals to communicate by decreasing the obstacles for engagement.[725] John asserts that sharing is more than a communicative action, but it also assumes an "interpersonal relationship," established with "honesty, openness, mutuality, caring, equality, trust and fairness."[726] Disclosing the daily details of one's life or offering one's perspective are the common rituals of social media.[727] As noted above by scholars of tie strength, mutual confiding or sharing is a component that helps in the strengthening of interpersonal connections. John also suggests that "sharing is represented as a mechanism for improving human relations and making the world a better place."[728] Social media networks (SNS), such as Facebook, promote their platforms through the utopian assumption that "the more we share…, the better the world will be."[729] With their slogan "Stay in touch," Windows Live website also establishes the connection between individuals' who are sharing and their relationships that are digitally mediated.[730] These aspirational taglines also coincide with the

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[723] Nicholas A. John, *The Age of Sharing* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2017), 67.

[724] John, *The Age of Sharing*, 67, 52-3.

[725] John, *The Age of Sharing*, 49.

[726] John, *The Age of Sharing*, 15-6.

[727] John, *The Age of Sharing*, 62-3.

[728] John, *The Age of Sharing*, 65-6.

[729] John, *The Age of Sharing*, 65.

[730] John, *The Age of Sharing*, 59.

common understanding that the internet should be free, open-sourced, democratic, and "non-hierarchical."[731]

While promising connection, platforms also have a subversive aspect to them as they can exploit users' participation to their advantage. The behaviour of "sharing" and personal disclosure has caused "the expansion of the public at the expense of the private" as individuals volunteer personal information that would normally remain in personal settings.[732] Furthermore, the event of disclosure creates a blurring of the boundaries between personal and public information.[733] This environment has allowed companies to benefit by exploiting and commodifying the ritual of sharing.[734] The act of sharing produces data which becomes a form of currency for the platforms. John notes the reality that, "The more we share online, the richer the online platforms we are sharing on become."[735] Conversely, sharing can also be subversive to companies and internet culture as the more individuals' share amongst themselves, the less things that everyone must purchase.[736]

Through sharing, the hope is that community members will achieve "authentic communication"[737] and form a genuine connection with each other.[738] The act of sharing with others is not a frivolous ritual or merely an event of distributing information, but it is a means by which people build and maintain interpersonal ties. Consistent digitally mediated communication has the potential to create a touchpoint between individuals, whereby they experience presence and connection. Within online communities, the act of disclosure creates a feeling of investment

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[731] John, *The Age of Sharing*, 67.

[732] John, *The Age of Sharing*, 121, 146.

[733] John, *The Age of Sharing*, 149.

[734] John, *The Age of Sharing*, 146.

[735] John, *The Age of Sharing*, 66-7.

[736] John, *The Age of Sharing*, 2.

[737] John, *The Age of Sharing*, 148.

[738] John, *The Age of Sharing*, 2.

and relationality among the participants, which helps bond them together. Online communities can use this framework to encourage more intentional participation to foster ties among its members. The following section provides examples of both faith-based and secular online communities to better illustrate how these theoretical frameworks are realised in actual communities.

4.4 Portrait of a Networked Community

This section demonstrates how the theoretical concepts discussed in this chapter are actualised in a faith-based community. An analysis is presented to highlight the unique "virtual" dimension that is present within these spiritually minded communities. Furthermore, the practices implemented by the communities can help other faith organizations increase their ties and identity among its members.

Established in 2016[739], Pink Robe Chronicles (PRC)™, @pinkrobechroncles, is an American digital community that livestreams its services and its recordings are accessible to the public on Facebook and YouTube. This group was selected based on their excellent interaction between a preacher and her congregation in a digital worship service. The community demonstrates how the individuals' interactions using platform *remediates* the activities associated with brick-and-mortar churches. This remediation indicates that the movement from offline to online is not direct but, rather, is impacted by the digital medium itself.[740] While the livestreaming of services has become commonplace during the COVID-19 pandemic, many leaders do not utilize the comments section and reactions as a means of engaging viewers in participation. While Melva L. Sampson, the curator of PRC, has offered a case study of her faith community, she does not give attention to how the comment section and emoticons are used in her services.[741] Thus, in this

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[739] "Pink Robe Chronicles," Dr. Melva Sampson (website), accessed May 19, 2022, https://www.drmelvasampson.com/pink-robe-chronicles.

[740] Chakravorty, "Mediation."

[741] Melva Sampson, "Going Live: The Making of Digital Griot and Cyber Assemblies," *Practical Matters Journal* 12 (Summer 2019): 1-18.

present work, PRC is presented as an example of effective engagement in this regard between a preacher and her congregation. Furthermore, the engagement of congregations through the comments section and emoticons suggest ways in which churches can develop community and perceived co-presence in digital settings.

4.4.1 Pink Robe Chronicles™

Sampson wrote her own case study of Pink Robe Chronicles (PRC) using an autoethnographic methodology, recognizing herself simultaneously as the "researcher and researched."[742] Her work draws on Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas's first tenet of womanism that is radical subjectivity: "the moment black women understand…[their] agency as a tool of resistance, powerful in naming…[their] own experiences and foundational to…[their] identity politics."[743] Thus, the objective of Sampson's work is to name herself for herself. Amid the police brutality that led to the #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) movement, Sampson started preaching on Facebook in 2016, when she realized that she did not have "the right to remain silent in the face of savage church and government politics."[744] She identifies livestreaming as both a means of freedom and disruption of the "hegemonic, colonialist, and imperialist gaze."[745] Reflecting on her experience preaching online, Sampson observes,

> I preach. We preach. *My body preaches* through womanish gestures….*My breasts preach* sermons of anatomical acceptance when they refuse to be disguised by shapeless and non-pink robes that bear the tried marks of truth telling and wisdom sharing….*My stomachs,* yes plural, *preach* when they refuse to be subdued by corsets and girdles, all forms of patriarchy, misogyny and respectability. *My hoseless thighs preach* as they thunder to and fro loosening the shackles of the hoodwinked and bamboozled. We preach. I preach with feet marching to

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[742] Sampson, "*Going Live*," 1, 5.

[743] Sampson, "*Going Live*," 2; cf. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 16.

[744] Sampson, "*Going Live*," 4, 10.

[745] Sampson, "*Going Live*," 12.

> freedoms land, with my hands lifted up whether I'm yelling hallelujah, "fight the power," "these is bloody shoes [*sic*]," or "God's Plan."[746]

Through her livestreamed services, Sampson, a Black woman clad in a pink bathrobe, affirms the value of Black lives. Her physicality and advocacy represent a disruption of an American society that perpetuates systemic racism and gender ideals for women. She identifies PRC as a "digital hush harbor," again emphasizing that "noncisgender, non-heterosexual, non-male, non-Christian, and poor bodies are unsafe in Black churches," as these spaces often mirror "the antiblack, sexist, classist, homophobic, transantagonistic violence experienced in the rest of the world."[747] While digital environments are often seen as unsafe due to online bullying, the PRC's Facebook Live weekly broadcast paradoxically is a "hush harbor" for the members of the community. Thus, marginalised individuals can find a respite and place of belonging in the digital safe space, which Sampson has created.[748] This sanctuary is created because presence does not need to be physical to be meaningful, which will be later discussed in chapter 5, section 1.

Analysing a recorded livestream is an effective way to understand how digital religious communities use the comments section and emoticons; thus, PRC was selected because of its effective engagement. PRC's weekly Sunday recordings are accessible to the public on the PRC Facebook page, Sampson's Facebook page @melva.sampson, and on YouTube as @pinkrobechroncles.[749] The October 4, 2020 broadcast was selected for analysis because it was during a critical period during the pandemic and the BLM movement, and it also included the sacrament of Holy Communion. With 723 comments, 125 post reactions, and 1,600 views, this recording provides abundant evidence of viewers' engagement during its one hour and ten-minute broadcast on Sunday at 8 AM EST.[750] This analysis was designed to shed light on the

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[746] Sampson, "*Going Live*," 5; emphasis added.

[747] Melva L. Sampson, "Digital Hush Harbors: Black Preaching Women and Black Digital Religious Networks," *Fire!!! The Multimedia Journal of Black Studies* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 52, 46, 50.

[748] Sampson, "Digital Hush Harbors," 47.

[749] https://www.facebook.com/pinkrobechronicles/

[750] "Do Not Fear!" Facebook @melva.sampson.

broadcasters' efforts to encourage participation, the actions that the viewer's emoticons and comments represent, and the viewers' interactions with each other in the comments section.

The following discussion presents the analysis of the anonymized examples from the case study from the perspective of the theoretical framework described above. I argue this digital engagement remediates the activities in brick-and-mortar churches and helps churches to develop community and perceive co-presence in digital spaces.

4.4.2 Participation as a Means of Co-Presence

As the broadcaster, Sampson encourages her congregation to participate in multiple ways throughout the livestreamed service. For example, at the beginning (7:19) and midway (33:50) through the service, Sampson requests that members of her congregation share the video, thus tasking the community with the responsibility of distributing the worship service to others. Further, she makes personal connections through a welcoming ritual. As indicated in figure 4.1, she individually names and greets viewers who simultaneously greet her in the comments

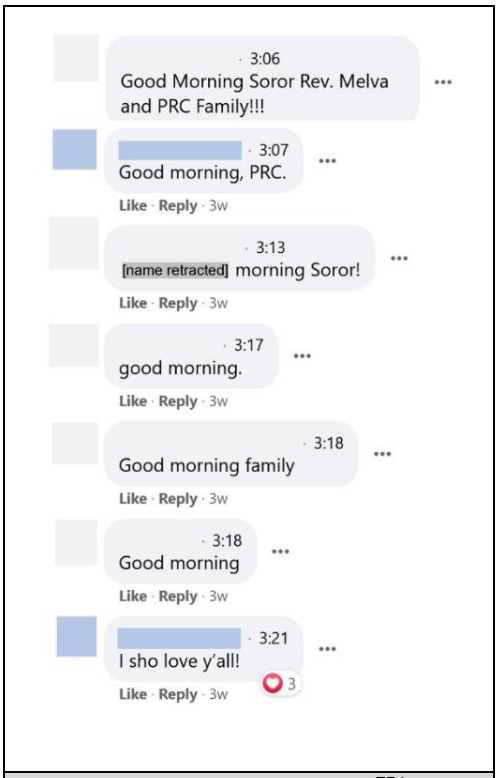

Figure 4.1 *Greetings.*[751]

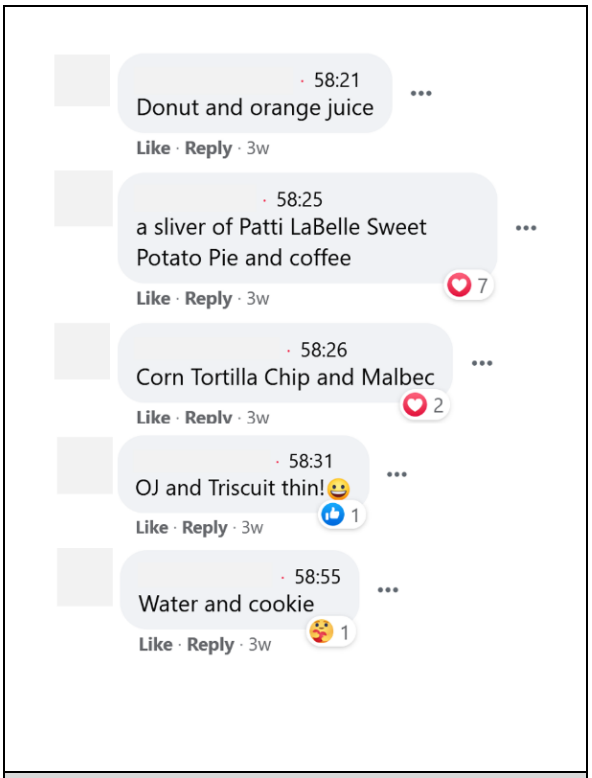

Figure 4.2 *Revealing their non-traditional Communion elements.*

section. This activity sets a precedent for the rest of the service as the viewers engage not only with the broadcaster but with each other. One user, who is shown in blue, greets (3:07) and expresses his affection (3:21) towards the community that has gathered, saying, "I sho love y'all" [*sic*]. Another tags, and thus greets, a friend (3:13). This activity remediates "the greeting of peace," a communal ritual in Christian services.[752]

For the Lord's Supper, Sampson requests that the community use any liquid and solid for their Eucharistic elements and that the viewers "tell us what you have for communion this morning" (7:19). Many participants mention in the comments section using the traditional bread with wine or grape juice, while others mention using substitutes on hand, as seen in figure 4.2, such as "a sliver of Patti LaBelle Sweet Potato Pie and coffee" (58:25). Sampson verbally praises the

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[751] All screenshots of the comments section are from October 4, 2020 service on Facebook @melva.sampson.

[752] Gail Ramshaw, *Christian Worship: 100,000 Sundays of Symbols and Rituals* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009), 137-8.

resourcefulness of the commenters, and other viewers react through emoticons. In replying to her request, the participants are engaging in a disclosure activity regarding their resources. As Granovetter and others have noted, such exchanges of mutual sharing reinforce tie strength, which is to say, the bonds among the members of the community.[753] Throughout the livestream, the broadcaster encourages members of the audience to engage actively, which they do in the comments section as a means of indicating their presence in the church service. As Cetina emphasizes, in such "synthetic situations," the community meets in time rather than in a place such as a church building.[754] Synchronous communication between the religious leader and the congregation fosters a sense of co-presence that, according to Berger, is a critical aspect of digital worship.[755]

4.4.3 Engagement as a Means of Identity, Memory, and Physicality

The PRC community's engagement through the comments section is more than random chatter. Rather, it is a space in which the community expresses identity, memory, and physicality. Figure 4.3 (below) provides some examples of ways in which viewers collectively refer to themselves as both a family and community. Thus, one participant teasingly remarks (5:45), "[I] hope my membership didn't get revoked" followed by a distressed emoticon, perhaps implying that she has not been tuning in to the livestream regularly. Even in a digital space, a member's humour translates to the community, as six individuals react with a laughing emoticon. Another individual, identified as the "digital deacon" by Sampson, transcribes her verbal requests in the comments section. In one instance, after Sampson asks the audience to share the video, the digital deacon enters her request in the comments section, referring to the PRC broadcast as "*our* beloved community" (7:52; emphasis added). Reacting to Sampson's preaching, another individual comments, "This is why PRC is *my community*! Talk, Doc!!!!!!" (27:40; emphasis added). As seen in the examples, the use of the first-person singular or first-person plural

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[753] Granovetter, "Strength of Weak Ties," 1361.

[754] Cetina, "Synthetic Situation," 79.

[755] Berger, *@ Worship,* 106.

pronouns implies individual or collective ownership, respectively, of the digital community that has gathered for the broadcast. As Campbell and Baym have noted regarding digital communities more generally,[756] the individuals who watch and engage with the PRC broadcast demonstrate a shared collective identity.

Figure 4.3 *Communal Identity*.

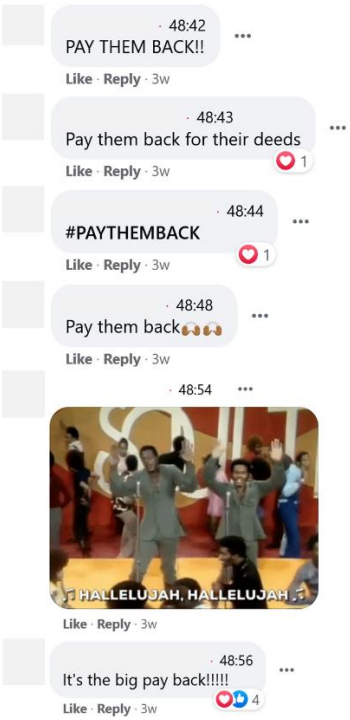

Figure 4.4 *Call and Response, "Sermonic Echoing."*

The PRC's engagement in the comments section also presupposes a collective memory of the Black experience in America. In one telling instance, a viewer prompts Sampson to "call the roll" (50:07; figure 4.5), and another responds by listing the names "Emmett Till, Breonna, George" (50:13), referring to Emmett Louis Till, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. These comments thus assume a shared memory of these individuals and the racial injustice that killed them. After finishing her sermon, Sampson responds to these comments (50:55) by listing other

[756] Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 181-88; Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 84.

victims of police brutality. This moment is one of great emotional intensity, which is an aspect of tie strength.[757]

The community also utilises the comments section to remediate the activities of in-person worship services. For instance, the practice of "call and response" between the preacher and audience is evident in the digital space. Many Black churches in America have a tradition of call and response during the preaching event.[758] Homiletician Evans E. Crawford identifies this activity as "participant proclamation," whereby the audience not only listens to the sermon, but they also "participate by adding their own verbal responses, which are sometimes coupled with a gesture of prayer or praise, such as a lifted hand."[759] Likewise, Gail Ramshaw explains this ritual: "the preacher intersperses the text of the sermon with rhetorical devices that serves as clues for the worshippers, who respond with 'Amen,' 'Praise the Lord!' and other phrases."[760]

Four forms of dialogical activity can be identified during the sermon. First one happens halfway through her sermon, Sampson asks "to get a witness" (22:20) from the audience by sending heart emoticons. Thus, Sampson has attempted to remediate the call and response ritual to fit the Facebook Live interface. Through the calling "to get a witness" through heart emoticons, she is inviting her audience to participate in the preaching event, which many participants did by sending numerous hearts which appeared on the livestream. This engagement could be the internet equivalent of "Can I get an amen?" Furthermore, the broadcaster and the audience may feel a greater degree of co-presence and a sensation that they are *virtually* together.

The second type of call and response is a *sermonic echoing* (above), in which the audience repeats a key phrase, such as "pay them back" (48:42-48:48, 48:56; figure 4.4). In this instance, Sampson is referring to the justice that God will payback evildoers for their deeds. Engaging in

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[757] Granovetter, "Strength of Weak Ties," 1361.

[758] Evans E. Crawford and Thomas H. Troeger, *The Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995), 37.

[759] Crawford and Troeger, *The Hum*, 38. For an example: T.D. Jakes, "It's a Faith Thing! – Bishop T.D. Jake," T.D. Jakes YouTube Channel, premiered on June 26, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5D1eiCCGIvA, 42:00-56:30.

[760] Ramshaw, *Christian Worship*, 128.

analogical preaching, she is referring to characters whose stories are narrated in the Bible as well as drawing a connection to forces that currently oppose members of the congregation.[761] These modern enemies include those who perpetuate inequality and inflict violence on Black lives, as Sampson indicates in her publications.[762]

Figure 4.5 shows a third type of call and response to sermons through emoticons. In the Black church, the preacher engages in "whooping," a series of refrains or chants at the conclusion of the sermon that marks the climax of the preaching event. As Ramshaw notes, the audience reacts outwardly to the whooping by "cheering, clapping, and even dancing in the aisles."[763] As Sampson preaches, two viewers respond to her words with emoticons representing running (49:58) and praise hands (50:01) that remediate their physicality and presence in the worship service.

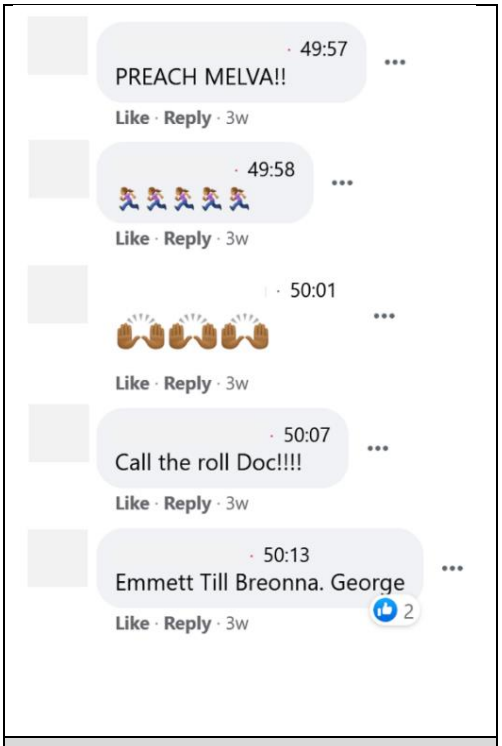

Figure 4.5 *Call and Response during "Sermonic Whooping."*

Figure 4.6 *Call and Response, Reactionary comments*.

761 Stephen Farris, *Preaching That Matters: The Bible and Our Lives* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 80.

762 Sampson, "*Going Live*," 10.

763 Ramshaw, *Christian Worship*, 128.

The fourth type of call and response (above) includes encouraging or confirming statements that the preacher makes during a sermon. For example, figure 4.6 presents the comments of six individuals on Sampson's preaching, such as "Say it !!!" (50:23), "Yes!!!!" (50:24), and "That's Bible!" (50:24). These positive affirmations of the preacher's message are common in traditional Black church services.[764] Two respond sequentially with the same comment, "My my my" (50:20-22), one adding exclamation marks (50:22). Mere seconds separate some of these comments on the virtual sermon, so the question remains whether participants tended to echo each other's similar comments or rather came up with their parallel responses independently.

Prayer is another activity that is remediated in the digital space. While not a dialogical activity in the traditional sense, it is a spiritual communication that individuals make to God. Sometimes, individuals may pray in agreement, offering their petitions to the Lord. Figure 4.7 provides examples of individuals conveying prayer through their comments. Sampson prays to Jesus and the African ancestors, and her viewers echo these sentiments with their comments (49:36, 49:37b). Another viewer expressed her agreement declaring "I'm praying that prayer with you!"

[764] Crawford and Troeger, *The Hum*, 13, 15.

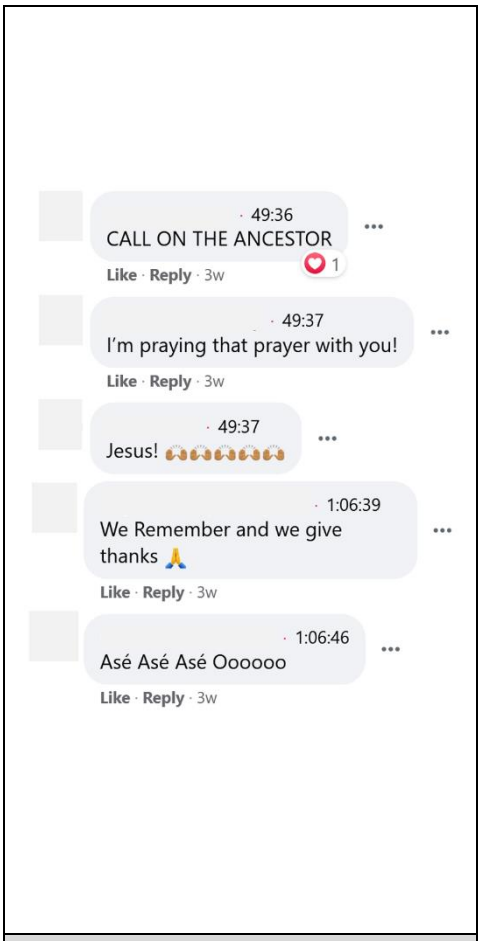

Figure 4.7 *Prayer*.

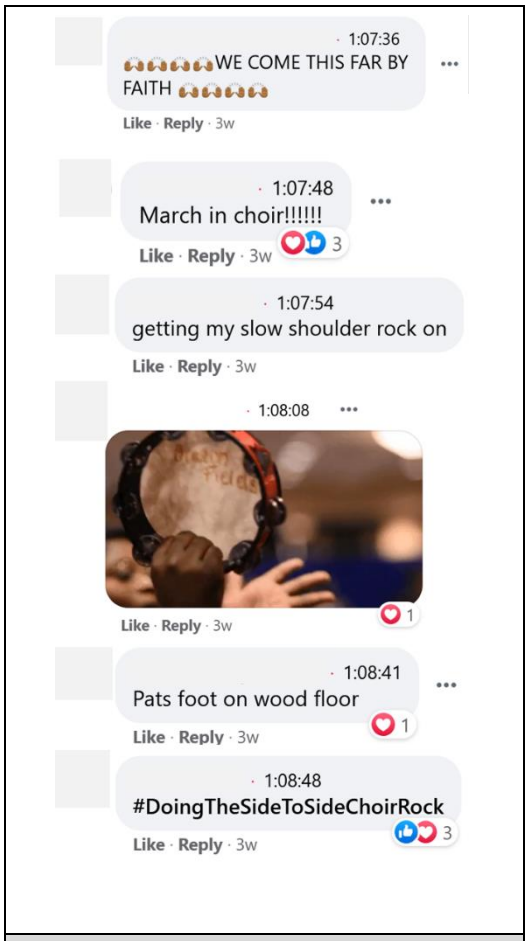

Figure 4.8 *Singing and Praise.*

(49:37a). The concept of agreement in prayer is evident in Jesus's statement in the Gospel of Matthew, "Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."[765] Through the comments section, participants express agreement with Sampson's prayer using words and emoticons such as the praise hands (49:37b) and praying hands (1:06:39). Drawing on both Christianity and their African spirituality, they seal their prayers with "Asé" (1:06:46), which has a similar meaning as "amen," "so let it be."[766] In digital worship, individuals voice their prayers to the community in the comments section.

[765] Bible, Matthew 18:19-20, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

[766] Thelathia N. Young and Shannon J. Miller, "Asé† and Amen, Sister! Black Feminist Scholars Engage in Interdisciplinary, Dialogical, Transformative Ethical Praxis," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 43, no. 2 (2015): 289–316.

Following the prayer, the worship service concludes with a video of a community member playing the piano and singing. As seen in figure 4.8 above, the viewers appear to use the comments as a means of participating in the praise music. One individual writes out the song lyrics in capital letters and adds the praise hands emoticons (1:07:36). Other viewers appear to use the comments section to communicate their physicality within the virtual service and the ways in which they are enjoying and embodying the music, such as mimicking marching in the choir (1:07:48), doing the shoulder rock (1:07:54), foot-tapping (1:08:41), or doing the side-to-side choir rock (1:08:48).

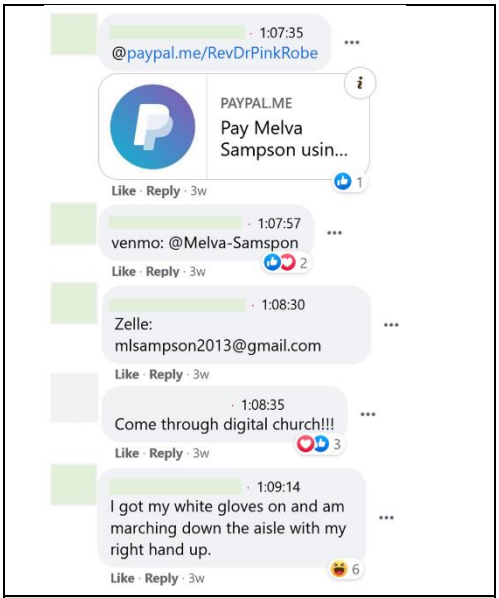

Figure 4.9 *Collecting the Offering*

This musical segment is also an opportunity for the viewers to contribute to an offering to support Sampson and her ministry.[767] During the song, Sampson prompts them to do so by listing her various digital payment handles on PayPal, Venmo, and Zelle. As seen in figure 4.9 (above), the digital deacon, indicated in green, lists Sampson's account handles in the comments section (1:07:35, 1:07:57, 1:08:30) to prompt the viewers further to donate. Notably, one viewer encourages the PRC community to "come through" with their financial contributions (1:08:35). Moreover, the digital deacon appears to indicate her own physicality in taking up the digital offering when she says, "I got my white gloves on and am marching down the aisle with my

[767] Ramshaw, *Christian Worship*, 136.

right hand up" (1:09:14). In traditional Black churches, the deacons would often wear white gloves[768] while collecting the offering from the congregation.

4.4.4 Viewers' Interactions as a Means of Church Community

The viewers not only interact with the broadcaster but also communicate with each other by posting reactions, replying under comments (figure 4.10), and responding in subsequent comments (figure 4.11). As numerous examples show, the viewers react to each other's comments with the thumbs-up, heart, and laughing emoticons. While some viewers post their responses beneath the original comment, due to the fast pace of a livestreamed service, most interactions occur in subsequent comments, thereby complicating the effort to interpret the back-and-forth interaction among viewers.[769]

Figure 4.10 *Viewers Interaction I*

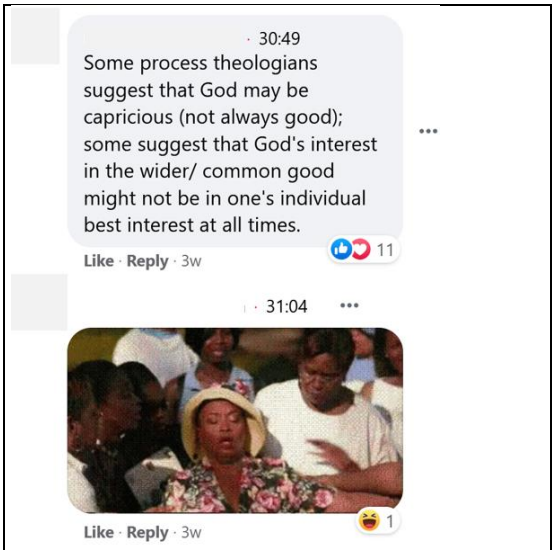

Figure 4.11 *Viewers Interaction II*

768 The Road of Grace, "The Sacraments in Black Spirituality," *Credo Covenant* (blog), published on October 16, 2014, https://credocovenant.com/2014/10/16/the-sacraments-in-black-spirituality/.

769 The use of GIFS was insubstantial with only two participants utilising them during the service. Notably, one individual used 11 GIFs in the comments section, while the other person only used one.

4.4.5 Remediation, not Transfer

This account of the PRC's engagement makes clear the connection between the comments and the offline practices in churches. In the shift to digital worship, there has been an effort to bring conventional offline practices into the digital space. However, this effort does not imply an equal transfer, as the medium of the platform impacts communication. As Swagato Chakravorty asserts, "a medium cannot simply 'mediate' or transmit. There is no purely passive medium."[770] As discussed earlier, Bolter and Grusin declare that "a medium is that which remediates."[771] Thus, a medium "absorbs the form and content of other media and reworks, reconfigures, or otherwise refashions them."[772] To the extent that an in-person worship service is a mediated practice, digital worship is best defined as a *re-mediated* experience. When spiritual engagement is remediated in a digital space, it is important to recognise that online communication has its own vernacular that translates into these discussions and there is nothing quite similar in in-person communication, such as the use of emoticons. Yet, the viewers of Sampson's sermon were able to detect humour in the comments, such as the comment at 5:45 shown in figure 4.3, which received several laughing emoticons.

In digital worship, the comments section becomes the sole means of viewer engagement that is visible to the entire congregation. Making use of a means of communication unavailable in traditional worship, participants can comment on and react to each other, with some comments naturally inviting more engagement than others. Due to the relatively high levels of viewer participation of the PRC community, a viewer's comments are only present on the screen for a few minutes or seconds before being replaced by the comments of others.

Additionally, digital worship on platforms such as Facebook Live has an advantage over traditional worship in that it is not merely an event existing in one point in time. When the service is posted to an online platform such as Facebook, it can be played and replayed as

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[770] Chakravorty, "Mediation."

[771] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 65.

[772] Chakravorty, "Mediation."

viewers wish and exert influence long after its creation. Traditional worship services present barriers to participation, especially for individuals with disabilities or chronic health conditions. Digital worship, by contrast, is available to all who have access to the Internet, allowing them to watch the service from a front-row seat. As noted in chapter 3, preaching on the digital "street corner," amid memes, partisan political posts, and selfies, is an eminently public experience. The audience that gathers may include faithful members of the community, social media followers and friends, and observers, such as religious scholars, watching passively.

4.4.6 Virtual Vertical Relationality

Thus far, we have explored the different theoretical frameworks that help to construct a digital community, along with analyzing an online faith-based group to better understand it's dynamics and character. Interestingly, the PRC example provides an insight into how digital engagement is not only a form of communication, but also a means of expressing identity, physicality, and memory. In this final section, I have created the following figures below to illustrate what is universal about digital networks and what could be distinct about faith-based communities.

As seen in Figure 4.12, members of a digital community can develop a bi-directional tie strength with each other. As discussed earlier, these horizontal ties are strengthened by the variables of time, emotional intensity, and engagement. Furthermore, participants can experience the sensations of perceived co-presence, immediacy, and hypermediacy, which helps to better enhance their experience and encounter with others online. I have identified this connective axis as *virtual horizontal relationality*, whereby members of a network have developed relationships with each other through their engagement.

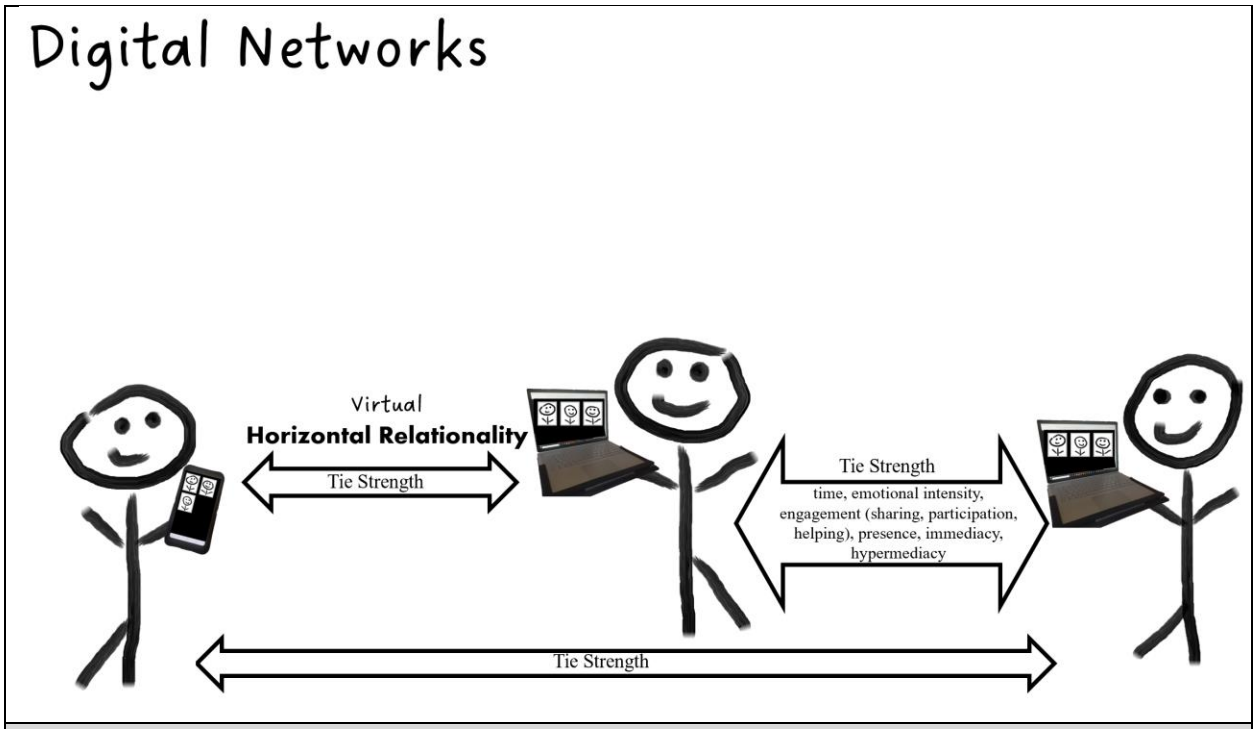

Figure 4.12 *Digital Networks*

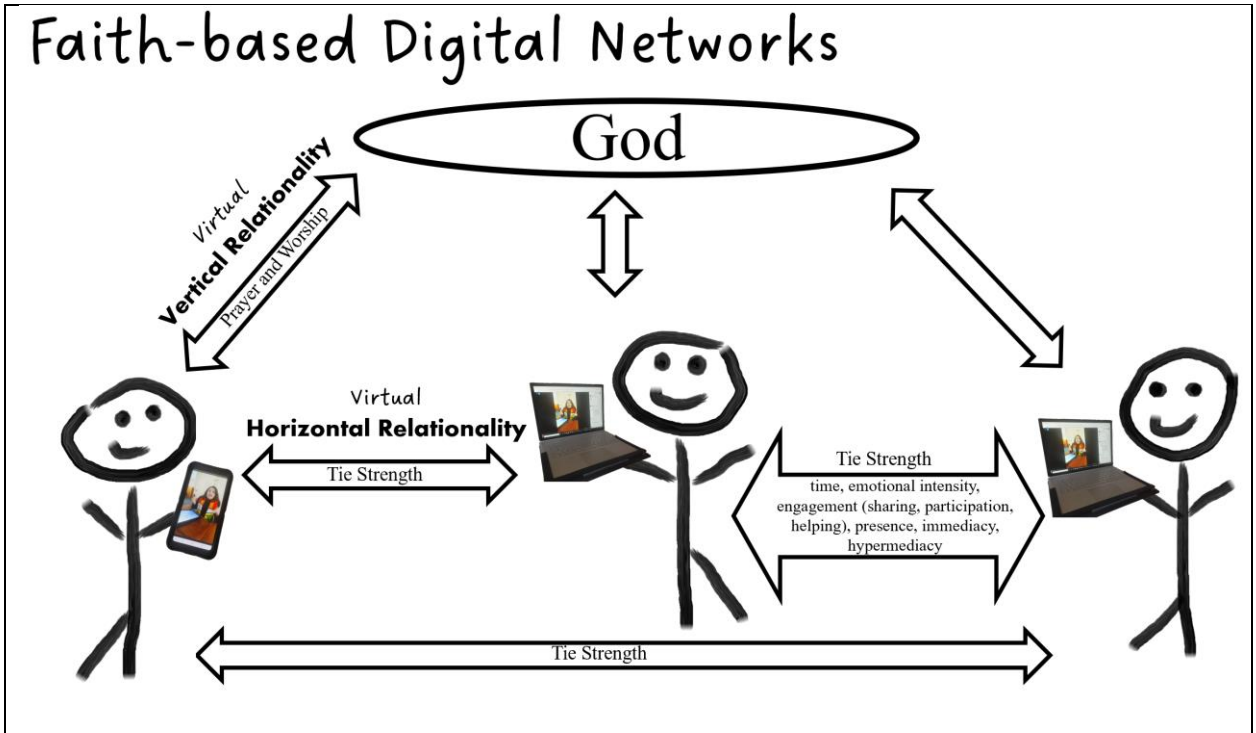

Figure 4.13 *Virtual Vertical Relationality* in Faith-based Digital Networks

Tie strength in digital networks is generally considered to be horizontal. For instance, the PRC has built a sense of community and expressed it through their engagement in the comments section. The women experience emotional intensity, communal identity, and emotional support among each other in a digital safe space. Additionally, faith-based groups, like the PRC, can have another dimension to them that can be absent from other digital networks, which is indicated with the additional vertical axis in Figure 4.13 above. The PRC exhibits spirituality through their activities of prayer and worship to God, which I have identified as *virtual vertical relationality*.

Interestingly, this vertical axis can contribute to the strengthening of the community's interpersonal horizontal ties, as their common belief in God can reinforce their relationships among each other. For example, sharing prayer requests and praying together is a communal activity that can foster mutual sharing and emotional intensity, which are variables of tie strength. Worship music also can foster connections among the individuals, particularly when the music involves emotive lyrics, a building of musical intensity, and repetition.[773] Prayer and worship are activities that users can participate through the interface or choose not to engage through it, such as listening to a worship song on YouTube while not writing in the comment section.

Prayer and worship as remediated practices envision God as being more accessible because worship is no longer bound by a building, a denomination, or an institution. Churches' ministry and scope of influence are no longer limited by its geographic region; but rather, it extends beyond buildings, borders, and membership. Thus, churches realise that their place and purpose is to be a part of a greater relational network online. The preacher invokes the presence of the Holy Spirit to join the participants in worship. Through prayer and worship, participants also welcome the presence of God wherever they may be. The people are encouraged to seek the presence of God through digitally mediated preaching and worship. Additionally, the participants are reaching out to God, which is a different kind of "virtual" from other digital engagements

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[773] For more information: Paul Alexander, *Signs & Wonders: Why Pentecostalism Is the World's Fastest-Growing Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 20; "Lean Back (+Spontaneous) | Capital City Music | Live from Washington, DC | Kingdom Come Album," Capital City Music YouTube channel, uploaded on January 23, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch? v=qHQOcUizZuQ.

because it is not connected to hardware or devices; but rather, this “virtual” relationality is a supernatural phenomenon, transcending beyond this world. Thus, the faith-based groups are engaging in a “double virtual” phenomenon, which can make religious communities distinct in the digital context.

All faith-based digital networks may not include vertical relationality in the form of prayer and worship. While prayer and worship are the examples presented, they are not the only modes of vertical relationality. There could be other means, such as the partaking in the sacraments, the hearing of the proclaimed Word, among other spiritual practices. Some groups can be discussion-based such as Bible studies, wherein they talk about God and the biblical text. Thus, for religious online groups, their shared interest in their faith can be how ties are strengthened and communal identity is formed.

Conclusion

Through this chapter, we have explored how digital communities are changing how we understand communication, relationality, and community. The essential elements and theoretical frameworks that comprise these groups were presented. For the members of Pink Robe Chronicles, they have found their group to be a source of encouragement, belonging, identity, and support. Tie strength, or *virtual horizontal relationality*, is the essential glue that binds the members of these communities together. This interpersonal connection is cultivated as participants experience emotional intensity, disclosure, mutual sharing, and reciprocal giving. Digital communities feel the phenomenon of immediacy and hypermediacy, which enhances their online interactions and fosters tie strength as individuals perceive their experience to be reality. Furthermore, perceived co-presence and emotional presence are also critical aspects that aid in the building of ties between people in digital spaces. However, digital faith communities, like PRC, have *virtual vertical relationality*, a unique dimension of spirituality that transcends beyond technology and this world to connect with God. The members’ religious experience online helps to bond them together as a community, as they participate together in corporate prayer, singing worship songs, partaking in the sacraments, and studying the Scriptures.

The analysis of the PRC indicates their effective use of the comments section and emoticons during the preaching event. The broadcaster and viewers influence each other, meaning that virtual worship can be participatory and the engagement during the livestream multidirectional. The comments and emoticons remediate the activities exhibited in brick-and-mortar churches, such as greeting, responding to the preaching of God's Word, praying as a community, praising God together, and giving in the offering. PRC provides an example for faith leaders seeking to foster community by encouraging participation, which also affects the video's algorithm and its overall visibility.[774] The immediate interaction between Sampson and her community creates a response presence that fosters a sense of identity and bonding as a community.

Digital worship can be satisfying for preachers and their audiences because they can form communities and communicate simultaneously through emoticons and comments. Therefore, even on digital platforms, ties can be strengthened, and relationships can grow. For the Academy of Homiletics, these media theories can help make worship and preaching more effective in digital spaces. The final chapter will offer ways at which preachers can apply this media theory to the theory and practice of preaching in the digital context.

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[774] Taina Bucher, *If ... Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 89.

Chapter 5
(Re)imagining Preaching in the Networked Age

> Churches should see the move to digital worship as an opportunity to create a unique space for conversation, care, and encouragement that focuses on affirming the relationships and people within their faith community. Instead of offering a one-way, broadcast-focused church service, the interactive features of social media and digital platforms can be used to create deeper personal connections between church members and leaders. Instead of pastors being the source of wisdom, digital media can be used to create intimate and empathetic communication, allowing both members and leaders to share words of encouragement and biblical insights…."[775]

Preaching today is a difficult task. We live in a networked age, where there are no longer distinct boundaries between our online and offline lives; rather, we simultaneously and seamlessly communicate in both. Technology has influenced our perception of relationships, community, and what seizes our attention. Social media can easily preoccupy and entertain us as we endlessly scroll through content. Amid this environment, preachers face the daunting task of crafting sermons that are captivating enough to catch and sustain their audience's attention. Thus, the question remains, "How can we most effectively preach in the age of TikTok, Facebook, and Zoom?"

During the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Heidi A. Campbell observed that for many churches, "The most common strategy is transferring their standard offline worship services to an online platform…."[776] While this makeshift solution was understandable amid the start of the pandemic, I contend that putting a camera in front of a preacher should not be all that is necessary for digital preaching. Moreover, the current homiletical approaches require a revision and a reorientation for preaching today in a networked age. Sermons on social media should be adapted to online spaces, which requires a theological (re)imagining and creative approaches to be noticed on social media newsfeeds. Furthermore, in-person networked preaching needs to be adaptive considering the influence of media on our attention, culture, and entertainment. In this

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[775] Heidi A. Campbell, *The Distanced Church: Reflections on Doing Church Online*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell, last modified April 2, 2020, http://hdl.handle.net/1969.1/187891, 52.

[776] Campbell, *The Distanced Church*, 51.

final chapter, I argue that in *digitally* turning to the user, networked preaching (re)imagines the *sermon as media* and the preaching event as a sacred moment to hear the proclaimed Word with the virtual body of Christ, who is not bound by time nor space.

The road map for this chapter will be as follows. The first section offers a homiletical ecclesiology that offers a (re)imagining of God and the church in our networked society. Building on Calvin, this chapter imagines God coming to us through the proclaimed Word, whereby we may be in a coffee shop, at home, or anywhere in the world. Adding to Sarah A. N. Travis, churches recognise that their influence and ministry exist beyond their physical building, geographic borders, and traditional understanding of membership. Rather, they recognize themselves as community members, who are interconnected to a broader network and have a responsibility to serve their *glocal* community, both in-person and online. Churches can also utilise tie strength theory to help foster their own relational networks. Building on Eugene Lowry, a "go-live ecclesiology"[777] is offered as a means of imagining the sermonic event as a holy, *Kairos* moment-in-time that does not require perfection or highly produced content.

The second section (re)imagines the *sermon as media*. The preacher is essentially a social media creator, who must be conscious that the preaching moment is adapted to fit the medium. Practically, sermons online should mirror the other content on the platform. The techniques of the New Homiletic and postmodern homiletics help to enhance sermons online, particularly when it comes to fostering anticipation, narrative, and dialogue within the sermon. Following the techniques of content creators, preachers should also utilise BuzzFeed's cultural cartography when assessing the impact of their sermons.[778] Dao Nguyen identifies that viral content accomplishes specific objectives or creates a particular response for the consumer, such as "makes me laugh," "this is me" (identity), "helps me connect (with another person)," "helps me

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[777] Ruth Schmidt, "A Go-Live Ecclesiology: Why Being Present Online is More Important Than Being Polished," *Medium* (blog), last modified April 26, 2020, https://medium.com/@ruthschmidt/a-go-live-ecclesiology-why-being-present-online-is-more-important-than-being-polished-fd53634b4f66.

[778] Dao Nguyen, "What Makes Something Go Viral?" YouTube, posted by TED, last modified January 8, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kab-mpU-YVM.

(do something)," and "makes me feel (something)."[779] This framework helps to foster the horizontal relationality among the digital community.

The third section considers how homiletical theory requires a revision and a reorientation for networked preaching. A practical guide is offered to help preachers better communicate with their listeners in both online and in-person contexts. Sermon examples will be offered to illustrate how this homiletical theory becomes practice in the preaching event.[780] Furthermore, in-person networked preaching also needs reform considering the influence of media on our attention, culture, and entertainment. Bringing theological, liturgical, homiletical, and theoretical aspects together will provide a foundation to create an approach to preaching for our technological world today and beyond.

5.1 Homiletical Ecclesiology

A digital mediated worship service has theological implications for our understanding of church and God. Through its use of digital media, the local church can recognise its place in the larger network and realise the potential of its scope of influence. When the worship service is accessible online, this gesture is not just an added feature that faith communities can offer, but it is a gracious act of hospitality. Some may never feel comfortable walking into a church building, but they could be interested in attending the service online. Thus, digital media becomes a theological vehicle for liberating the gospel beyond the church walls and making the church more inclusive by providing a means of giving everyone a front row seat in the service.

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[779] Nguyen, "What Makes Something Go Viral?"

[780] Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 152; Wilson argues for ethical objectives for homiletics, particularly that "homiletics arises out of and leads to actual sermons."

5.1.1 An Accessible God

The church service is traditionally the place where people encounter the presence of God. Through hymns and worship music, people can sing about the nature of God's goodness and feel the presence of the Holy Spirit. Through the teaching and preaching of Scripture, they can encounter God through the revelation of the proclaimed Word. As discussed in chapter 2, section 2, Calvin asserts that the proclaimed Word can be a sacramental moment, whereby it "offer[s] and set[s] forth Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace."[781] With *the Reformed Sursum Corda*," Calvin instructs his hearers about the importance of looking beyond the mere communion elements to the spiritual realm. The preaching moment is also another occasion when the people are invited to lift their hearts to the "heavenly things in heaven."[782] Whether God is offered to us or we raise our hearts up, this traditional paradigm assumes that the faith community is together in the church building; thus, a divine encounter occurs within these in-person parameters.

As later discussed in chapter 3, section 3, Sigmon offers a new classification scheme for the theory and practice of preaching online that she calls *homilecclesiology*, whereby the preaching goes "beyond the limits of the liturgical event, sanctuary space, and face-to-face encounter."[783] Digital preaching not only liberates the sermon, but our understanding of God is liberated beyond our own constraints of where we believe God can be experienced.

When a preacher broadcasts a sermon with a cell phone and tripod, it may not seem to have much theological significance; however, with a closer look, that single act has a significant implication. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he told his disciples in Acts 1:8 that they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit and be his witnesses, "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria,

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[781] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Library of Christian Classics, 2 vols, edited by John T. McNeill, translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1960), 4.14.17.

[782] Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western church* (New York: New American Library, 1961), 223.

[783] Casey Thornburgh Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly: A Process Homilecclesiology for a Digital Age" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2017), 142.

and to the ends of the earth."[784] Jesus' disciples were his original witnesses, who preached the Gospel beyond their community by physically traveling to those places. With the technology of today, gone are the days when the sermon can only be experienced in person. With digital media, the Gospel can continue to be proclaimed to "the ends of the earth," without the need of a passport or a plane ticket. While the preachers themselves are not traveling, their *voice* has left the church building, and their preaching has been liberated from the constraints of time and space. Instead of praying that people would come to their building, preachers and churches go to where the people are—on social media.

Theologically, one may be prompted to ask the question, "Where is God in broadcasting the sermon on social media?"[785] I would argue that God is central to this technological activity, and that the Holy One works through the agency of the preacher. Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki states that,

> "the creative word from God given in every moment is a whispered word, not readily discernible, because it is clothed in the context of our past, because it is a habitual word, because it comes in our preconscious depths, and because it most usually directs us outward to our God-given work in the world. God's word comes to us effectively—it is that which holds us in existence—but it comes to us as a whisper."[786]

I argue that God can be heard—not just in a whisper—but in a cell phone "ping." Through the Live notifications such as through Facebook, God *interrupts* people's regular agendas and turns their attention to a spiritual realm. Through social media livestreaming, God is *going to the people* and inviting them into a new spiritual space, regardless of their geographic location—lying in bed or taking a coffee break at work. Digital preaching complements our belief in an omnipresent God, who can be worshiped and experienced in any space.

Digital worship makes God accessible to those who may never have an opportunity to attend church at the regular service times. Thus, more individuals can form virtual vertical relationality,

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[784] Bible, New Revised Standard Version.

[785] Luke Powery, interview by author, phone conversation, August 3, 2017.

[786] Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Whispered Word: A Theology of Preaching* (St. Louis, M.O.: Chalice Press, 1999), 11.

or ties with God, as discussed in chapter 4, section 4. For those who identify as non-religious, as "spiritual, but not religious," or as non-Christian, they can comfortably explore the church outside of its building. For persons with a disability or a chronic health condition, they may not be able to commute to in-person services; thus, church online provides a way to connect with a faith community. For LGBTQ persons who live in small towns and do not have access to affirming communities, progressive churches online can sometimes be their only means of support. For incarcerated individuals with Internet privileges, they can virtually leave their prison cells and receive a word of hope. By welcoming everyone into this digital space, the church is going beyond words into inclusive, loving action. Beyond a geographic location, digital media allows God to be more accessible at any time of a day. Church services are no longer confined to the time-space limits of in-person worship. Through social media, everyone can be social and join the sermon conversation. Online viewers have the freedom to come and go from the broadcast as necessary. They can watch the sermon in real time or the recorded version later. Digital media expands the possibilities of where worship can take place and what materials are necessary. The accessibility of God is not dependent upon being at a church building; but rather, if the church service is available online, anyone can have a spiritual encounter, wherever they may be.

5.1.2 Church as a Relational Network

Decades ago, in every town in America, the neighbourhood church was the pillar in the community, like it's steeple that overlooked the town. The pastor primarily served in and ministered to the people within his or her own area. At times, some people may have traveled to a neighbouring town to attend church, perhaps if they encountered conflict with the pastor or other church members. In general, a church's scope of outreach and relational network was limited to a geographic location and the willingness of parishioners to commute to the church. While the mystique of the neighbourhood church is a beloved ministry model, this paradigm may need to be expanded in the age of social media. Local churches, who livestream their services, may soon discover that individuals from all over the United States and the world are able to watch and participate in their services.

As discussed in chapter 3, section 2, Travis proposes her own (re)imagining of the church in a creative way, departing from a Christendom self-understanding of "triumphalism, privilege, and a sense of permanence"[787] to a new realisation as "an incarnate, vulnerable, creative body."[788] A post-Christendom community is not "tied to a particular place but will learn to share life with others at the margins."[789] Her homiletical ecclesiology imagines the church being light and nimble, as it is "effective and content with less resources," even selling its buildings and becoming "vulnerable to a culture that is not particularly church-friendly."[790] Her homiletic of Metamorphosis preaching allows preachers to be midwives who create a new narrative of the church.[791] This approach could include "new ways to imagine Christian community,"[792] and perhaps that includes a church not being bound to a physical building.[793] When a church has an online ministry, the community extends its service beyond its physical building, and the place of ministry can be virtually anywhere and at any time.

If a church's scope of influence is beyond its neighbourhood, it can realise it's full potential in the ministry of the world and of being a part of a larger network. As discussed in chapter 3, section 3, Casey Thornburgh Sigmon's *homilecclesiology* is an expansive understanding of the church as it opens the preaching event to more individuals beyond the time-space limits of in-person worship. Thus, it is rooted in relational networks, rather than conventional institutional identity.[794] Similarly, Heidi A. Campbell asserts that one of the most desirable aspects of online platforms is to feel "a sense of relationship" and not the mere consumption and dispersal of

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[787] Sarah Travis, *Metamorphosis: Preaching after Christendom* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), 43.

[788] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 14.

[789] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 97.

[790] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 103.

[791] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 59.

[792] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 87.

[793] Travis, *Metamorphosis*, 97.

[794] Sigmon, "Engaging the Gadfly," 142.

information on the web.[795] Like a virtual hug, internet users long to feel cared for and to reciprocate that feeling, and they value the ability to communicate and engage in fellowship authentically.[796]

Bringing theory into practice, Campbell has identified the approaches that churches have taken to worship together as faith communities during the pandemic. The first approach is simply to *transfer* their liturgical service by recording what would have been conducted in person. By keeping the same liturgical format and appearance, the church leadership achieves the goal of giving the members the familiar worship from the safety of their own houses. Campbell observes that mainline churches have implemented this strategy. The second method is for churches to *translate* the original service into a modified form. Churches that were already livestreaming have converted their worship service into a "talk show format," complete with a provisional studio and the pastor as the "host." This approach features interviews, music, and a limited interactive component through social media. She notes that this second approach is used in interdenominational and nondenominational faith communities.

Campbell observes further that the final strategy taken by churches is to reassess their service considering their parishioners' needs and to *transform* it into a "fireside chat model." This service is highly dialogical, as the pastor has a conversation with the congregation in which they reflect together on life amid the pandemic and share prayer requests in real time. Campbell witnessed only a few churches of various denominations using this third option. [797] She offers the advice that churches should be more relational and conversational.[798] Campbell's proposed approach considers the fact that, when church services are virtual, worshippers must connect both with God and with their neighbours. Her philosophy is consistent with the vertical and horizontal relationality, in which individuals develop ties with both God and neighbour.

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[795] Campbell, *The Distanced Church*, 50; also see: Heidi A. Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online: We are One in the Network* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

[796] Campbell, *The Distanced Church*, 50.

[797] Campbell, *Distanced Church*, 51.

[798] Campbell, *Distanced Church*, 52. Italics my own.

When pastors share their sermons online, their friends may be prompted to watch the videos that appear on their newsfeeds because of their relationship with them. Similarly, if a parishioner shares a sermon, a friend in their social network may watch the message because of their connection with that parishioner. Even if individuals may not desire to be a part of a church, they may be interested in watching a sermon or even a whole church service. As discussed in chapter 4, section 4, virtual horizontal relationality, or interpersonal ties, with those within one's social network is what prompts individuals to watch content shared from their friends. Moreover, the Facebook's live notifications prompts a sense of urgency and encourages friends to tune in, particularly when they receive a notification that their friend "is live now."

On social media, media creators and regular users may feel pressure to create highly produced content. Churches, who offer their services online, may also feel this pressure to produce. Ruth Schmidt, a social media strategist turned seminarian, acknowledges the expectations that are placed upon preachers, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many may feel considerable anxiety and pressure to upload a perfect pre-recorded service on YouTube and Facebook. However, Schmidt recommends a "go-live ecclesiology" using Zoom, Facebook Live, or other video conferencing platforms.[799] She argues that pre-recorded services lack community, virtual embodiment, and presence that come with being together in real time. Thus, the aim is for worshippers to be embodied and able to share in each other's presence digitally. Schmidt describes her own emotional experience of worshiping during the pandemic vividly:

> The elements are in front of me: ripped wonder bread and a glass jar of kombucha on the coffee table. I'm sitting on the floor in my pajamas, legs crossed and mascara still smudged from what I couldn't remove last night. The pastor on Facebook Live says a blessing, we eat and drink, and the Lord's Prayer is said. Then I cried.[800]

Her observations are in line with Berger's finding that the simultaneous and synchronized aspects of digital worship foster a sense of "co-presence" when "co-location" is not

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[799] Ruth Schmidt, "A Go-Live Ecclesiology: Why Being Present Online is More Important Than Being Polished," *Medium* (blog), last modified April 26, 2020, https://medium.com/@ruthschmidt/a-go-live-ecclesiology-why-being-present-online-is-more-important-than-being-polished-fd53634b4f66.

[800] Schmidt, "A Go-Live Ecclesiology."

possible,[801] as discussed in chapter 4, section 2. Digital worship can be, without a doubt, a source of real connection to both God and one's church family. Even when worshippers are separated physically, they can still commune spiritually by being virtually face-to-face. The church as a relational network should adapt a "go-live ecclesiology" as it better remediates authenticity and the real-time exchange of communities.

5.2 Sermon as Media

Contextuality is a longstanding value in preaching, as it honours the hearers' context and the uniqueness of communities. As discussed in chapter 3, section 2, Leonora Tubbs Tisdale encourages pastors to not only exegete Scripture, but also their congregations and their unique subcultures by studying their faith communities.[802] In digitally turning to the user, contextual preaching on digital platforms is inherently more complex and expansive than traditional contextual preaching from the pulpit. Preachers need to be aware of the multiple audiences for their digital sermons and to identify the needs of each, for instance their parishioners, their friends, and other strangers scrolling by. Inside jokes and references to specific congregations may alienate other visitors.[803] Preaching on social media is not business as usual; but rather, it requires not only that the message be contextual to the online audience, but also that the message is appropriately adapted to fit the medium. This section seeks to dispel the assumption that putting a camera in front of the preacher is all that is required for preaching online; but rather, preachers should heed special considerations when speaking from digital pulpits.

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[801] Teresa Berger, *@ Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 106; see also Antonio Diaz Andrade, "From Physical Co-location to Perceived Co-Presence: 'I Feel Close to You when I Use My Mobile,'" *Pacific Asia Journal of the Association for Information Systems* 6, no. 1, article 2 (2014): 1-19, https://aisel.aisnet.org/pajais/vol6/iss1/2.

[802] Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, Fortress Resources for Preaching (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 89-90.

[803] Justin Trapp, "The Ultimate Guide to Taking Sermons Digital," *Pushpay* (blog), last modified July 3, 2020, https://pushpay.com/blog/guide-to-making-church-sermons-digital/.

5.2.1 Media Theory

Defining terminology is an important aspect of the research process. The terms "social media" sermon, digital sermon, or online sermon indicate the location of the event: the homily is on a platform. For this dissertation, I have created my own terms: a "networked homiletic" and "networked sermon," which denotes a theory and practice of preaching that is appropriately adapted for platforms. Sermons today can often be preached to dual congregations: both online and in-person simultaneously; thus, this approach seeks to work in both settings. While digital media is constantly changing and new applications are emerging, there are overall guidelines when preaching online regardless of the platform. Pastors should take these recommendations into consideration when crafting sermons for social media.

Networked sermons are media. As media content, these messages are given a form through the various platforms. Regardless of the aims and intentions of the preacher, networked sermons should be more than a transfer of information; but rather, the preaching event is transformed and shaped by the medium through which it travels. As discussed in chapter 4, section 2, preaching online remediates its in-person counterpart, which means that it is refashioned to fit the platform, where engagement communicates one's presence. Thus, preachers are essentially content creators, and their aim is not merely to post their messages on a platform, but to create a genuine experience. Individuals can experience immediacy, the transparency of media,[804] in digital worship and forget that they are participating via Zoom or Facebook. They could feel as if the worship experience is "real" and present to them, which reinforces the feeling that their experience is "authentic."[805] Conversely, the hearers can engage in hypermediacy, an awareness of media, through their use of backgrounds, reactions, GIFs, and typed comments.[806] The preachers' objective is to generate participation in their social network, which consequently will build a stronger community. Furthermore, preachers need to be like network managers in knowing the inner workings of the platforms that they use for ministry. Thus, the roles of

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[804] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 70.

[805] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 70.

[806] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 70-71.

preachers are complex: they need to create, as well as understand how interpersonal networks on social media are built and made stronger.

Networked sermons are "social." Like videos, memes, pictures, and posts on social media, they should spur reactions, comments, conversations, and GIFs. Networked sermons should be "social," in that they should entice the users to share and engage with them among their friends. As discussed in chapter 4, this regular engagement of individuals helps to develop horizontal relationality, which gives them a sense of presence and investment in the community. With church online, the comments and emoticons also remediate the activities exhibited in brick-and-mortar churches, such as greeting, responding to the preaching of God's Word, praying as a community, praising God together, and giving in the offering. The immediate interaction between preachers and their online community creates a response presence that fosters a sense of identity and bonding as a community. Furthermore, the ecosystem of social media runs on engagement and participation. Media scholar Taina Bucher explains that,

> "The participatory subject constituted by the algorithm hinges on an underlying idea of popularity…. There is, thus, a circular logic to the way in which visibility is organized on Facebook. Being popular enhances the probability of becoming visible, thus increasing the probability of generating even more interaction."[807]

When users interact with posts in their newsfeed, they are helping to elevate the visibility of that post, which also affects the video's algorithm and its overall visibility. This environment helps to understand why networked sermons should be recognized as media, and that they are specific to a platform.

Networked sermons are platform specific. Media is not a monolithic entity; but instead, each platform has key particularities.[808] If networked sermons are "social" and if they are media, then putting a camera in front of a preacher should not be all that is necessary for digital preaching. Rather, an understanding of the platform and its particularities is also needed. For example, if the average videos on Facebook are less than 10 minutes, sermons should not exceed beyond that

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[807] Taina Bucher, *If ... Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 89.

[808] Carlos Barreneche and Rowan Wilken, "Platform Specificity and the Politics of Location Data Extraction," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 18, no. 4-5 (2015): 498.

length. While sermon length can be dependant upon a preachers' context and ability to sustain their audience's attention, preachers would be well-advised to keep their digital sermons briefer than their in-person ones, perhaps aiming to craft 10- to 12-minute messages or shorter. The key is to preserve the pattern of successful content; thus, sermons should reflect other posts on the platform. If pastors insist on speaking longer, they should ask themselves, "why social media users would watch their sermons, if they are substantially longer than other videos on the platform?" While exceptionally gifted orators, who are spellbinding with their charisma, could possibly preach longer, these individuals are the exception and not the rule. Most of us who preach do not fall into this category. I recommend that a sermon needs to be more concise and simpler in structure when it is delivered digitally than when it is delivered in person. Furthermore, current media also affects how we consume media; for instance, the popularity of short-form videos such as TikTok videos, Facebook Stories, and Instagram Reels have conditioned us to consume shorter content.

Networked sermons compete for our attention. Unlike in-persons sermons, sermons that are preached online do not have a captive audience, who are confined to the physical building during the sermonic event. Thus, the preacher must keep viewers engaged because of the ease with which an online observer can leave the livestream or post. Sermons on social media are competing with the latest viral and high-production videos. For pastors to command the attention of individuals scrolling by on their mobile devices, they must present an engaging message. Preaching on social media is like standing on a digital street corner and proclaiming the Gospel amid memes, partisan political posts, and selfies. The audience that gathers may include parishioners, social media followers and friends, and random visitors. Like any online content, the sermon must be interesting enough that it compels the viewer to continue to watch. Preachers must remain attentive to digital listener fatigue[809] and attention deficit[810] culture. They should be mindful that receiving information through a digital medium requires more cognitive effort than

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[809] Christina Cauterucci, "I Will Not Be Attending Your Exhausting Zoom Gathering," *Slate* (website), last modified May 12, 2020, https://slate.com/human-interest/2020/05/zoom-call-burnout-quarantine.html.

[810] Kevin McSpadden, "You Now Have a Shorter Attention Span than a Goldfish," *Time* (website), last modified May 14, 2015, https://time.com/3858309/attention-spans-goldfish/.

receiving the same information through face-to-face communication.[811] These suggestions are certainly not exhaustive, but attention to the issues that I raise here can help preachers to communicate with their listeners better in digital contexts.

5.2.2 Using Cultural Cartography and Marketing Techniques

Social media platforms are businesses built and designed for the needs of the marketing industry.[812] Instead of rejecting the commercialised logic inherent to these platforms, preachers can draw upon the wisdom of content creators and the psychology of the marketing industry to construct sermons on social media. It is important to note that the field of homiletics has a history of drawing on the approaches of outside disciplines. Yet, some may offer the concerns that drawing upon techniques of the marketing industry is commercialising the sermon. However, the approaches offered in this section are not suggesting anything new; but rather, they can also be seen in the techniques of the New Homiletic, particularly in valuing the use of story and being conscious of the emotions that they produce.

These marketing resources can help to better conceptualise how sermons can be "social." For instance, BuzzFeed created their own framework for creating and categorizing their media content, whereby they focus on what the media is doing for their audience, rather than merely concentrating on the subject matter.[813] Apropos of digital sociality and tie strength, Dao Nguyen, who is a publisher at Buzzfeed, identifies that viral content accomplishes specific objectives or

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[811] Lini Kadaba, "'Zoom fatigue' is real. Why video meetings strain your brain and how to fix it." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, last modified May 20, 2020, https://www.inquirer.com/health/coronavirus/zoom-fatigue-science-brain-how-to-combat-20200520.html.

[812] Siva Vaidhyanathan, *Antisocial Media: How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 70. He states: "Facebook, Google, and Amazon want us to relax and be ourselves. They have an interest in exploiting niche markets that our consumer choices have generated. These companies are devoted to tracking our eccentricities because they understand that the way we set ourselves apart from others are the things about which we are most passionate. Our passions, predilections, fancies, and fetishes drive and shape our discretionary spending; they are what make us easy targets for precise marketing."

[813] Dao Nguyen, "What Makes Something Go Viral?" YouTube, posted by TED, last modified January 8, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kab-mpU-YVM, 1:52-57.

creates a particular response for the media user. Humor or "Makes me laugh" content is defined as "good, clean, and non-offensively funny," such as "Dad Jokes" or puns.[814] Identity or "this is me" content enables individuals to joke about themselves in a self-deprecating or critical matter.[815] This content expresses one's background, culture, and interests, which aids in forming connections with others. Correspondingly, "This Is Us" category illustrates individuals' connection with each other. Nguyen suggests that this community content is "one of the greatest gifts of the internet," "when a piece of media…precisely describes your bond with someone."[816] Practical or "helps me" content aids them in completing a task or allows users to learn more about themselves or others.[817] The final group is "faith restored" or "helps me feel" content, which could foster a range of emotions from sadness to curiosity, to restoring one's faith in humanity.[818] For instance, when watching a livestream, the audience can experience a "shared anticipation" of what will happen in the broadcast.[819] Importantly, media content can encompass multiple categories and meet various objectives simultaneously.[820] Buzzfeed's cultural cartography aims to better understand the users and recognise the role of media in their life, in order to provide better content.[821]

Similarly, preachers can adapt this cultural cartography framework for their sermons on social media to help their audience achieve specific outcomes. For instance, sermons can communicate aspects of the nature of God and the human experience that can help users better understand themselves and others. A preacher's message can also evoke emotions, such as curiosity, joy,

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[814] Nguyen, "What Makes Something Go Viral?" 4:19-29.

[815] Nguyen, "What Makes Something Go Viral?" 4:33-48.

[816] Nguyen, "What Makes Something Go Viral?" 4:39-55.

[817] Nguyen, "What Makes Something Go Viral?" 4:59-5:05.

[818] Nguyen, "What Makes Something Go Viral?" 5:07-10.

[819] Nguyen, "What Makes Something Go Viral?" 2:06-2:13.

[820] Nguyen, "What Makes Something Go Viral?" 6:04-6:13.

[821] Nguyen, "What Makes Something Go Viral?" 9:53-10:08.

sadness, or empathy. Sermons can illustrate experiences that restore one's faith in humanity and God. Like Internet videos, a preacher's message should have an element of suspense or narrative tension to capture and sustain the attention of listeners. As discussed in chapter 3, sermons should take their audience on a journey, maintain a sense of tension, and reveal an insight at the end.[822] A virtual audience needs a reason to keep watching because it is so easy to just keep scrolling through a newsfeed or click off a Zoom call. Like content creators, preachers should have an awareness of their sermon's function and emotional affect, rather than merely being a means of transmitting information.

Additionally, preachers can gain insight from the marketing industry when creating their messages on social media. Marketing scholar Jonah Berger studies what makes certain ideas and products "contagious" and become viral in their popularity, which complements Buzzfeed's framework.[823] He reveals the sociological and psychological dynamics that undergirds the transmission of information, which are insights that can be applied for sermons.[824] Like the marketing of a product, the greatest hope for digital sermons is that they will be discussed and shared among one's social network.[825]

Effective marketing fosters emotions in its audience, thus marketers should concentrate on the feelings that their messages create.[826] Berger asserts that the reason for social transmission of messages is that "when we care, we share."[827] However, all emotions do not universally promote sharing. High arousal messages that create the feelings of awe, anger, anxiety, and humor

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[822] O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, vo1. 1 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 803.

[823] Jonah Berger, *Contagious: Why Things Catch On* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 21.

[824] Berger, *Contagious*, 26.

[825] Berger, *Contagious*, 21.

[826] Berger, *Contagious*, 23.

[827] Berger, *Contagious*, 96.

encourage sharing[828], while those that evoke low arousal emotions, like sadness, do not.[829] Berger gives the example of a Google advertisement about a man who falls in love with a French woman. He reflects that, "You cannot watch this clip without having your heartstrings tugged. It's romantic, joyous, and inspiring all at once. I still feel tingles every time I see it."[830] Advertisements have the potential to be viral hits when they concentrate on the feelings that their message fosters.[831] In a similar fashion, preachers should be conscious of the emotions that their sermons create and hopefully prompt their hearers to action or reflection.[832] Like advertisements, sermons can also evoke a range of emotions from awe, hope, peace, humor, as well as negative feelings, like anxiety and anger.

Successful marketing also conveys practical value in their messages which encourages social transmission.[833] Furthermore, the sharing of useful information can increase bonds and tie strength among individuals. Berger offers the scenario that, "If we know our friends are into cooking, sending them a new recipe we found brings us closer together. Our friends see we know and care about them, we feel good for being helpful, and the sharing cements our friendship."[834] Similarly, people may be motivated to share a particular sermon with a friend if it provides practical value for him or her. Perhaps counterintuitively, narrower, personalized messages are more effective and encourage sharing more than generalized ones. People have a strong desire to share content if it seems uniquely tailored to a specific friend.[835] In marketing, exemplary messages are those that help to improve one's life and are packaged as digestible content that is

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[828] Berger, *Contagious*, 103, 110

[829] Berger, *Contagious*, 110.

[830] Berger, *Contagious*, 115.

[831] Berger, *Contagious*, 115.

[832] Berger, *Contagious*, 113.

[833] Berger, *Contagious*, 158.

[834] Berger, *Contagious*, 159.

[835] Berger, *Contagious*, 175.

useful, note-worthy, and condensed.[836] Digital sermons should also have similar qualities, particularly in having a concise and clear message.

Lastly, marketers often use stories as an effective means of communicating viral content. Berger indicates the importance of packaging ideas and products into compelling stories. Furthermore, he stresses that, "we need to do more than just tell a great story … We need to make our message so integral to the narrative that people can't tell the story without it."[837] Stories are common means of communication in preaching. Preachers can also heed the advice that their narratives should be integral to sermons; however, their stories should not overshadow the overall message.

In our networked age, preachers can glean insights from those outside of the realm of homiletics, such as content creators and marketers. Effective digital communication is not just that users will watch one's content, but that it will inspire them to share with their network. The ecosystem of social media hinges on the content's virality and users' engagement. The greatest hope for sermons is not just that they are heard, but the message will prompt reactions, conversation, sharing, and ultimately, action. For preaching to achieve these results, a homily should reflect our human experience, evoke an emotional response, and prompt us to engage with our network. While these frameworks provide a helpful methodology, practical strategies for sermon writing and delivery are needed, which will be explored in the final section.

5.3 Best Practices for Networked Preaching

As discussed in chapter 3, there are a myriad of methodologies and approaches for in-person preaching. Depending on their historical context and social location, homileticians have offered their own proposals to proclamation. An unfortunate assumption is that these in-person approaches can be directly applied to online contexts. However, in our networked society, digital preaching requires additional considerations as it is no longer "business as usual." Thus, this section offers a practical guide with sermon excerpts, which considers the media theories and the

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[836] Berger, *Contagious*, 174.

[837] Berger, *Contagious*, 24.

particularities of the Internet. While these suggestions on sermon writing and delivery are not exhaustive, these guidelines provide a foundational framework that can be adapted as new platforms emerge.

5.3.1 Toolbox for Crafting Digital Sermons

Some homileticians may teach and advocate for one preaching methodology that they teach their students. While this pedagogy may be acceptable for an introductory homiletics class, settled pastors will need a repertoire of homiletical strategies because they are preaching each week to the same congregation. After hearing sermons Sunday after Sunday, the congregation starts to anticipate what their pastor will say, particularly if he or she relies on one preaching approach or sermon form. Routine and "the expected" message are the enemies of effective hearing. This dynamic is compounded in digital context due to the ease by which users can click off a sermon broadcast or video. Thus, like viral videos, digital sermons must draw people in and keep them tuned into the broadcast.

I propose a "sermon toolbox" that preachers can use when crafting their weekly sermons. The same "tools" may not be needed every week, but they are effective when utilized for a specific task. While these tools approach preaching differently, many of them accomplish similar goals, such as providing the listener with the unexpected, building anticipation, fostering a sense of beauty, and providing sharable content for one's social network. Depending on the needs of the sermon, preachers can use multiple tools sequentially or simultaneously within a sermon. Preachers may find that some of these approaches are more common than others, and some are easier to execute. Nevertheless, these tools, along with others, can provide a sense of variety for the congregation's diet of sermons. In this section, various excerpts are offered to demonstrate how these theoretical tools become practice in preaching.

An overarching technique used within these examples is the use of stories. Due to the constraints of digital preaching, every story or illustration must contribute clearly to the main idea of the sermon. Moreover, a simple and logical structure should be used to maintain the interest of the online audience. In my own preaching practice, I often use a simple multi-story method, which

often include the following: "a story, the Bible's story, and our story."[838] Depending on the homily, the "our story" could include the preacher's story, the church's story, and/or the *glocal*[839] community's story. With these various narratives, I aim to weave them together in a technique which I call *braiding*. My sermon approach could be seen as a distillation of Edmund A. Steimle, Morris J. Niedenthal, and Charles L. Rice's method presented in *Preaching the Story,* wherein the preachers' story, the listener's story, the Biblical story, and the church's story are communicated in the sermon.[840] However, the use of telling stories within sermons is nothing new. In fact, most homileticians have these common elements in their approaches, which includes explaining the story of the biblical text, providing application to the congregation, and including additional stories to illustrate the sermon. My braiding technique aims to weave the stories together by alternating between them or combining them in an overlapping manner. Each tool that is presented below demonstrates different degrees in which the narratives are weaved together. At times, the sermonic braid only has two strands, combining the biblical story with another story. On other occasions, it brings together both the biblical story and our contemporary situation. Sometimes, the preacher can weave all the narratives together. The philosophy of the sermonic braid is that it can be remixed, which reduces routine and fosters the unexpected for the hearers.

As shown in figure 5.14 below, the first tool is "double narrating," whereby one-story overlaps with another story, and it is hard to differentiate between them. For instance, the preacher speaks about the situation of the biblical text in such a way that the hearers think that they are speaking about their contemporary situation. For this tool to be effective, the preacher must use the present tense when speaking about the biblical text. "Double narrating" is most effective in a sermon's introduction, as the audience is disoriented and assumes that the preacher is starting the sermon by talking about their current context. The excerpt is from a sermon about Luke 17:11-19, which tells the story of Jesus healing ten men from leprosy, including a Samaritan who returns to Jesus

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838 Cassandra Granados, "We Are The Branches! (sermon)," *YouTube*, last modified August 31, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKo9ieoS4aE&t=3s.

839 *Glocal* denotes the interconnected nature of global and local contexts.

840 Edmund A. Steimle, Morris J. Niedenthal, and Charles L. Rice, *Preaching the Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 1.

to express his gratitude. This excerpt is the introduction to the sermon, so that the hearers assume that the disease that is being described is COVID-19, and it was preached during November 2020 amid overwhelming pandemic anxiety. For this tool to be most effective, the preacher must communicate the overlaying details of both contexts, which take some reflection and careful wordsmithing. Double narrating is not a common preaching tool, but when it is used, it is effective in building suspense and interest for the hearers. The tool also demonstrates how the circumstances of the biblical story mirrors and speaks to our own.

Our story begins with a disease.
A contagious and communicable disease.
It spreads through droplets from the nose and mouth.[841]
It poses a "clear and present danger"
to the health of the whole community.
Protocols were established to stop the spread of this disease.[842]

This disease is devastating,
not just what it does to the human body,
but what it does to families and communities.
For those infected they endure great suffering,
as they live in isolation,
as they hope for a better day.

What disease am I talking about?
Well, Leprosy.
Our story begins in Luke, chapter 17,
with ten men, who suffer from leprosy.
Our Bible story takes on a new meaning,
as we live and cope with the COVID-19 pandemic,
we can relate to the threat of a disease,
that not only devastates the human body,
but also, people's lives.
We can relate to social distancing protocols,
such as conducting a preaching class via Zoom,
or standing at least 2 meters away from each other.
For the ten men with leprosy in our story,
they were instructed by the Law
to permanently quarantined together,

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841 "Transmission: How do people get Hansen's disease (Leprosy)?" Center for Disease Control and Prevention (website), accessed November 12, 2020, https://www.cdc.gov/leprosy/transmission/index.html.

842 Numbers 5:2-3 and Leviticus 13:45-46.

being isolated from the rest of their community.
They were instructed to live on the outskirts of town.
They were required to shout and warn people,
who approached them,
letting them know that they had leprosy.[843]

Figure 5.14 "Double Narrating"

As demonstrated in figure 5.15 (below), the second tool is "refrain," which is the repetition of a word or phrase to create emphasis and momentum. Refrains are a common and effective technique in oral communication. This excerpt is a continuation from the same sermon (figure 5.14) on Luke 17:11-19. The repeated phrase "that Grace" is used to build emphasis and indicate the grace of God, which is in all our lives. This divine grace was present for both the Samaritan leper, the original Gospel hearers, and the contemporary hearers. In essence, this refrain is a three-stranded braid that universally overlaps everyone's story. Within this sermon, this tool helps to foster beauty, a sense of awe, and can be pleasing to the ear. It is important that refrains are not too long, nor too short, and they are not overused within a given sermon. The misuse of refrains can have a negative effect on the hearer's experience of the sermon.

Our story also inspires us to be like the Samaritan,
not only in asking God for healing,
but also, being vigilant in noticing God moving in our midst,
noticing God's grace.
Like the Samaritan, may we stop and recognise those things
that we often overlook
as we go about our day.
Amid trudging through the cold, windy weather,
we often do not realize
the Grace that shines so brightly in our lives.

Like the grateful Samaritan,
may we notice grace all around us.
That Grace, that heals.
That Grace, that keeps us whole and safe.
That Grace, that makes a way, when there seems to be no way.

[843] Numbers 5:2-3 and Leviticus 13:45-46; Luke Timothy Johnson and Daniel J. Harrington, *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 3, edited by Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), 286.

That Grace, that gets us through the deepest valley.
That Grace, that woke us up this morning.
That Grace, that puts air in our lungs and pumps blood through our veins.
That Grace, that follows us all the days of our lives.
That Grace, that takes us from this world into the next.
That Grace, that is with us beyond life and time.

Figure 5.15 Refrain

As demonstrated in figure 5.16 (below), the third tool is rhyming, which is a technique that is commonly found in the field of literature. Preachers do not need to be professional poets to use this tool, even amateur efforts in rhyming can make a creative and enjoyable sermon for the hearers. As sermons are a performative event, the rhyming does not need to be perfect, nor does the phrasing need to be perfectly symmetrical because oral communication is forgiving. So, "full" rhyming and "half" rhyming can be used, as noted in italics. The key is composing the rhyme to be pleasing to the ear. Like refrains, rhyming should not be overused in a sermon because the sing-song melody will lull the hearers to sleep and have an adverse effect on their ability to hear the message. This rhyming tool is effective as an introduction, as seen in the excerpt below on Luke 2:1-20. This Christmas Eve sermon begins with a remix of Luke's account of the birth of Jesus by using similar rhyming and phrasing (indicated in bold) from the classic story, *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*. This introduction braids two different narratives together, a story and the biblical story. Within this sermon, this rhyming introduction fosters a sense of beauty and awe, which also makes it contagious content. Rhyming within a sermon is unexpected, creative, and unique, which would encourage users to share this sermon with their social network.

'Twas Some Time **Before Christmas**,
When **all through the** land, a census was declared mandatory,
a count of every woman and man.
Joseph had to comply with the laws of the *day*,
which involves a trip many miles *away*.

Now, Mary had **just settled down** into her regular routine.
preparing for her *baby*,
who had not yet *come-to-be*.
She had **visions**, which **danced in her *head***,
anticipating motherhood and the cuteness that lay *ahead*.

When all of a sudden, the Census **arose such a *clatter***.
Mary's restful plans were all but *shattered*.
As Joseph's fiancé, Mary agreed to be registered with *him*,
and it was not a trip, one makes on a *whim*!

According to Google maps, the destination was 93 miles *away*.
And there was no plane or train, to make the trip in one *day*.
If you walked from Nazareth to Bethlehem, by *foot*,
It would take you 31 hours, just *look*.

Whether Mary walked by foot or rode the whole *way*,
it was quite a stressful event, we can all *say*.
And, their troubles were not over, when they reach Joseph's *hometown*.
Because no empty rooms could be *found*.

Figure 5.16 Rhyming

As shown below in figure 5.17, the fourth tool is vocalising the "Yeah-But" voices of the audience, which is also identified as a "contrapuntal"[844] technique in chapter 2, section 2. This tool mimics dialogue by acknowledging the audience's potential thoughts and gives an opportunity to voice differing perspectives. As discussed in chapter 3, there has been initiatives by preaching scholars to make the preaching event more dialogical in nature. This "Yeah-But" tool attempts to bring conversation into the monological sermon; however, it is imperfect and has its limitations, particularly in guessing the assumptions of the audience. Nevertheless, this technique is effective in presenting various perspectives in the message. Figure 5.17 is a continuation of the Luke 2:1-20 sermon seen in Figure 5.16. This sermon seeks to dispel the ideal portrayal of Jesus' birth, which is depicted in art and hymns like "Silent Night." To keep the hearers engaged, this sermon section presents the graphic reality of childbirth and the seriousness of the event, which is a departure from the routine Christmas sermon. This experience of childbirth and the circumstances of the first Christmas weaves the biblical narrative with our own contemporary reality. I present the opposing voices who may disagree with my sermon, and then, I offer a rebuttal. This example also has brief refrains, which shows how preachers can use multiple tools simultaneously.

[844] David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 47-48.

Throughout history, artists have attempted to portray
the birth of Jesus in nativity scenes,
to give us a sense of what it was like.
But these scenes are far from accurate.
I mean, the real situation was messy.
Giving birth is messy,
there is blood, fluid, sweat, and tears.
And, it was by no means **a silent night**,
amid the excruciating labor pains.
There was no **all is calm**, and **all is bright**.
And yet, we clean up the nativity scene,
so that there is no evidence of an actual, physical birth.
Instead, Mary is portrayed as serene,
With not a piece of hair out of place.
No milk stains on her dress. Nor blood. Nor afterbirth.[845]

Along with being messy,
the original Christmas was stressful.
Mary is often portrayed as a woman,
when in fact she was a young girl,
she was "a baby having a baby."
Moreover, **when a mother gives birth,**
it is not a routine occurrence.
It is a high-risk event.
There are no guarantees.
When a mother gives birth,
she is putting her life on the line, along with her baby's.
It is a stressful time for all involved.
The miracles of Christmas were
that Jesus was born,
and God became flesh,
AND, that Mary survived.[846]
That night, she beat the odds.
That cannot be overlooked, nor taken for granted.

I know that there are some that would say,
"Do not talk about the mess! Do not talk about the stress!"
"That is not appropriate."
"Please let's clean up the story."

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[845] "Christmas Eve, December 24, 2019," *Pulpit Fiction* (website), accessed on November 19, 2020, https://www.pulpitfiction.com/narrative-notes/christmaseve y6k8e?rq=Luke%202 %3A1-2

[846] Christmas Eve, December 24, 2019," *Pulpit Fiction* (website).

"Put fresh clothes on Mary. Fix her hair.
And for heaven sakes, don't talk about bodily fluids!"

But wait!
There is something beautiful to note here
that you miss when we tidy up the nativity.
God entered the world, just as we did.
Covered in that white birthing stuff called vernix caseosa.[847]
God entered the world, just as we did.
Taking that critical first breath and crying.
God entered the world, just as we did.
Being held, swaddled, and nursed.

God became flesh, and he dwelt among us
in our human experience,
in the humblest of circumstances.
The first people to meet freshly born Jesus were shepherds.[848]
Working folk,
who had just gotten off work,
and they came just as they were,
still in their work clothes to meet God.
All of heaven and earth rejoiced in the birth.
In heaven, the angels sang.
On earth, Mary, Joseph, and the Shepherds rejoiced.
It was a small, unplanned moment.
But it was meaningful and special.

Like that first Christmas,
God also enters **our** world,
amid this messy and stressful time.
Amid a pandemic and lockdown,
Amid COVID cases rising higher and higher
Amid our frustration and fear growing,
In this stressful time,
know *God is with us*.

Like a birth plan,
that did not go according to plan,
Our Christmas will not be as we anticipated.
We will not have a great gathering, like Christmas' past.

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[847] Marygrace Taylor, "What Is the Vernix and Why Is It Important?" What To Expect (website), published on April 20, 2020, https://www.whattoexpect.com/first-year/newborns/vernix-caseosa/.

[848] Fred B. Craddock, *Luke*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1990), 36.

We will not be surrounded by all our friends and family.

It will be more like the first Christmas.
A small, humble rejoicing.
But it will be meaningful and special, as we are not alone.
***God is with us*.**
And we will celebrate on Zoom or on the phone,
being physically distant, but virtually present.
We will celebrate Jesus' birthday, a different way.
Like the angels,
we will proclaim peace on earth and goodness to all.
Yes, we are uncertain of what is to come.
But, be still and know
God is with us, on this day and every day.
God is with us, amid the stress and mess. Amen.

Figure 5.17 Vocalising the "Yeah-But" voices of the Audience

Figure 5.18 below demonstrates the use of multiple tools: rhyming and "merging stories." This example offers another way preachers can creatively combine techniques. Like a three-stranded braid, this section weaves together the biblical story and our story, using the theme and language of a nursery rhyme. This sermon on Matthew 21:1-11 was preached on Palm Sunday. In the biblical narrative, the people ask the question, "who is this" when they see Jesus. The message also invites the contemporary hearers to reflect on the same question through a poem that reflects on who Jesus is. Unlike the example in figure 17, this rhyming poem is used at the conclusion of the sermon, rather than the introduction. Both tools of rhyming and merging stories function to create the unexpected and foster a sense of beauty in the preaching event, which could encourage users to share the sermon to their social network.

Like the strangers' who were at the parade,
who asked, "Who is this?"
This Holy Week, we are compelled to ask the same question.
"Who is Jesus?" But, more importantly, who is Jesus to us…
This past week, I wrote a poem of what Jesus means to me:
The poem is entitled, "**Mary really did have a little Lamb**"

Mary really did have a little Lamb
and his compassion was more than we could ever *know*,
Everywhere that Lamb went, the hungry and hurting **were sure to *go***!

That Lamb brought sight to the blind, and healed the lame to *walk*,
he cured the lepers and restored the mute to *talk*.

That Lamb cared for the least and *the last*,
those who were considered lowly *outcasts*.

That Lamb expressed God's compassion to *all*,
He is Emmanuel, God with everyone, big and *small*.

That Lamb went to the cross and died a horrible *death*,
We thought the story was over, and there was nothing *left*!

But, the story is not over, it has just *start*.
Christ not only has conquered death, but lives well in our *hearts*.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of *prejudice*,
he reminded us that we should love everyone, *regardless*.

Everyone is special in the eyes of the Holy *One*,
No matter your health, gender, past, or what you have *done*.

Share the love of God with all that you *meet*,
Be kind to all around you, the strong and the *meek*. Amen.

Figure 5.18 Merging Stories

Like the previous excerpt, figure 5.19 below also demonstrates the use of multiple tools: rhyming and "scripture rewriting," in which the biblical text is rewritten for contemporary hearers. This sermon was on Psalm 23 and was preached on Mother's Day. For contemporary hearers, they have no point of reference for shepherds in reference to God as a caring figure, who guides them through life. However, the hearer could possibly relate to a loving parental figure or guardian, who has cared for them, such as a mother. Like many others, this sermon fosters beauty through rhyming. This message may also remind the hearers of their mothers or mothering figures and thus be compelled to share it with them.

In honor of Mother's Day, here is my own psalm 23 rewritten:

"**God is like a mother**; she created me.
Whatever I may be missing, she meets the need.
The shirt off her back or her last bite to eat.
She will give so much, so sacrificially.

God is like a mother; I can rest in her arms.
At night, I know I am safe, away from harm.

God is like a mother, so strong, fierce, and brave.
No one will mess with her baby, if she has a say.

God is like a mother; she is always there.
No matter what problem I face, she really does care.

God is like a mother; she teaches me lessons,
Like, being kind to others is really a returned blessing.

God is like a mother, let us not overlook.
She is described in many maternal images in the great Bible book.

Figure 5.19 Scripture Rewriting

The field of homiletics can glean insights from unexpected sources, like content creators and marketers. The greatest hope of a sermon is that it will foster engagement and conversation among one's network. The tools presented here are only a small sampling of the possibilities for networked preaching. Additionally, these techniques can also be effective and work well for in-person preaching. These excerpts demonstrate how sermons can foster the unexpected, build anticipation, beauty, and remind the hearers of their social network. I invite preachers to add on to this toolbox, creating their own techniques that foster the same effects in their hearers. The sky is the limit in terms of the preachers' creativity.

5.3.2 Sermon Delivery for the Digital Pulpit

Crafting the sermon is only one aspect of networked preaching. The technical elements of digital communication are also critical to communicating effectively. The following suggestions help to reduce the number of distractions for the hearers, so that they can better receive the message. Some of these suggestions may seen self-evident or common sense; however, these mistakes are often made by preachers.

When preaching exclusively to an online audience, preachers need to be mindful how they appear on the screen when they are preaching. They should look straight into the camera lens with the same enthusiasm, passion, and intensity that they display when they are preaching in-

person.[849] Similar to Craddock's homiletical approach of "empathetic imagination," that is, assuming the perspective of another, preachers should use their imaginations, remembering all the individuals, who are or who will experience the preaching moment.[850] Similarly, when preaching to both in-person and online audiences, the preacher should be mindful to periodically look into the camera lens, as this device represents their online congregation. This simple gesture makes the online congregation feel welcome and included in the service. Conversely, when the preacher does not look or acknowledge the camera, the online audience may feel like the preacher is ignoring them or that they are bystanders in the service. When preaching to dual congregations (both in-person and online), preachers should welcome and acknowledge those who are participating virtually. Within a sermon, the preacher can also pose questions to online users and encourage engagement in the comment section. As discussed before, participation through reactions and comments helps build tie strength and increase the sermon's visibility due to the platform's algorithm.

Preachers should obviously focus on the basics to avoid distractions, such as a stable network connection, clear audio quality, good lighting, a non-distracting background, proper camera angle, and the use of a stable camera or cellphone stand. Regarding clothing, they need to be mindful that their outfits will not distract or interfere with their microphones. Further, the camera should be framed close to the preachers to capture their facial expressions and gestures.[851] When the camera is set far from them, the online audience may feel less included and sense that they are passive observers in the back. Instead, the camera should be placed close to the pulpit, so that the people online feel like they have a front row seat in the service.

Lastly, preachers need to keep in mind the communication basics that they learned in their homiletics classes. The effective delivery of digital and traditional sermons requires an ease of

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[849] Brandon Hilgemann, 5 Tips For Preaching To A Camera," *Pro Preacher* (website), last modified April 18, 2020, https://www.propreacher.com/preaching-to-a-camera/.

[850] Alyce McKenzie, "Preaching to an Empty Room," *Southern Methodist University* (blog), last modified March 17, 2020, https://blog.smu.edu/perkins/preaching-to-empty-room/; Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 95.

[851] Jesse Campbell, "4 Critical Pointers for Preaching to a Camera in an Empty Room," *LifeWay* (website), last modified March 18, 2020, https://factsandtrends.net/2020/03/18/4-critical-pointers-for-preaching-to-a-camera-in-an-empty-room/.

expression, intentional gestures, and a variation of vocal pitch and speaking rate. Preachers should also internalize their notes, rather than reading their sermons to their audience. Paying attention to these aspects can greatly enhance the hearers experience of the preaching event.

This section presented suggestions for best practices for digital preaching. While not an exhaustive list, these "tools" and guidance embody the values that are important to online proclamation. The reader may be prompted to ask what the difference is between digital and in-person preaching. Some may suggest that in-person preaching could be longer, have more illustrations, and opportunities for additional side points. However, social media is changing our behaviors and how our minds consume content. Thus, I recommend that the preachers consider the guidance and advice from this chapter for in-person preaching. In our networked age, sermons should adapt to our easily distracted state, regardless of if preaching is in-person or online. If the preacher's message is not engaging, the hearers could easily pull out their phones and start scrolling on them while sitting in the pews. Online users can easily click off the service and keep scrolling on the platform. In our networked society, both in-person and online preaching requires additional considerations, which homileticians and pastors should take note.

5.4 Conclusion

Tapas restaurants are one of my favourite places to eat. Families will order a variety of items and share them amongst themselves. They pass the *tapas*, or "little plates," around for everyone to partake in the scrumptious, sample-sized appetizers. In 2013, I remember going to a *tapas* restaurant and trying a sweet potato filled egg roll. Even though I only got a bite, that delicious morsel left a memorable impression with me. This experience helped me to (re)imagine my homiletical approach. Whether in-person or online, I believe that preaching should be more like *tapas*: small, delicious, and making you long for more, which is especially critical for preaching in a networked age. This kind of awareness will help preaching adapt to its current context considering the influence of media on our attention, culture, and entertainment.

Through this chapter, we have explored ways in which to (re)imagine preaching in a networked age and creative approaches to be noticed on social media newsfeeds. In a step in the right direction, preacher should recognise the *sermon as media*; thus, digital preaching should reflect

other content that is on the platform. In the age of Twitter and TikTok, proclamation should be like *tapas*: bite-size, condensed, and easily consumable content. Sermons must move us, make us feel something, remind us of our own social network, and compel us to react, comment, and share. Like sunlight to plants, engagement is the essential ingredient for sermons to flourish in the social media ecosystem. To encourage engagement, preachers are encouraged to use the suggested "tools" in the toolbox or create their own sermon techniques that create similar outcomes of fostering awe and anticipation. Sermons should be consumable content, which leaves the users longing to hear more, rather than becoming disinterested and clicking off the livestream video. The guidelines provided in this chapter are a conceptual framework that can be adapted as new platforms emerge.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, preachers were compelled to rely on digital means to preach the Word. Mustering up courage, they proclaimed the Gospel into camera lenses, knowing that the Word is going forth to dwell among God's people. Even when preachers and listeners cannot be physically present in the same place, they still form communities and are able to communicate, both simultaneously and asynchronously, through emoticons, typed words, and video conferencing. Only God knows what the future holds for preaching on social media. My prayer is that digital preaching will not just be a temporary fix during unprecedented times, such as during pandemics. Instead, churches will realise the impact of their digital ministry and continue to reach out virtually to the whole world.

A Final Word

Parents' duties are to impart their values onto their children. Despite their best efforts, no amount of parental wisdom can predict all the scenarios that their kids will encounter in their lifetime. The multiplicity of circumstances means that parents cannot give guidance for all possible occasions. However, the children can draw upon the values that they were taught, which builds a foundational framework for making decisions on their own. In a similar manner, Scripture does not give us specific instructions on the scenarios of our modern life, but it does impart values which helps us to make decisions.

In a similar spirit, this dissertation did not provide solutions to all the scenarios that a minister may encounter while preaching on social media. This approach was intentional because of the continuous evolution of technology and the ever-changing landscape of social platforms. Rather, the research presented offers some critical values for conceptualizing and crafting digital sermons in a networked age. Through our theological, liturgical, homiletical, and theoretical study, here are the takeaways for scholars in the Academy and preachers who are in the homiletical trenches every Sunday.

Values for (Re)imagining Preaching in a Networked Age

1. **The Body of Christ is not bound by temporal, spatial, and physical limits, but it is a virtual network of God.**

Paul preached virtually with his pen in 1 Corinthians to address the trouble at the table and communicate the values of a Christ-following community. Like the Corinthians, we cannot recognise Christ unless we recognise his Body, which includes all those who are a part of it – both in-person and online. Paul's instruction reminds us that our relationship with one another in the Body of Christ is integral to our relationship with God. The values of a biblical community provide a framework that can be applied to digitally mediated worship. Digital worship is a gesture of hospitality, like adding more chairs to the Lord's table so that more people can commune with God and neighbour. The sacred moment of worship becomes more accessible when we include those who are beyond the church's walls. Like Peter Damian, if we worship

God through a digital medium, we are not alone but spiritually present with the whole Church, the Body of Christ.

2. **Preaching can be a sacramental moment, whereby God comes to us in the preaching of the Word.**

As John Calvin expressed, preaching should be more than soundbites of information, but a sacramental moment in which the people meet Christ through the proclaimed Word. Through the preaching of the Word, Christ transcends the limits of the physical world, and in essence, believers are connected virtually to Him through the working of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, Calvin had a concern that the people would not just hear his preaching, but they would also be motivated to action. One of the great hopes of preachers is that through the power of the Holy Spirit, they will inspire change. Calvin exhorts us towards such reform both in ourselves and in others.

3. **Sermons should be dialogical in nature and ultimately bring voice to the hearers.**

Homileticians have sought to renegotiate the relationship between preachers and hearers. Through the various turns to the hearer, to the other(s), and to digital preaching, preaching scholars created ways to make the preaching event more dialogical in nature. With each new turn, the sermon has become more collaborative, has given voice to the hearers, and recognised their lived experience. With the turn to digital preaching, the hearers now have a greater "response-ability" in the preaching event.

4. **Tie strength, or *horizontal relationality*, is the essential glue that holds communities together.**

This interpersonal connection is cultivated as participants experience emotional intensity, disclosure, mutual sharing, and reciprocal giving. Digital communities feel the phenomenon of immediacy and hypermediacy, which enhances their online interactions and fosters tie strength as individuals perceive their experience to be reality. Perceived co-presence and emotional presence are also critical aspects that aid in the building of ties between people in digital spaces.

5. **Engagement can increase tie strength and a sense of investment with those within the community.**

The preacher and the community can use the comments section and emoticons during the preaching event. They can influence each other, meaning that virtual worship can be participatory and the engagement during the livestream multidirectional. The immediate interaction between the preacher and the audience creates a response presence that fosters a sense of identity and bonding as a community. The comments and emoticons can remediate the activities exhibited in brick-and-mortar churches, such as greeting, responding to the preaching of God's Word, praying as a community, praising God together, and giving in the offering.

6. **Digital faith communities are unique because of their *vertical relationality*.**

Vertical relationality is a unique dimension of spirituality that transcends beyond technology and this world to connect with God. Individuals' religious experience online helps to bond them together as a community, as they participate together in corporate prayer, singing worship songs, partaking in the sacraments, and studying the Scriptures.

7. **Preachers should recognise the *sermon as media,* as social, and as competing for our attention. Networked sermons should also reflect the other content on the platform.**

Preachers are content creators, so their aim is not merely to post their sermons on social platforms. Rather, they should recognise their messages as a form of platform content and have the objective to generate engagement in their social network. In the age of Twitter and TikTok, proclamation should be like *tapas*: bite-size, condensed, and easily consumable content.

8. **Engagement is the essential ingredient for sermons online.**

Like sunlight to plants, engagement is the critical element for sermons to flourish in the social media ecosystem. Faith leaders should encourage participation, not only to foster community, but also because it affects the video's algorithm and its overall visibility.[852]

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[852] Taina Bucher, *If ... Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 89.

9. **Networked sermons should use techniques that help us feel something, get us engaged and keep us watching, remind us of our network, and compel us to react, comment, and share.**

To encourage engagement, preachers can use the suggested "tools" in the toolbox in chapter 5, section 3 or create their own sermon techniques that produce similar outcomes of fostering awe and anticipation. Sermons should be consumable content, which leaves the users longing to hear more, rather than becoming disinterested and clicking off the video. In the end, engagement is more than manipulating the platform's algorithm, but it is a means of connection.

Connection

This dissertation can be summed up into one word: connection. Connection is the greatest hope for social media: individuals can connect with each other, whether they are in the same neighborhood or across the world. Comments, emoticons, reactions, and GIFs are not just platform features or unnecessary chatter; but rather, they are how we communicate and make meaning together. Our reactions and emoticons are how we express ourselves, sending our love, concern, support, appreciation, and laughter. Our relationships are built through our interactions online with every message we send. This digital communication is how we operate in our networked age.

In every era, preaching must adapt to be effective in communicating and finding connection with others. Networked preaching is not merely transmitting information about God, but it is how we create connection. It is how we feel together, express empathy, find support, and experience life together. To effectively minister in our networked age, we must understand it. By knowing that digital engagement helps to build relationships and form communities, pastors can use this knowledge to help create communities of faith online. They can craft sermons that encourage participation and draw people into the conversation. By knowing how digital communities are grown, pastors can use this information to strengthen their ministries and scope of outreach.

Like Casey Thornburgh Sigmon, I invite other researchers, homileticians, and preachers to join the conversation on digital homiletics. Further research is needed to document the use of comments and emoticons in a range of church services and identify commonalities in

communication among faith communities. Human subject research and interviews could provide further valuable insight into the community members' comments. Additionally, pastors and scholars can offer their own creative approaches to preaching in a networked age. The collective creativity and collaboration of our network is what will build better and more effective sermons. Together, we will do as Jesus commanded us: going into our networks and preaching the Gospel.

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