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Digital Shepherding: Social Communication and Religious Leadership

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Bishop Maxim, Levi Checketts

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Digital Shepherding: Social Media Reshaping Religious Leadership and Pastoral Care

Editor's Introduction

This issue of COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS departs from our usual practice in two ways. First, as we occasionally do, we publish a set of shorter papers in one issue rather than one longer review essay. Second, this issue presents interdisciplinary work, with a focus on theological or religious issues.

The papers themselves come from a conference on theology and communication, hosted by the Communication Department at Santa Clara University during the summer of 2017. The concept for that conference stems from the earliest years of the Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture, the founder of this journal. That Centre's charter included forging links with religious communicators and churches, to inform them about new developments in communication and to encourage interdisciplinary work—with theological scholars reflecting on the religious consequences of communication processes and media, and communication scholars exploring religious topics. In fact, so important was that charge that earlier issues of COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS published a supplement called *Research Trends in Religious Communication* (available on our website, <http://cscsc.scu.edu/trends>). From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, the Centre, in collaboration with the Gregorian University in Rome, convened biannual gatherings of communication and theological scholars, publishing a series of books on topics ranging from film and religion to organizational communication and church structures to the role of interpersonal communication in religious practice.

At the request of the Vatican's then Pontifical Council for Social Communication, TRENDS and Santa Clara University restarted the seminars on communication and theology, focusing on the impact of social media on church life, religious experience, and theological scholarship. Over time, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Communication

Office took interest and the gatherings attracted a wider range of theological perspectives.

By design the seminars invited younger scholars in an attempt to shape a research agenda on this important part of life. Conference themes have addressed different areas which participants had identified as ways in which social media and digital communication affected church life. The fruits of these discussions have received some attention: Last year, for example, the press of the Universitat Ramon Llull in Barcelona published *Authority and Leadership: Values, Religion, Media* (M. Díez Bosch, P. Soukup, J. Lluís Micó, and D. Zsupan-Jerome, eds.), a collection of papers exploring how social media has affected the authority of churches and religious leaders.

* * *

The papers presented here, as mentioned above come from a larger set of those presented in 2017 exploring “digital shepherding,” or how the digital world changes what it means to act as a pastor and what the change in communication patterns may do to moral theology and religious teaching. Participants reflected on questions like these: “What does it mean to be pastoral or to do ministry in a digital culture or context?” “How do the terms, ‘pastoral ministry’ and ‘moral theology’ find new meaning or expression today?”

More theological than communicative in approach, the essays incorporate communication research in some very interesting ways. While one might expect to read about applied communication—how to create effective church messages, for example—these essays instead draw on a variety of theoretical material coming from or popularized in communication study. Each essay takes on a different dimension of theological work.

Professor Nadia Delicata explores moral theology through a media ecology lens. Rehearsing the history

and development of moral theology (that part of theology that explores right action in the light of the Gospels), she asks how the current digital communication structures might affect this discipline, noting that an earlier shift occasioned by the printing press led to very particular developments in Christian teaching. What might change now?

Professor Thomas Boomershine focuses on Christian worship. This central part of Christian life revolves around the oral proclamation of the word, though the last centuries have transformed proclamation into reading from a written text. His own scholarly work focuses on the oral performance of Scripture as a hermeneutic or interpretive method. Noting that people in the early centuries of Christianity only experienced oral performance, he argues that the key to understanding what we often (literally) see as a written text depends on its hearing. To recover that sense of the Word of God transforms not only Christian worship but Christian life. Such a realization will also dramatically change the preparation of the clergy, who will minister in an increasing oral world.

Bishop Maxim Vasiljevic asks us to reflect on the visual aspect of the digital communication world, comparing the virtual world to the world of icons, as understood in Orthodox theology. Here he draws on both his post doctorate year at the Sorbonne and at the French Academy of Fine Arts and on his analysis of the cultural experiences of alienation and death, contrasting those with the transformative power of a living icon.

Finally, Professor Levi Checketts brings us the practical experience of a pastoral minister. Drawing on Bateson's theories of the presentation of self, he traces how the social media world has brought together previously separate aspects of a pastor's roles. Informed by the observations of social media participants by Baym, James, Turkle, and van Dijck, he begins with people's confused or conflicted presence(s) on social media. His reflection on his own

online experience leads him to sketch out the role conflicts and ministerial opportunities in Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other platforms.

* * *

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* * *

Funding for the conference at which these scholars first presented their papers came from the Catholic Communication Collaboration, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, and Santa Clara University.

Moral Theology in a Digital Age: Retrieving the Past for the Future

Nadia Delicata

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In many respects, what I propose in this essay is simply a very personal reflection. For these past few years, I have been teaching and writing in two areas that often do not intermix as readily in our academic theological or even ecclesial discourse. For instance, at this gathering, I tend to “bracket” the fact that my primary teaching responsibilities and service in my local diocese are as a fundamental moral theologian. Likewise, and in particular in the context of the ethical and political issues that have risen lately in my country, the moment I am labeled a “moral theologian,” it becomes more difficult to explain to fellow theologians, or to members of the hierarchy, that there are technological effects and media dynamics to consider, even in the very analysis of the social, political, or personal situation. It is only in the sanctuary of the classroom, (and in more “esoteric” academic journals and books), that I find myself able to speak my mind and to string together in the same sentence natural law and the Laws of Media, or to apply *Veritatis Splendor*’s teachings on the morality of the act to the dangers of Deep Learning. Otherwise, the two worlds of discourse seem to remain parallel to each other, never truly “touching,” let alone mutually-mediating, one another.

This, in a nutshell, is my lament, but also hope, not just for this reflection, but in my ministry in the church: What is my responsibility as a moral theologian in a digital age? How do I facilitate a mutual self-mediation between the “reading” of digital culture and the church’s tradition of moral reasoning? How does this reflection assist the ministry of the church, not only *ad intra*, but also in the world?

Ironically, this kind of reflection, which can be broadly construed as pertaining to the moral dimensions of “culture,” is hardly uncommon in the Roman Catholic Church. How can one forget the richness of the tradition of Catholic Social Teachings, in particular from Pope John XXIII to today? Nor can it be denied

that the calls that we find among others, in the World Communications Day Messages, to nurture “neighborliness” or to “witness” the gospel in the digital “Areopagus” are not moral exhortations. Moreover, though still few, there are moral theologians like Jim Caccamo, reflecting on the ethics of new digital practices, in the same way that moral theologians continue to reflect on the moral dilemmas created by biotechnologies or business practices, etc.

So the heart of my lament—if it can be called such—is not that the Church or moral theology is ignoring digital culture. Rather, my lament is more fundamental, because, it seems to me, the methods and language of moral theology are still not sufficiently sharpened to respond adequately to the challenges of the moral life in digital culture. To put it more bluntly, if the subject of moral theology is the human as agent—and more narrowly, the Christian disciple as agent—it is necessary for moral theologians to consider how in a digital context *it is the very understanding of being human and of “agency” that is profoundly shifting*.

Still, the new challenges of digital culture are not the only complications facing moral theology. Many of us are still quite distracted by old battles (see McCarthy, 2012; Curran, 2013, pp. 253–288). It is not too long ago—merely six years, in fact—when I simply could not, and would not, imagine myself teaching moral theology. I disliked the politics of the discipline and I abhorred the futility of the labels that seemed to come with the job. What is worse, they were a strong reminder of the mess—the very profound mess—in which the discipline found itself. Much has changed in these past six years, and most notably for moral theology, the Pope. But there is a level where, more than 50 years after the Council that called for the discipline’s renewal, we are still fighting demons, perhaps as old as the Church’s ministry with sinners. Maybe these demons mask an even deeper existential crisis, where it

is the role of the moral theologian itself that is disputed in the church.

To my mind, the two issues—moral theology’s identity crisis, and her persistence in “bracketing” profound anthropological challenges being posed by digital culture—are two facets of the same coin. Moral theologians are being faced with a profound challenge in their service to the church, but at a point in time when we are unsure what we can contribute. So, my limited aim in this very personal reflection is to unpack somewhat this state of affairs.

I propose to do so by applying to moral theology a commonly used metaphor in the church: the gospel metaphor of the new wine carried in wineskins. But in order to persuade why this metaphor is fitting for all theology in our digital times, I will rely on the quote from Marshall McLuhan that continues to inspire my theological work because I still struggle to unpack its ramifications.

So here it is—once more!—in skeleton form:

The cradle of the Church was Greco-Roman literacy, and this was providentially designed, not humanly planned. [. . .]

But now we have suddenly a way of propagating information and knowledge without literacy. *I would say it is a wide-open question whether the Church has any future at all as a Greco-Roman institution.* [. . .]

This cultural heritage is expendable.
(1977/1999, p. 60, my italics)

The quote’s point is a simple one. We do not know any Christianity, any “lived” and systematically reflected upon experience of the Gospel, outside of “the cradle of Greco-Roman literacy.” Yes, the Church has “inculturated” (or at least, attempted to inculturate) the Gospel in other non-Greco-Roman cultural contexts. But, those attempts could not escape being a translation of an already inculturated Gospel. Moreover, the Gospel’s first inculturation “was providentially designed, not humanly planned.” Just as it was divinely willed that Jesus be born a Jew, and therefore the Hebrew tradition remains paramount to interpreting the Good News, so it was divine providence that Jesus be born a Jew in the Roman Empire and that a Jewish Roman citizen would be chosen as the Apostle to the Gentiles. One could even argue that Constantine was not a mere blip for evangelization: Like no other, he guaranteed that Christian discipleship, that being

church, would cease being sectarian and become palpably “universal.” The empire, itself driven on Greco-Roman literacy, guaranteed this transition from small individual churches, to the earthly manifestation of the kingdom that was to come. If the Church, at various points in its history, believed itself to be the kingdom, it is but a painful proof that even the church, the “chosen ones,” are not immune to hubris.

Which, of course, brings us right to the heart of the matter when it comes to moral theology. For authentic Christian discipleship cannot be taken for granted not even for the baptized. Rather, it must be slowly and often painfully nurtured in a world that remains marred by sin. The church is the perfect symbol of contradiction: a community of saints who are sinners. How the church deals with its own weakness—let alone the contradiction in the world—is what moral theology reflects about. To put in words this reality, moral theology has appropriated the classical language of Greek philosophers and Roman jurists perfected by the gospel: the good life, virtue, nature, law, but also grace, beatitude, and love. Classical philosophy allowed for a coherent reflection, and therefore a systematic understanding of discipleship as *paideia* of Christ.

Still—and this is the gist of the quote’s argument—our “tradition,” East and West, and indeed, our tradition of moral reflection, is not only profoundly “literate” and therefore practically inseparable from classical thinking, but in some (or many?) respects, incomprehensible outside of that literate environment. This is nowhere as evident as with moral theology’s classic teleological arguments or arguments based on the nature of things, whose philosophical foundations of realism have become so alien in our culture. So what is happening now that the cultural ground of literacy itself is obsolesced? What is expendable of our moral discourse? What remains profoundly pertinent and needs to be renewed? How can it be renewed?

As a way of proceeding, first I want to look at the artifact “moral theology” that we have inherited, that package of wineskin carrying wine. Then, since what is at stake is distilling the wine of moral theology in service of the gospel, I will try to unpack what essential ministry to the church is offered by moral theology. Which will lead us to the third dimension: As we center our reflection on the “new wine,” inevitably we will also have to make a difficult judgment. As wineskins grow old and tired, what new wineskins must we sew to renew moral theology?

A. *The artifact moral theology*

Keenan (2010) introduces his fascinating study *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences* by tackling this (minor?) controversy among moral theologians: Is “moral theology” a product of a very particular time, culture, and church? Or is “moral theology” an ecclesial reflection or praxis for all time and cultures, for the universal Church?

Keenan opts to defend the latter meaning, even if, as Rigali (2004) has argued, the term must surely be anachronistic when applied to theological reflection on the Christian life prior to the rise of the word “moral theology” with the advent of professional priestly training for hearing confessions demanded by Trent. Indeed, one could even argue that this “moral theology,” marked by a morality of obligation under the influence of Nominalism and driven by the (low) casuistical approach of the manuals, is the quintessential artifact created by the “modern” Catholic Church. Thus, in my view, even if Keenan opts to argue that we might as well call “moral theology” any form that the ministry of the healing of souls takes in the history of the church, this still misses the point that the medium is also the message, and therefore that *the particular form* a ministry takes has profound consequences on the community. In other words, that at every point in time, in every culture, a ministry could take different forms that in themselves can be judged as more or less conducive to fulfill the demands of the gospel.

Thus, while, for better or for worse, we continue to use the term “moral theology,” this in no way means that we should hang on to past methods or simply appropriate new methods without the necessary reflection. Indeed, it should go without saying that, first the Second Vatican Council, then John Paul II’s *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), and now the current papacy not only are going beyond the methods of manualist “moral theology” but in many respects are subverting it too. In their stead, moral theology is slowly taking a new form that is still quite fluid. But the question remains: Are these methods of moral theology merely the effect of changing times? Or are they the conscious appropriation by the church to minister more effectively in digital times? What is the essence of moral theology that remains necessary for the church’s ministry in all times?

B. *New wine*

As suggested earlier, the matter of moral theology is none other than the reflection on human life as

ordered to God. While every man and woman is created “in the image of God,” Christian discipleship, becoming in Christ’s likeness, is a lifetime transformation. More significantly, it is a lifetime transformation that relies on the free acceptance of God’s grace, that alone can elevate us to communion—“friendship”—with the Father. God wills that all will be saved; God desires communion with all God’s children; but as it was from the beginning, man and woman must consciously and freely will to receive God’s gift of divinization. As the Fourth Gospel puts it, those who stubbornly persist in self-righteousness, who refuse his healing by not desiring to abide in him, “condemn” themselves.

The reason for the complexity of this lifetime journey is that, as Maximus the Confessor argues in his commentary on Gregory of Nazianzus’ homily *On Pascha*, if Adam was created *atechnos*, and therefore in his pre-lapsarian state, he was virtuous, in harmony with all creation, and his desire completely ordered to knowing and loving God, his “sin” disrupted all his relations, in turn marking humanity forever (2014, v. 2, pp. 192–201). In our post-lapsarian reality, even if Christ’s death and resurrection open the gates of hell and he sends his Holy Spirit that we may become divinized, our reason and will remain prone to becoming darkened, just as our efforts at participating in God’s creation, remain tentative, fragile, and often broken. Thus, the theology of Christian discipleship continues to be marked, not only by the reality of grace, but by the reality of sin. Even when our heart desires nothing more than the Spirit of God, we remain weak and partially blind, easy prey for the spirit of evil. Our transformation to conform to Christ is a long process, where desires and inclinations—in body and soul—must be purified, so that in receiving the Spirit, our freedom to embrace the authentic human potential for which we were created, is fulfilled.

As such, it is not surprising that for much of its tradition, moral theology (widely construed) has focused on the moral and spiritual development of the agent (that is, our growth in virtue and to receive the theological virtues), and on the actions of the agent (that is, the goodness or otherwise of particular acts, or better still, the appropriateness and “fittingness” of human action in particular circumstances). All throughout, and as Mahoney (1987) has forcefully argued, this reflection has also been in mutual self-mediation with the development of the crucial pastoral praxis in the church of rehabilitating and “reforming” the sinner (pp. 1–36).

As the earliest Christian communities soon realized that even the baptized would scandalize the community through their refusal of God's love and particularly evil actions, the pastoral and theological crisis was precisely whether to exclude the sinner to maintain the purity of the community, or to rehabilitate the sinner to the fold of the community. As the Council of Nicea recognized, in imitating Christ's own salvific action, and the great mercy shown by the Father towards fallen humanity, the Christian path can only be of rehabilitation (as Pope Francis puts it: "no one can be condemned forever!" 2016, ¶297), making the most crucial ministry in the church, the conversion and healing of the sinner.

Still, how this ministry is exercised also gives crucial indications of how the ministry is understood. It is enough, in this context, to reflect briefly on the "names" given to the sacrament of God's mercy in various epochs: penance (even tariff penance), confession, and in our days reconciliation.

The first emphasized the long arduous path of doing penance as an act of spiritual discipline (analogous to that self-imposed in monastic communities for purification), but also of suffering "punishment" for transgressions. Unsurprisingly, it was this dual sense of penance that increasingly led the church to shift the imaginary of its ministry from being one predominantly of "healing" and of formation to virtue, to one stressing the other important biblical metaphor of "judgment" and condemnation. By the time of the 11th century's dialectical renaissance that birthed Scholasticism, the Anselmian image of the Father who demands justice for human transgression, a price that could only be paid through his Son's blood, imbues western medieval popular piety, but also its understanding of the Eucharist. The fear of God's judgment becomes foundational for understanding the church's ministry towards the sinner.

The second epoch stressed even more this legalistic metaphor, as "confession" went full circle from the early church's "confession of faith" to becoming one of the necessary acts of the penitent (the "integral confession" of "sins" after contrition and prior to satisfaction) in the tribunal of the Tridentine "confessional." The confessional however, was a fascinating symbol not just because of the horror it could provoke. More significantly, it strengthened the belief, already emerging with tariff penance, that sins could be washed away . . . and the cycle repeated. As moral theology developed as the theological and philosophical

foundation for the praxis of rehabilitating "lost sheep," in the manualist period in particular, it would become the science of scrutinizing actions (disconnected from actors) and culpability (disconnected from a pedagogical journey to virtue). The beauty of the Thomistic journey of discipleship to virtue, indeed to "friendship with God," is distorted almost beyond recognition. (St. Thomas Aquinas, in his application of Aristotelian ethics to the culmination of the long path of Christian discipleship, describes the virtue of *caritas* as "friendship with God." In summary he argues: "Since there is a communication between man and God, inasmuch as He communicates His happiness to us, some kind of friendship must needs be based on this same communication, of which it is written (1 Corinthians 1:9): 'God is faithful: by Whom you are called unto the fellowship of His Son.' *The love which is based on this communication is charity: wherefore it is evident that charity is the friendship of man for God.*" See ST II-II 23.1, my emphasis.)

To this day, confession remains a profoundly Catholic symbol—as profound as the "Blessed Sacrament," the Virgin Mary, or even the Pope. Nonetheless, after the post-conciliar reforms to the sacrament, the term "Sacrament of Reconciliation" has come to be preferred. In no uncertain terms, it retrieves the theological meaning of what Christ has done for us: reconcile us to the Father. Thus, today's practice of the sacrament seeks to be, as Pope Francis evocatively puts it in *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013, ¶44) "an encounter with the Lord's mercy which spurs us on to do our best."

This emphasis on "doing our best" is ultimately the heart of the Christian discipleship assumed in moral theology: It implies recognition of frailty, but also of our freedom to be constantly, slowly, converted. It is beautifully captured in another central saying of Pope Francis: It is fitting that "time is greater than space" can also exemplify moral theology. It implies sowing the right seeds even in the church's ministry with the wounded.

After all, the judge is righteous even when he condemns. But the doctor cannot be a true healer while the patient remains mortally wounded. Gently and tenderly, the doctor urges the patient to imbibe the right medicine, progressively promoting the healing of body and soul. The church's ministry with the sinner, that ministry that moral theology exemplifies in the church and outside of it, recognizes judgment as necessary to diagnose the illness. But naming the sin, while essen-

tial to ground us in truth, does not, on its own, heal the sinner. Rather, healing remains a process of slow acceptance and opening of ourselves to the Spirit of God—a process that, as the church has recognized from the beginning, requires the support of the whole Christian community.

C. In with the new and out with the old

Moral theology can thus be understood to rest on two imaginaries at the heart of the church: the imaginaries of healing and of judgment. Our temptation in every epoch might be to prefer one over the other. But the sure sign of wine in “old” wineskins is when they stop working in tandem because they become disconnected from each other. For instance, manualist moral theology tended to be strongly legalistic, analyzing the righteousness or otherwise—and if otherwise, the gravity of matter—of particular acts. At the same time, confessors were just as meticulous in their examination of extenuating circumstances that would mitigate the culpability of the individual sinner. Thus, ironically, the reversal of a strongly rigid deontological church teaching was a pastoral adaptation that tended to empty the very notion of sin. The important distinction between “objectively grave matter” and “subjective non-culpability” was often used in the confessional “not simply to absolve confessing laity,” but even “to dissolve them of any guilt in the first place.” If, in his desire to console the penitent, the confessor was increasingly willing to see the laity, because of ignorance or an increasingly complex list of psychological conditions, as incompetent to make moral judgments, so they “stretched the divide between Church teaching and pastoral practice” until effectively they “gave us sins without sinners” (Keenan, 2010, pp. 148–149).

The risks today might be different, but perhaps even graver. Today it is not just confessors who not merely absolve, but dissolve responsibility for wrongdoing. Today we tend to do it ourselves by not seeing anything wrong with our actions in the first place. It is the sense of sin that has become weaker, and with no sense of sin, there can be no sense of God’s grace either. So how is moral theology to assist the church’s ministry of healing and judgment in our times?

I would suggest four aspects of its post-conciliar reform that moral theology needs to continue strengthening to heal from its past excesses, understand the spirit of the age, and continue serving the church in the future.

- First, the decisive shift that reclaims virtue, and not merely the distillation of norms, as the true aim of Christian moral pedagogy;
- Second, the importance of truly paying attention to the signs of the times as we continue to seek the truth about human freedom and action in every circumstance;
- Third, that we are attuned to the pain and suffering of the people of God;
- Fourth, that we discern in which specific ways moral theologians can contribute most fittingly to the church’s ministry of accompaniment in conversion, healing, and formation. At the same time, that we ourselves, those called to serve as moral theologians, continue our personal pilgrimage to be cleansed of the marks of our own shortcomings and of the complexity of the situations we find ourselves in.

D. The turn to virtue

We have long been obsessed with a “shortcut” morality that focuses on specific acts rather than an arduous pedagogy of virtue. Moral norms are important, and especially so as guidelines for the novice on the path to virtue. But moral norms are also tricky: As Thomas Aquinas reminds us, the deeper we delve into the nitty-gritty details of daily life, the harder they become to ascertain as a general rule (ST I-II 94.4). Thus, it is only the wise person, the person of virtue who can act most fittingly in any circumstance.

Nevertheless, the real issue in our times is not even the problematic nature of ascertaining rules in contingent circumstances. That has—and will always remain—an issue. The deeper issue is how the particular nature of our moral crisis impoverishes the purpose we give to moral reasoning, and therefore to natural law itself and, derivatively, to human laws. In other words, because we no longer share a robust anthropological foundation, we no longer share a common view of the good life, and therefore cannot share a common ethic or “law.” Laws, of course can still be enforced, but they cease to defend or inspire a shared identity or community. Instead human law can create even deeper divisions, as some start feeling as strangers in their own home.

Pope Benedict XVI continuously reminded us that the foundational moral problem we inherited from modernity is the disconnection of freedom from truth. (See among others, the sophisticated introduction to his social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, aptly titled in English “On Integral Human Development in Charity

and Truth,” June 29 2009.) As MacIntyre (2007) and others (Pinckaers, 1995) have persuasively argued, after centuries of Nominalistic bias, and therefore after centuries where moral reasoning has been replaced by moral theories, the excellence of discerning “wisely” in human matters has been replaced by poorer substitutes like competence or management. This is a particularly serious predicament, since what characterizes the human as embodied spirit is precisely our natural ability to direct our freedom in a reasonable manner—that is, to be virtuous—a potential that relies on understanding our proper ends, and on the personal commitment to strive to reach those ultimate ends.

However, what the rise of secular culture tends to eclipse, are precisely transcending ends: the flattening of our horizon of meaning, the death of true leisure (Sunday as the day of the Lord) and of the philosophical art of contemplation, all disconnect us from our ultimate desire, and therefore the truth of our becoming as oriented to God (Taylor, 2007; Pieper, 2009). Hence, the necessity in our times of reconstructing a true anthropology, where the human is reclaimed as the being who exercises his or her freedom for true transcendence, not just for “indifferent” choices among options or actions.

Nevertheless, the challenge of remembering and reclaiming who we are as creatures in light of the divine is compounded further by the fact—self-evident in digital times—that the human is becoming a “new” being. As Guardini (1956) and others have argued, through technology as the extension of our intrinsic capabilities, the human today is immensely more powerful, almost like a god. Yet the “machine” itself has a paradoxical effect as it functions on its own, thus distancing us from our own power.

I rely primarily on Guardini here because of the central importance that Pope Francis gives to the theologian. Pope Francis applies Guardini’s reflections on technology in his social encyclical on integral ecological development *Laudato Si’* (2015, Ch. 3). He also relies on a pivotal quote from Guardini (1956) in his programmatic apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013): “The only measure for properly evaluating an age is to ask to what extent it fosters the development and attainment of a full and authentically meaningful human existence, in accordance with the peculiar character and the capacities of that age” (§224, quoting Guardini). This quote can be understood as capturing the essence of the problematique of human responsibility, but also as suggesting an entry point to a

more systematic reflection on human culture and techne as suggested by the Orthodox theologian Sergius Bulgakov:

Just as other truths of Christianity were understood more fully in the battle against heresy, so a crucial dogmatic question in our own time is the heresy of life in relation to Christian creative activity. Our epoch is characterized by a broad development of creativity “in its own name,” by a deluge of anthropotheism, in the form of a luciferian creative intoxication, and by an immersion in dull sensual paganism.

These developments cannot be overcome by mere rejection; they can be overcome only by the unfolding of a positive Christian doctrine of the world and creative activity, and by manifestation of its power. (2002, p. 332)

I think it is also important to understand these reflections in the context of both how the tradition presents techne under the symbol of the post-lapsarian “garments of skin” (see Maximus the Confessor, 2014) but also what Ong argues:

Technologies are artificial, but—paradox again—artificiality is natural to human beings. Technology, properly interiorized does not degrade human life but on the contrary enhances it. The modern orchestra, for example, is the result of high technology. . . . What do you think the sounds of an organ come out of? Or the sounds of a violin or even of a whistle? The fact is that by using a mechanical contrivance, a violinist or an organist can express something poignantly human that cannot be expressed without the mechanical contrivance. To achieve such expression, of course, the violinist or organist has to have interiorized the technology, made the tool or machine a second nature, a psychological part of himself or herself. This calls for years of “practice,” learning how to make the tool do what it can do. Such shaping of a tool to oneself, learning a technological skill, is hardly dehumanizing. The use of a technology can enrich the human psyche, enlarge the human spirit, intensify its interior life. (1982, p. 82).

The machine “narcotizes us” by making us believe that it is something altogether “other” to ourselves. As such, the greater our technological power, the greater our temptation to hide behind impersonal structures, through which we wash our hands from the exercise of responsibility. Evil happens and none of us are to blame.

Our freedom to act becomes disconnected from the truth, not only of the ultimate *telos* of our actions, but even of the reach of our actions, and therefore of our own power and responsibility. As we become helplessly paralyzed by the complexity of the technical structures we birth, we are transformed into puppets, as anonymous power becomes appropriated—as Guardini evocatively puts it—by the spirit of evil. Anonymous power becomes properly demonic because no power can be left without “order” or “direction.” Washing our hands, refusing to be who we are called to be—agents who co-create with the divine—turns us into anonymous ghosts driven by passions now beyond our control, because beyond our recognition or comprehension.

E. Attentiveness to discern the truth and act wisely

Such “anonymous” forces are becoming more insidious—the market, propaganda, the rise of more “intelligent” algorithms, etc. We ignore them at our peril. The exercise of prudence, traditionally understood through the context in which it was to be applied—for instance, the domestic sphere or the sphere of governance—must today match the reach of our power of influence through technologies, not just to determine the fittingness of our future actions, but to judge the harm or goodness caused by our ongoing application and creation of ever more sophisticated technological extensions of ourselves.

In another context, I argued that this could be understood as leading to a “cosmological prudence” (2015b). However, with the rise of ever more intelligent machines that will increasingly act as moral agents on our behalf in what can be termed a “distributed morality” (Floridi, 2013), it is also crucial to start considering how our abilities of moral reasoning are in themselves becoming technologically augmented. What does it mean to become a “cyborg” not simply through extending our bodies, or even aspects of our reason like memory or imagination, but the quintessentially spiritual dimension of meaningfully orienting our freedom?

Thus, conversion to virtue also necessarily implies the challenge of re-awakening to that deeper truth to human searching, the more integral truth to which human desire itself is oriented, and therefore to the truth of who we essentially are as human beings. While the traditional language of “natural law” has been lost, even among the faithful, moral theology

must continue to ask those fundamental questions that give us a real “measure” for our becoming (and not mere subjective desire): What is the authentic flourishing, the integral flourishing that not only befits, but respects who we are as human beings? Who are we as human beings? (See Guardini, 1994, Ninth Letter.)

If our discernment of the human condition is to be truthful, it cannot bypass the question of what constitutes or contradicts authentic flourishing according to our particular nature. Thus, another difficult challenge for the moral theologian is precisely to retrieve a language of fundamental principles, when such principles are not only openly contested, but rapidly collapsing. As Weaver wrote after the Second World War, “We can infer important conclusions about a civilization when we know that its debates and controversies occur at outpost positions rather than within the citadel itself. If these occur at a very elementary level, we suspect that the culture has not defined itself, or that it is decayed and threatened with dissolution” (2009, p. 171).

At the threshold of birthing a new world, we will increasingly discover that authentic creativity must always rest on fundamental *ordering* principles. In the case of the human, such fundamental principles could be understood as the “inclinations” that characterize human nature as presented Aquinas’ classic discussion on “natural law” (ST I-II 94.2). Aquinas speaks of *synderesis*, the fundamental principles “to do good and avoid evil” that ground the human as oriented to God, and of three inclinations to flourishing (and therefore to the “good”) that reflect our particular nature as human beings. He argues that:

- we are “creatures,” ordered to life and ultimately to fullness of life in the Creator;
- we are “embodied,” which for Aquinas includes our need for education and not just for bodily reproduction. A pivotal point that must be raised here is how the human is being reconfigured through our novel bodily and “mental” extensions, including extensions of genetic modification and cybernetic augmentation;
- we are “spiritual,” which for Aquinas means that we are persons in relationship who always seek the truth—the truth ultimately being the beatitude of “friendship with God.” This aspect also includes freedom, and indeed the freedom and responsibility to be co-creators with God.

The “emergence” of the new always points to a still hidden *telos* that orders its very becoming.

F. On being attuned to the suffering of the people of God

In contrast to the fundamental principles that order human flourishing, the reality of sin is ultimately a reality of “death” and “suffering.” As Pope Francis remarks in his discussion of the “dominant technocratic paradigm” (2015, Ch. 3), the appropriation of a technocratic mindset introduces a new “death” and “suffering” since it reduces even us, the human being, to mere objects that need fixing. This is, in fact, how we tend to look at human suffering in our age. Mortality, illness, barrenness, even spiritual ills become “problems” that can be “fixed.”

Not so in the wisdom of the Gospel, where suffering is what we bear, not for its own sake, but as reflecting the existential reality of our dependence on God. Suffering is the quintessential mark of fallen humanity constantly in need of God’s healing. The gospel, the good news, is precisely of that healing being offered to the world where our suffering is not annihilated, but transformed into joy, into glory.

This is the crucial significance of the recovery of an imaginary of healing, that ultimately is a recovery of the good news of God’s sovereign power (“kingdom”) over us, a power of mercy. As God was merciful towards us first, so God’s church is called to exercise the “kingship” ministry of mercy.

In his discussion of the theological virtue of *caritas* and its proper interior acts of joy, peace and mercy, St. Thomas Aquinas puts it this way as he discusses the unique role of mercy:

On itself, mercy takes precedence of other virtues, for it belongs to mercy to be bountiful to others, and, what is more, to succor others in their wants, which pertains chiefly to one who stands above. Hence mercy is accounted as being proper to God: and therein His omnipotence is declared to be chiefly manifested.

With regard to its subject, mercy is not the greatest virtue, unless that subject be greater than all others, surpassed by none and excelling all: since for him that has anyone above him it is better to be united to that which is above than to supply the defect of that which is beneath.

. . . Hence, as regards man, who has God above him, charity which unites him to God, is greater than mercy, whereby he supplies the defects of his neighbor. But of all the virtues which relate to our neighbor, mercy is the greatest, even as its act surpasses all others, since it belongs to one who is higher and better to sup-

ply the defect of another, in so far as the latter is deficient. (ST II-II.30.4)

Mercy is a virtue that presupposes the right ordering in our relationship with God and with one other: an ordering of greater moral perfection. Not only is God’s love more perfect than ours (a kenotic, self-offering love, even to those who “stand below”), but our “love of neighbor,” the love that characterizes the church as witness of God’s salvation, must imitate God’s love, and thus it cannot be other than merciful. This is, in fact, how the church exercises her ministry of healing and reconciliation.

Nevertheless, for the Christian, mercy is not an end in itself. The end of the Christian life is *caritas*, our elevation to an equal status to God in a relationship of “friendship with God.” And while our abiding in God’s love always depends on God pouring mercy on us first, God’s mercy, God’s gift of salvation, presupposes our willingness to be not only converted, but perfected: to receive the Spirit who divinizes us, to love selflessly as we were loved first.

As Pope Francis evocatively puts it, the church always ministers “in a field hospital.” To ignore the devastating effects of “death” and sin is to turn a blind eye to the existential crisis of suffering in our times—and of all times—which really is our disconnection from God’s balm of mercy. To be attuned to suffering is thus to also be attuned to how God beckons the church to continue the “works of mercy.” Ironically this is a ministry grounded in power—the “power of the keys”—but a power that becomes hubris when it ceases imitating God’s own essential power to offer God’s very self. Ultimately what mercy manifests and what mercy affirms is the subversion of worldly power under the dominion of true divine power: the power of self-emptying love.

G. On discerning our proper communicative role in the church

The diagnosis of our true condition and compassion towards the sinner implies the long path of a pedagogy that not only offers healing medicine, but nurtures in virtue, so that the patient too is able to continue the church’s ministry of mercy. The pedagogical relationship between the church as mother and her children ultimately relies on that medium that brings them together as community: the way we communicate with one another through our words and gestures.

Of course, words communicate more than mere content just as actions actuate more than directly

intended effects. Ultimately who we become as ministers in the church, including as moral theologians, is reflected in how we “speak.”

In an earlier presentation (Delicata, 2012), I had argued for a turn to rhetoric—a turn where theologizing becomes a conscious communicative event for transformation. I have come to believe that this turn is even more crucial for moral theologians who, as history has taught us, many times do not understand the power that the words we speak have to build walls or to heal divisions. Moreover, in our world, where everything—matter and software—is being imbued with the power to speak, how we speak will become the most ethical of our gestures. As has been suggested many times, the fundamental issue of “communication”—and therefore of communication that creates communion—is presence of the word (Ong, 1967, p. 298). In a digital age, the question of presence becomes particularly problematic because we are experimenting with so many novel ways of communicating with one another, but also because the “created realm” becomes “present” to us in new ways (e.g., augmented reality and the Internet of things). Still, as I argued elsewhere (Delicata, 2015a), ultimately every human extension of “speech” creates novel ways of “being present,” “of enhancing the human spirit” always oriented to greater communion in truth. But the standard of human “presence,” that is, the truth as transformative (“personal” and “person-forming”) power of presence is ultimately God in Godself. Hence, the question of “presence” ultimately calls for a reflection on the question of “spirit” that, to my mind, really must begin with who God is as Spirit and indeed with the person of the “Holy Spirit.” Analogously it also a retrieval of our understanding of other created spirits, the angels, but also a deeper study of theo-anthropology (of the human as embodied spirit called to be divinized in the Holy Spirit).

Incidentally, it seems to me that analogous to the question of the transforming power of “word/Word” is the question of the mediating power of “icon/Icon.” The church, of course, also has a long tradition of reflecting on “iconicity” (Vasiljevic, 2017). Ultimately what we are really considering is creaturely becoming in itself, mediated by the “human,” and as “symbolic” and “communicative” of Divine Being. Bulgakov (2002) argues along these lines through his (controversial?) Sophiology (distinguished between Divine and creaturely Sophia).

Ironically, “moral theology,” or the ancient practices from which the discipline emerged, has a rich heritage of biblical, political, and ecclesial power speech of prophetic indictment, *parrhesia*, deliberation, and of course, *paraenesis* or traditional moral exhortation. But perhaps the recovery of such speech forms, and thus the recovery of the praxis of moral and “morally-forming” speech, while absolutely necessary for the church, is precisely where moral theology itself dissolves in a wider sphere of “pastoral practice” or pastoral theology.

Nonetheless, what might remain essential and particular to the language of moral theology are the more restrained arts of speech: first and foremost, dialectic as the art of discerning among arguments for their truthfulness (associated with the judgment of “conscience”), but also the more political and educational (and therefore, “culture-making”) persuasive arts of deliberation and teaching. Ong calls dialectic and rhetoric “arts of verbal strife” and he shows how through the long march to print, they became increasingly “depolemized” as appropriated in the process of didactic education (1967, pp. 236–237). I find this point highly significant to moral theology in a digital age that recovers so much of “oral” agonism. Needless to say, prudence in itself demands the ability to grasp and “verbalize” the whole greater than the parts. Thus moral theology will continue to depend on hermeneutical skills, but also the poetic arts that configure “stories” that grasp the poignancy and drama of daily life.

Still, while moral theology is necessarily “communicative” because it is linguistic, determining the proper boundaries of that “language” might be an important question to reflect upon. Is the moral theologian’s ministry essentially a “teaching” ministry—limited to the formation of future leaders of the church and therefore utilizing “languages” fitting for this rapidly shifting task? Is it also a “pastoral” ministry in the richest sense—oriented to the moral healing and formation of the people of God, whether in the church or outside of it, and therefore necessitating other more evocative “languages” of transformation? Is it a prophetic ministry that seeks the very transformation of culture, and that therefore must rely on poetic arts like poetry, drama, satire, and others? Or is the church’s own ministering to be more of a collaborative effort where the actual “speaking” is increasingly “strategic” and thus necessarily reliant on more than one voice, more than one language and minister, but on communities of witness and discourse who “speak” the good news in multiple persuasive fora simultaneously?

I think these are important questions of method that urge us to ponder both the depths, but also the limits of the disciplines we come from and that are also necessarily changing in scope in a digital environment.

H. Conclusion

To bring this reflection to a close, ultimately what I take from this exercise is both an acknowledgment of past errors, the necessity of conversion in the discipline “moral theology” itself, but also a renewed appreciation of the limits of what we do (and can do) as moral theologians. I do think that there is a profound paradox that while moral theologians must recognize their wider call to ministry, we must also not forget that what we can contribute to ministry is in itself crucial, but potentially very focused and limited.

I like to think of our call as distilled in the recovery of “common sense”; the ability to grasp truth that is self-evident, but hidden under many layers of cultural biases. Common sense must also be articulated in “common speech”: not “common” because plebeian, but “common” because truly shared in common as the hope for our future as one community. But that commonness must rely on truth: truth about human becoming in our relationship to the Creator . . . but truth that is increasingly eclipsed and difficult to discern in our complex new technological reality.

From myth, to dialogue as philosophical method, to the *summas* as contextual and systemic presentation of truth, can we recreate an analogous truthful language for moral theology in our times? Can we uncover and utter the properly moral dimensions of the good news in an age of fake news? Perhaps what is being asked of moral theologians is no more—but also no less.

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The Embodiment of the Word: A Pastoral Approach to Scripture in a Digital Age

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This essay seeks to outline a new paradigm for the pastoral ministry of the proclamation of the Word in and for post-literate, digital culture. The need for this new paradigm grows out of the recognition that the present practices of proclamation of the Word were developed in and for the literate cultures of the past 2000 years and are increasingly boring for a digital generation. The degree of this problem is reflected in many evangelical Protestant liturgies that are designed to reach out to the young people of digital culture such as the “nones.” Last year for the first time in American history, those who identified their religious affiliation as “none” was the largest group. In many of the worship experiences designed to reach out to the “nones,” the reading of Scripture has been eliminated from the liturgy. In many of those liturgies, there are no Scripture readings, only contemporary music with a rock band and a sermon that may include some paraphrases of Scripture. Why? Because Scripture readings have become a dead time and a turn off for digitally sophisticated folk. To put it bluntly, the proclamation of the Word bores many people accustomed to highly engaging media experience. I have observed this flat line of meaning in Christian congregations across the full range of traditions, Eastern and Western. It has become a ritual tradition that is often largely meaningless for people who reg-

ularly hear highly engaging speech and storytelling in “the media.” How has it happened that the most compelling media experience of the Word for centuries has become boring in the 21st century?

A. History and practices of the proclamation of the word

Let’s begin with a description of the theory, history, and practices of the proclamation of the Word in the communication cultures in and for which the current tradition developed. The present conception of the Scriptures in western Christianity has been shaped in and for the communication culture of literacy and, specifically, the Enlightenment. In this culture, the Bible has been conceived as a series of texts that were read by readers alone and in silence. This concept of the Bible has led to a disembodied, objective presentation of the Word shaped by the levels of the mastery of literacy. Thus, in Roman Catholic liturgies, the Old Testament and epistle readings can be done by a literate layperson but the Gospel is customarily read by a deacon or priest and then interpreted by a theologically literate priest. This paradigm determines the proclamation and homiletical interpretation of the Word in the liturgy, the preparation of pastors in seminary, and the role of Scripture in the often hierarchical relationship between pastors and laity. Our degrees are symbols of the levels of mastery of literacy in which the

most advanced is the culture of the silent reading and writing of texts.

Frei (1974) defined the meaning of the biblical texts as meaning as reference. In the hermeneutics of meaning as reference, the texts of the Bible are studied as a reference source in which a trained reader can identify two kinds of referential information. The first is the empirical meaning of the texts as a source of ostensive information about the actual historical events that are described in the texts. A wide range of ostensive meaning has been identified ranging between the spectrum of conservative and liberal biblical interpretation. On one end of the spectrum, the Bible is an inerrant, non-contradictory, and literal source of the exact details of historical events such as the creation of the world, the miracles, the resurrection, and the end of the world. At the other end of the spectrum, the Bible is a predominantly legendary source of some historical data mixed with a complex of myth, later theology, and retrospective editing of the tradition. The search to define ostensive meaning has led to divisions between the conservative and liberal communities and movements such as, for example, the quest of the historical Jesus, the creationist museum, and the controversies around the original and perpetual virginity of Mary. The second type of meaning as reference is to study the texts as a source of ideal meaning, that is, of the ideas that are reflected in the texts. The ideal reference of the texts is their theological meaning. The ideal meanings range from a systematic theology, a single, non-contradictory system of theological doctrine in the texts to a highly complex set of theologies that are implicit in the various traditions of the biblical world.

This hermeneutical system is the source of the current practices of the proclamation of the Word in western Christianity, Catholic and Protestant. The reader stands behind a lectern, often only a head appearing above the book. Often the congregation looks at a missal, a bulletin insert, a pew Bible, or sometimes at a screen where the text is projected. In more formal liturgies, the congregation stands for the reading of the Gospel. The book, often a big book, is in front of the reader. In order to do the reading well, the reader must keep the eyes fixed on the text with a slight look up on occasion if the text is learned well enough. The tone is within a relatively narrow range, sometimes a virtual monotone, and without emotion. The homilist has a much broader freedom of expression and movement. The tone can vary widely; the congregation can be addressed directly. It is even possible to invite laughter.

The homilist is also free to move, sometimes even out of the pulpit and directly in front of the congregation. But the proclamation of the Word operates within a relatively strict set of limits. In as far as possible, the Word is rendered as a documentary source of referential information that can then be interpreted and made meaningful by the preacher.

How did we arrive at this point in the history of the proclamation of the Word? A brief history—the proclamation of the Word in literate culture had its origins in the oral traditions of pre-literate culture, the culture of bards and storytellers. In that culture, traditions were often, even generally, chanted. The stories were told from memory and were passed down from generation to generation by oral transmission. (You can find online video of storytellers in the oral tradition, as for example, Turkish storytellers: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7j0XjY3_RE.)

The reading of manuscripts became the dominant practice in correlation with the evolution of the synagogue in which the liturgy was essentially a scripture reading, often with multiple readers, and prayers. Internalization of the Scriptures continued in part because of the demands of early manuscripts that were essentially a list of letters without punctuation or word divisions. In the early centuries of the Church in the manuscript culture of the ancient world, the performances of the Word developed into major media events. The proclamation of the Word was often a series of as many as six long readings that would take 30–40 minutes. In the Apostolic Constitutions of the 6th century, there is a fascinating insight into the cultural power of these performance events. It is stated there that persons are to be prohibited from leaving the service prior to the homily and the Eucharist. This prohibition was issued because people were coming to the churches to hear the proclamation of the Word and, once they had heard the readings, they weren't interested in staying for the rest of the service. The chanting of the Scriptures was normal practice for centuries in both the Eastern and Western churches and is still widely practiced in the Eastern churches including the Syrian Malabar rites. The importance of the chant in rabbinic Judaism and in the various Orthodox churches is evident in the training and ordination of cantors in Judaism and extensive programs in Byzantine chant/music at the Greek Orthodox seminary Holy Cross and at the Russian Orthodox St. Vladimir's seminary. (For an example of Orthodox chant, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZLJxLRTPvg>.)

The invention of the printing press and the much more widespread distribution of the Bible in the West had a significant effect on the proclamation of the Word and the dominant style of biblical performance gradually changed in western Christianity. Thus, for example, the King James Bible was composed in the early 17th century for public reading in an elevated tone but in a speaking tone rather than a chant. While the chanting of the Bible continued in Roman Catholic and Anglican churches for centuries even into the 20th century, reading in a more informal speaking tone became the dominant practice. In correlation with the hermeneutical revolution of the Enlightenment and meaning as reference, the tonal range of the proclamation of the Word was gradually narrowed and became more of a monotone. The editing of the manuscripts into printed documents included word divisions, a full range of punctuation, and paragraphing. This made it possible for readers to read the Scriptures aloud with minimal to no preparation. (For an example of contemporary Scripture reading in church, listen to http://ccc.usccb.org/cccradio/NABPodcasts/18_04_02.mp3.)

When seen in the context of the history of communication culture, the proclamation of the Word has been immensely successful in the literate cultures of human civilization. The books of the Bible have been and are the most extensively performed literature in history. The Bible has been the perennial best seller and has been more widely distributed and read than any other book. The exegetical and interpretive literature of biblical scholarship and commentary far exceeds any other literary tradition. And the proclamation of the Word in liturgy has been the most powerful and pervasive performance tradition in literate culture. But we now live in the first period of human history in which a communication system other than literacy has become the dominant system of communication and cultural formation. And the systems the Church has developed for the communication and interpretation of the Word are declining in their cultural impact.

This is then a brief history of the proclamation of the Word and the evolution of the technologies of literacy and the stages of literate culture. It is also the historical context for the pastoral ministry of the proclamation of the Word in digital culture. There is a stark contrast between the style of the proclamation of the Word in Christian liturgy and the character of digital culture. This is a random list of some of the characteristics of digital culture: highly engaging, emotionally

compelling, striking and rapidly changing images, physical presence, and a wide range of tonalities. The proclamation of the Word now has other characteristics: no emotion, static images, no movement, minimal engagement with the audience, a very narrow range of tonalities. Therefore, we have a problem. The normative tradition is profoundly incongruent with the culture of the digital world.

B. A new paradigm of the Scriptures

A new paradigm of the Scriptures has emerged from the recognition of the original character of biblical literature in the context of the media culture of the Hellenistic/Greco-Roman world. The study of the Bible in ancient and modern media has revealed that biblical scholarship has read the media world of the 17th–20th centuries back into the ancient world. We have operated with the unexamined presupposition that the Bible was originally a series of texts read by readers. The so-called “reader” is a ubiquitous description of the receivers of biblical literature in biblical monographs and commentaries. Several metaphors have been operative: (1) a group of editors editing texts of the Pentateuch or the synoptic Gospels with two or three manuscripts spread out on big tables, (2) a network of book stores selling a wide range of manuscripts for reading by literate persons, (3) readers sitting and reading manuscripts in silence.

The study of the media world of antiquity has made it clear that these assumptions are an anachronistic reading back into the ancient world of a much later communication culture. Current estimates are that only 3–5% of persons in rural areas to 10–15% of persons in urban ones were literate. Manuscript production involved laborious copying by hand and was on a small scale. Manuscripts were available in a small network of stores but were expensive. Silent reading was rare; public and private reading was reading aloud. The great majority of persons were only able to experience biblical literature by hearing the manuscripts read aloud to audiences of illiterates. Memory was a central dimension of education and manuscripts were often recited from memory. In the ancient world, the Bible was a series of compositions of sound that were performed for audiences. The predominant sensorium, to use Walter Ong’s term, of ancient audiences was the sensory system of hearing with the ears rather than reading with the sensory system of the eyes. These ancient performances were a continuation of the styles of performance in oral culture: highly emotional, wide range

of tonalities, constant engagement of the audience, physically demonstrative and expressive.

Thus, biblical scholarship has been engaged in a massive media anachronism in which the media culture of the Enlightenment has been read back into the ancient world. This is also the case with what has become standard practice in the proclamation of the Word. We have assumed that the disembodied, emotionally detached, and static reading with no engagement of memory or audience interaction reflects the original character of the Word.

A brief engagement with a particular story may help to show the difference it makes. I have just published (Boomershine, 2015) a (450 pages) detailed commentary on Mark's passion and resurrection narrative as a story told to audiences that were predominantly Israelite but included the enemy Gentiles in the immediate aftermath of the Jewish-Roman war. The discovery of the resurrection by three women is the ending of the Gospel in the best ancient manuscripts. Read it in the current mode. . . . When experienced as a text read by readers, the ending is a puzzle and many readers over the centuries have concluded that it either was not or should not be the ending. Textual copyists added two endings that are often included in contemporary texts as you can see here. Until the study of the stories as stories, the majority of scholars concluded that this could not have been the original ending. Various explanations for the lost ending have been proposed. The most widely accepted is that the original manuscript was mutilated and the last page was lost. Others have been that the original copyist either fell asleep or forgot or that the original appearance narrative was left out of an early manuscript that became the most authoritative manuscript.

When studied as a story that was told to audiences, several elements of the story are notable. The women are grieving and that tone is present from the beginning. The stone rolled back is a major surprise and is loud. The discovery of the young man in "the tomb" is an even bigger surprise, variously alarming/terrifying. The announcement of the resurrection is very short: one word in Greek. The whole announcement and specifically the command to "Go, tell" is addressed to the audience. The women's response of fearful flight and is surprising since it is a violation of the command but completely understandable in light of their feelings. The cola of the story get shorter and shorter, which is a typical Markan way of building a climax. The impact of the story invites the

audience to reflect on their response: to tell or to remain silent and say nothing are the implicit options.

Experience the difference: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnPtuxiYcBw>

The way in which Mark's story is proclaimed makes a difference in the way in which it is perceived. And it literally doesn't make sense when read in the traditional manner.

What is the difference? What has happened in the course of the history of the proclamation of the Word? The proposal here is that the process of the media history of the Word in literate culture has led to the disembodiment of the Word. There are several dimensions of bodily expression: emotion, vocal range in volume and tone, movement, clothing, furniture, the text, and relationship to the audience. The emotional range of the proclamation has been steadily reduced to virtually none. The reader is encouraged to regard any emotional expression as alien to the Word. The vocal range has been narrowed until it is often a straight-line monotone. I associate the sound with computer speech or a flat-line heart or brain monitor. There is no movement or gesture, no physical move of feet, hands, or often even the head. Covering the reader's body with a robe or hiding the body behind a lectern emphasizes this disembodiment. Sometimes the only part of the body that is visible is a head peeking out from behind the lectern. The lectern itself creates emotional distance. The presence of the text also creates distance. And perhaps most important, the implicit dialogue between the reader and the audience is virtually eliminated. The audience is not addressed by the reader and is not invited to engage with the Word directly. As a result of all these factors, there is a multifaceted disembodiment of the presence of the Word in the performance. The experience of the Word is reduced to the theological ideas that may be communicated in the proclamation. And when all of this is experienced in the context of digital culture, the degree of psychological and physical distance is increased.

C. The pastoral possibilities of the embodiment of the word

This reconception of the Scriptures as interactive embodied communication between God and human beings opens a new range of pastoral possibilities for the proclamation of the Word. These new possibilities emerge from the close connection between the word in oral culture and the word what Ong called the "secondary orality" of post-literate, digital culture. At the

center of the proclamation of the Word in the ancient world and now is the internalization of the Word. Internalization involves memory but it is more than memory. The phrase, “by heart,” is indicative of this difference. The Word is invited to dwell in all of the interior spaces of a person. As expressed in the Deuteronomist’s injunction of the love of God, internalization of the Word is the love of God with all of the heart, the soul, the mind, and the strength, that is, the physical muscles and bones of the body. It is diametrically different than the rote recital of the surfaces of a printed document. Memory is a central dimension of internalization. But memorization is often associated with mindless rote repetition of a set of printed words. That kind of memorization is about surfaces and the superficial mastery of sounds. Internalization is deep knowledge grounded in vivid experience and intellectual engagement. The role of the documentary record of the original sounds of the Word is to open a door into an experience of God. The mastery of musical manuscripts is a helpful analogy. A pianist who is learning, say, Rachmaninoff’s Second Piano Concerto begins with learning the notes but from the beginning this learning involves muscle memory, visual connections, deep listening, and the discovery of emotional dynamics. If anything, the embodiment of the Word is more comprehensive in its engagement of the various dimensions of a person. The embodiment of the Word is then a spiritual discipline, a spiritual exercise, and a spiritual adventure of dynamic relationship with God.

This foundation of embodied internalization of the Word lays the ground for the building of new possibilities for the proclamation of the Word in and for digital culture. First, liturgical proclamation of the Word as performance creates a dynamic equivalent experience of the impact of the original composition for contemporary congregations. Rather than the meaning of the biblical composition being limited to the theological ideas implicit in the text, embodied proclamation of the Word makes present a more comprehensive range of the dynamics of the original experience.

This approach also introduces a partnership model of shared preparation between lay lectors and pastors in which the common experience of the impact and emotion of the Scripture can generate energy for the homily and the Eucharist. This partnership involves mutual engagement with the Scriptures that leads to more energetic and grounded liturgy.

The experience of Scripture as embodied performance also transforms the relationship between the

congregation and the Word. Rather than detached reflection on the printed text, sometimes made available in a missal, pew bible or on a screen, the congregation is enabled to enter into a dialogical engagement with the Word as a holistic experience.

The proclamation of the Word as internalized experience opens the possibility of moving out from behind the lectern and a printed text into an open space without distancing barriers. Either with or without a text between the lector/priest and the congregation, the presence of the body introduces the vital role of internalization of the Word in the life of the congregation.

Finally, the proclamation of the Word as vital experience invites the full utilization of digital images and music as an integral dimension of the liturgy.

To conclude, Ong (1967) titled his Yale lectures on communication and theology “the presence of the Word.” This title was a description of the dynamic relationship between the prevalent communication system, the psychological dynamic of the communicator in each communication culture, and the character of the Word. Ong’s enduring contribution is the identification of the dynamic and changing relationship between the word and communication culture. In each new communication culture, the word becomes present in a different way. Ong only dealt peripherally with the presence of the Word in digital culture. The purpose of this essay has been to identify a constructive approach to the proclamation of the Word in the context of the most radical change in communication culture since the emergence of literate culture in the Hellenistic world of the 5th–1st centuries before Jesus’ life. The thesis here is that the dynamic presence of the Word in digital culture depends on an equally radical change in the proclamation of the Word in the liturgical practice of the Church. The suggestion is that we move from the disembodiment of the Word to the embodiment of the Word in a fully present proclamation.

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On Digital Iconicity

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“I can’t believe I’m having this conversation with my computer,” says Theodore in *Her*, a romantic science-fiction drama film on computer dating, directed by Spike Jonze (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2014.) Theodore develops something that will end up as a tragic relationship with Samantha, an intelligent computer operating system, personified through a female voice. The mirroring formation of the ego is known from the depths of prehistory. Yet now, love of a human for a fictitious being is today enabled by modern technology which stages reality in such a way that the existential emptiness is artificially substantialized in a more dramatic way (Thermos, 2017, p. 23).

A. Icon and digital image

The phenomenon of the image or icon has recently grown in popularity, which is inevitable, given that everything, our thought included, is essentially *iconic*. One is reminded of Patriarch Nicephoros (writing in 828), who believed that “not only Christ, but the whole universe disappears if neither circumscribability nor image exist” (1865, *Antirrhetics*, I, 244D). In a society obsessed with multimedia illusions, where visual pollution of every kind has obscured our capacity to see, it is difficult to witness a true icon. The same pollution hinders liberation of our daily lives from captivity to the natural world by means of an iconic ethos (of which the icon is an evocative symbol) bequeathed through the Tradition; an ethos that leads to the affirmation of the other, and to humility before the other, whom we are invited to “honor above ourselves” (Rom 12:10).

How do we escape the main trap of the third millennium, which is nothing less than a total submission to the novel demand of modern technological man without running the risk of living a para-eucharistic life? The increasing attempts to facilitate life with technological means in a digital culture (which allows technology with its positive contribution to enter our life and control it) can eventually lead to a loss of both iconicity and uniqueness of the person. The risk is a serious one. In an era of trans-human technology, each

of us is on the path to becoming “a tribe with one member.” The glamorization of our lives via modern social media is just one of the symptoms of this “self-idolatry.” Compare this to Michelangelo’s words: “My fond imagination made art an idol and a tyrant to me” (Neret, 2004, p. 83). St. Andrew of Crete wrote in the 7th century “I have become an idol to myself” (Ode IV). The first iconoclastic controversy began within the Church, but social media may be thrusting upon us a new or resurgent iconoclasm that is overwhelming our experience with images through meaningless self-idolatry rather than viewing ourselves as icons of God. Remember, the iconoclast controversy was also about the rejection of true images/icons.

Technology is so omnipresent in contemporary life that we must consider whether it has become the very reality of life itself. It is difficult and arduous to discover the manner in which to consider it both authentically and critically. The question that arises concerns a crucial theological and anthropological problem: *can humanity change the way it communicates without altering its own nature at some level?* Thanks to God-given freedom, humanity faces possibilities too difficult to handle, which are paradoxical and multiple, since they simultaneously combine the prospects of good and evil. Yet, until recently there was no discussion of the danger of modifying nature and altering the human being.

Keeping theology and communication in a synchronous dialogue and altering the models of communications in the Church should be positive if it is accomplished with theological awareness, sensitivity, and with the appropriate criteria. Without them, however, the transmission of the message of the Gospel to the world, and at a specific time (the so-called “enculturation”) can be a very hazardous endeavor. An ancient (Christian) principle says that no thing is bad as such, and it depends on how it’s used whether it will stay good. But can this be applied to Internet technology? Can the Internet be good (not only useful) if we use it in a good way?

B. *The Internet as the climax of alienation*

It appears that few, if any, pose such a question as it is fashionable to adopt new patterns without any deeper questioning or critical examination. Among ancient authors the term *technology* (τεχνολογία) referred to oral and written communication. However, such kinds of communication after Gutenberg still did not lead to human *alienation*—the medium remained constant, but the proliferation increased dramatically. Alienation [or “transition”] emerged with a dramatic change in the use of technology in the modern period. (Heidegger raised the question of technology in a compelling way.) Only as humanity has infiltrated the realm of advanced technology—the huge industrialization of production and distribution, the challenge of nuclear energy, the omnipresence of computing, etc. (and that is the moment when storage energy was introduced)—have we encountered the first (if we do not count the first *Fall* of man) serious alienation of humankind. The Internet is the climax of this process as humanity is alienated in a critical if not existential manner. Alienation is also reflected by the fact that humans enter into a system of “communication” and cannot “self-act” as before—they must follow a newly established communications protocol by submitting to digitalization (as opposed, for example, to free-hand writing on a paper, which later can be wet by a tear dropped on it). Furthermore, when everything is *inscribed* “online”—and when states and their authorities use electronic information in order to interfere in the private lives of citizens for the sake of the common good—what will happen to human privacy (the protection of personal life)?

Certainly, privacy is commonly understood as the ability to set boundaries around oneself, thereby affirming the self in an individualistic way. The right not to be exposed to unauthorized incursion of privacy (collecting personal information for one’s own purposes) by individuals, government, or corporations is the foundation of *individual* freedom. *Personal* rights and freedoms, on the other hand, are more related to a nexus of relationships that respect and even affirm and confirm humans’ very otherness. In that sense, the rights of the person are the most sacred rights of our civilization. When it comes to technology, it seems that both individual and personal rights are threatened. By emphasizing the reverence of human persons as icons of God, the Church provides our culture with a prerequisite for its very survival.

Some have suggested that this alienation is demonic, in that each one of us, by taking part in the global system of the Internet, willingly becomes a *slave* of certain super-powers who might be able to form a world government, new world order, or other nefarious societal upheaval (sounds apocalyptic, doesn’t it?). Our evolution is strange. From the platonic escape from the ephemeral being, digital memory leads to the extension of the mechanism of “panoptic control” into the past. Now, the Internet remembers what we prefer to be forgotten. Worse, the Internet may be selective in its memory.

C. *Death of neighbor*

Therefore, as with any other revolution, this one (informatics) also devours its children. The freedom, enjoyed by humanity until recently, begins to be lost by subordinating the person to the demands of technology, which, having caught us in its nets, reduces us to numbers on the omnipresent displays, while simultaneously enabling unchecked and indiscriminate mechanisms for falsifying the Truth. Some believe the blame is not to be placed on “Facebook” or “Twitter,” or other social media platforms, because a defeatist’s placing of blame on technology as an undefined, impersonal spirit of history that imposes upon us certain behaviors, is not a clever justification. What is needed is a *willing* effort, because in the end we decide *how* to use our machines, and not vice versa. In the new culture of “short (or distracted) attention” and simulated, virtual relations, even time which by definition should be “free,” is filled with obligations to our “connectedness,” and thus it ceases to be free.

Zoja (2009) discusses how modern technology has eradicated the second Judeo-Christian commandment: *Love thy neighbor like thyself*. Since in this technological, mass civilization, we do not care about our neighbors, most often we do not even know if our neighbor is dying.

In a new world of instant and “absolute” communication unbound from time and space, we suffer not only from unprecedented alienation but also from the *desecration* of time. What has happened to the sacredness of “now?” We have expelled it, too, in various ways. Let us ask ourselves: When people obsessively photograph what happens to them now, aren’t they *postponing* their encounter with the reality for later consumption? We can argue about this, but it’s worth asking if the storing of digital material (pho-

tographs, music, movies, and TV series,) envisions mere possession, which, in some cases, will become *surrogate* for a real experience.

D. Hamlet's dilemma

Certainly, every given technological novelty brings both a promise and a risk. Many possibilities and benefits from a universal trend enabling the happiness of the individual can explain the ease by which people totally surrender themselves to the power of media ecosystem-systems. Is there anybody to sober and encourage us to reexamine our newly obtained habits so that we become conscious of the seriousness of the problem of cosmogenic changes in our cultural universe? Will anybody show us, even discreetly, how to avoid becoming mere numbers in this technological advancement and losing our uniqueness and unrepeatability? ("New technology . . . always gives us something important, but it also takes away something that is important" cf. Postman, 1985).

In the ongoing debate over online euphoria on the American scene, one of the heroes warns: "While our cyber profiles become more and more detailed, we even less see each other as persons." This debate sometimes leads to Hamlet's dilemma: *to be* for a virtual world, supported by cyber-worshippers, or *not to be*, proposed by cyber-sceptics. It is easy to lean toward those who zealously underestimate technology, but also to those who with the same devotion defend technology, or even celebrate it. There is "religiosity" of the text, cell phone, or email. However, instead of escaping from the digital culture, faced with "Hamlet's dilemma" (a metaphor for the dilemma of digitalized routineness), one might consider a counter-proposal: When (or, better, *before*) we notice that, despite the convenience it offers, technology begins to deprive us of personal uniqueness by reducing us to numbers, then is the moment to resist.

E. Icon and future

One approach to facing these challenges is the icon. If the icons of the Church comfort us with a divine tranquility, it is because they reveal the deeper truth. Thanks to iconography, reality becomes "true" to the extent that it reflects the future, the "eschatological state." But what place has the Christian Orthodox icon in the 21st century? One might consider it a great success to see the world's largest museums offering their space for icon exhibitions and displaying them to a wide non-religious audience. Icons are no longer exclusive to Orthodox believers and their places of

worship, since they gained celebrity among Catholics and even Protestants. However, in their display, meaning and reflection is blunted by a shallow celebration of an image, much like the momentary "Snapchat."

By cultivating icons, Christians celebrate the seeing and vision of life that is transfigured and changed in the Person of Jesus Christ. Every genuine art—and an icon is an obvious example—begins from *nothingness* and *mask* and reaches to *being* and *person* (cf. Malevich, 2003). Apart from the extensive theological use of the term *person*, this notion is very significant in dialogue with contemporary art and science. Only with the help of the term "person" can we demonstrate the dignity, uniqueness and unrepeatability of the individual, something clear in the theological tradition:

What did these names [of the Saints] mean? To that, I can now answer—that the person is everything. From the eternal perspective, all that is around and next to and on the person is neither numbered nor counted. The kingdoms and the states, treasures and crowns, embellishments and cultures, honors and glories: all of this is subordinated to the person, in the service of the person, worthless in comparison to the person. The saintly person is the soul of Christ's character, repeated, more or less, in many, many persons. The saints are cleansed mirrors in which the beauty and might of the majestic person of Christ is seen. (Saint Nikolai of Ohrid and Zhicha, 2017, p. 5)

With its eschatological criterion, the icon corresponds with the *genuine request of art*: in art, the reality of things is represented visually not as they have been, or as they are, but as they might be. Byzantine iconography conveys exactly this vision of life to the society and culture in which we live: It expresses the spirit of a Christianized Hellenism which depicts a person as it *will be*, overcoming thus the *protological* ontology (i.e., an ontology of death).

F. Iconic vs. photographic logic

The great challenge that iconic ontology conveys to our "photographic logic" is that *it requires us to consider a presence without death*, something entirely unthinkable in our collective experience. The icon does not postpone, rather it anticipates the future by relating it personally and ontologically. Icons are precious treasures in the Tradition, which testify to the *personal* relationship with God, and a viewpoint that a Christian doesn't belong solely to himself/herself, to his/her job, or the ambitions of this world, but to God. Icons reveal

that we are not alone, or isolated, but that we belong to the communion of the saints, who the Lord loves with such great capacity that this world, with all of its temptations, cannot take away. This is, truly, the basis and goal of Christian prayer and compassion as philanthropic activity. Through these efforts one is led to the essential understanding of the relationship with God, the world, and one another, as citizens of His Kingdom that is to come.

But, you might ask, what of it? The identification of the self-sameness of Christ with His image leads to the assertion that Orthodoxy is the Church and not an ideology. It is a gathering of the people and, particularly, a *Eucharistic gathering of living icons*. This must be emphasized today: not an Internet—online—virtual and ephemeral illusion of communication, but the icon as the visible and true communication of the Kingdom; such must be the future of Orthodoxy because such is the future Christ promises His Church. In the Eucharist, we are taught not only to venerate and greet the icons, but also the other members of the synaxis, not passing the living icons—people—by, but greeting and embracing them. So, the icon is indeed the proper method of viewing the world. Only this iconic approach will save Orthodoxy from becoming a secular organization, conforming to the image of the world and the “docetism” of virtual communication. (Docetism, from the Greek *δοκεῖν/δόκησις*, *dokein* [to seem], *dókēsis* [apparition, phantom], is defined as the doctrine according to which the person of Christ, his historical and bodily existence, and thus above all the human form of Jesus, was mere semblance without any true reality.) Orthodox iconography, therefore, does not deny the digital image. On the contrary, it will affirm whatever is ontologically significant in digital communications, by opening the digital image to its eternal significance by injecting the “future state.” With this perspective, the digital image can play an important role in announcing the arrival of eternal ever-being. Consequently, the image can become an “icon” without ceasing to be an image—only if we who view the image look past the superficial graphic and read the written icon. It is sufficient for it to be *redeemed* from its association with the past (protology of death) while retaining its iconicity. But, we must ask, how may the image be liberated from death and become iconic?

First, the *paradox* of the Incarnation was addressed and resolved only in visual-iconic terms. The culture in which we live is subjugated to the represen-

tation of reality, either as an evidence-based representation of how things were or are (naturalism)—or, as a representation with a freedom that distorts the identity of the beings that are represented (modern art). Now, the imminent future will force us to view the world through representations of reality which will become so convincing that our minds could become utterly deceived. “Look at me!”—the claim of the digital image, “which renders itself completely visible”—is a rejection of the *iconic ontology* which automatically results in a different understanding of human existence. Without its referring to the future state, every image is forgotten, becomes the “past,” and expires.

Second, an icon bridges the chasm between the three extremes (natural-modern-digital) through the intervention of the person of Christ. Yet, the radical revision of the “virtual” aesthetic can take place in a more comprehensive ecclesial context. Through a bidirectional relation established by the icon, the “object” of what I see suddenly becomes a subject, since it approaches me from outside myself, and exacts its influence on me.

Third, the iconic approach presupposes that one accepts a *presence to which one can relate*, through an “increasing” perspective (perspective *outwards*.) The solution of the *increasing perspective* does not suffer from the fragmentation of information given by the optical lens (which at each moment know only certain sides of an object). For iconic knowledge, there is no front and sides and back. Following Skliris (2007), I think that the proper term for the Byzantine perspective would be “increasing perspective.” I disagree with the term “reverse perspective” used by some because it presupposes an initial “normal” perspective of the Renaissance, which Byzantine art somehow “reverses” (p. 64).

G. *New symbolism*

If the Liturgy is a foretaste of the Age to come (and not simply of the events of the past: Sacrifice, Last Supper, Crucifixion, etc.), then its entire symbolism should point to a transition from a quotidian to an eschatological vision of the world. If at the liturgy we do not extricate ourselves from that which we wear from without the liturgy, then we do not point to this freedom. The Church, mostly thanks to the liturgy, has a certainty that we enter the light and glory of the Resurrection: “Now everything is filled with light.” But, if we do have an entrance into the Kingdom, that implies a new logic—an *eschatological one*.

Today's discussions about ecclesial symbolism betray the dimness in criteria. Some would like to simplify church symbols (e.g. vestments) out of ethical (simplicity of the Gospel, the world wants simply to see people) or economic reasons (the money can be given to the poor.) These arguments would have weight if the symbolism didn't have a deeper meaning (maybe we should abolish them if this argument is valid). Yet, the crucial moment lies in the question whether adapting to history can occur without adapting to the Eschaton, whatsoever. By the eschatological criterion I mean a vision of the world after the Resurrection and Christ's Second coming.

H. Implications

To conclude, Orthodox iconography emerged as an attempt to recover the true iconicity of creation and to heal our damaged sensibility by referring to everything the ultimate, the "last" (*eschatos*) act of God's will: "the death shall be destroyed" (1Cor: 15, 26). When the storm of iconoclasm broke upon the Church, it denied the premises for salvation: the whole of divine-human life and liturgical reality, the honor paid to the Saints, the matter which has become filled with divine grace, etc. Therefore, because its *truth*, its *raison d'être* was denied, the entire body of the Church reacted, not just intellectuals and learned persons. Truth in genuine art does not simply correspond to the mind or reality. An ecclesial definition of *truth* points to "relationality" and of common ground of existence that we share. This encounter with the divine, in paradox and ambiguity, is a matter of relation rather than logical argumentation.

Consequently, an iconographer interprets the event of the resurrected life not in an individualistic way; rather, he or she paints icons with a brush tuned to the vibration of the earthquake that raises the dead and does away with hell. Our hope is that digital

images may one day reflect this method and ethos. Our culture so badly needs the "information asceticism" and "digital apophaticism," the terms by which we indicate the abstinence from giving the ultimate priority to virtual reality.

Highly conscious of this rich treasure of faith in the holy icons, Christians suitably honor the commemoration of those who bequeathed us this precious heritage, and in so doing, rediscover this vision while expecting the ultimate transfiguration of the world which has begun in the Church. Regardless of the cost or effort required, the awareness that man is an icon of God must be preserved in our culture.

This is the center of the meaning of the celebration of the Sunday of Orthodoxy, as it is concisely expressed in the historic *Synodikon* of 843 (an event which is a true participatory icon project).

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The Persona of the Pastor on Social Media

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In this essay, I will examine the question of how a minister should present himself or herself on social media. Ideally, my thoughts will contribute to a broader discussion on pastoral ministry and digital media, but—full disclosure—pastoral theology is not my strong suit. I shall instead be attending to the conduct, behavior, attitude, and other issues of character that attend pastoral ministry. I shall attend these using tools from social theory, a move I understand is a bit unorthodox, but I hope this illuminates some concerns in this area of inquiry.

A. Front and back stages

The first time I saw a priest *not* wearing his collar was my first day on campus as a new first year student. I arrived at my dorm and met the “rector,” who had been introduced to me in emails as “Father Tom.” I was quite surprised to see him, at nine or so in the evening, wearing sweat pants and a t-shirt. It was a moment akin to the first time I saw an elementary school teacher in the supermarket or heard a classmate not-accidentally referring to a teacher as “mom.” In retrospect, there was nothing *that* unusual about it; after all, priests probably get uncomfortable wearing stiff black clericals all day, just as teachers probably have to feed themselves and probably have children as well. But at the moment, it was something I was not expecting.

The American sociologist Erving Goffman would likely refer to this as the disillusionment of the audience. As is probably painfully obvious to you, at this point in my life, my experience of priests had been in mostly formalized settings—I was, after all, a Utahn who had gone to public school his whole life! Now, sometimes the audience is disenchanted entirely by accident, as in the climactic scene in *Mrs. Doubtfire* when Robin Williams’s character is unable to maintain the Mrs. Doubtfire character when meeting his boss and his family for two separate dinners at the same place. This can cause “loss of face” for the person

whose persona is shattered. In this particular case, however, Fr. Tom was entirely not at fault—it was simply my own ignorance that led to this disillusionment. To take but another example, Heidegger alludes to pilgrims scandalized at finding Heraclitus crouched down next to a fireplace to warm himself rather than occupying a more “dignified” position.

Goffman (1959) describes his social theory as “dramaturgical” in style. For Goffman, all social interaction reduces to playing parts before certain audiences. The part one plays depends on the audience, and if one wishes to maintain her role, she must do a sufficient job in “playing” the part (here one detects an allusion to Sartre’s notion of “playing at” being a waiter). Both the performer and the audience must cooperate for a successful social interaction; the audience must believe the performer and the performer must also be believable. If the performer fails in her performance, or the audience somehow gains information that destroys the “face” of the performer, the social interaction leads to a social gaffe, or worse yet, a breakdown of expected social roles. In other words, as I sit before you, I play the part of a student of theology and digital technologies who is presenting some research I have carried out on the topic. If I play my part well, you, the audience, will buy into my performance and may say such things as “interesting talk,” “I enjoyed listening to it,” and the like. If I play my part badly, you may ignore me entirely, shout epithets at me, or blacklist me from future conferences (assuming I do badly, I hope you opt for the first).

Goffman notes that social interaction often requires people to play multiple parts on multiple stages. We play one role before a certain audience, but before a different audience, we may be expected to play an entirely different role. He refers to this as “audience segregation” and the social performer often has to negotiate means by which she can keep disparate audiences separate. This is not a matter of disingenuous behavior—it is merely the way we operate! Before you

all, I hope to play the role of a fellow-scholar, one who is interested in talking about and researching similar topics. Before my students at the college where I teach, I have to play the role of an authority figure—mostly because they fail to respect me based on any merits I may have aside from that. Before my wife, I have to play the role of loving husband. In some cases, the collapse of stage setting is not disastrous, but in others, it can be. If I gossip with my students about other faculty the way I gossip with my wife, I could very quickly find myself in the midst of disciplinary action. The deacon at my church saw me a few months ago with a few friends having some drinks at a bar and wisely decided it was not the proper stage for conversing with me. Goffman even gives the amusing anecdote of a “tough guy” sailor who, on shore leave at home, asked his mother to “pass the f***ing butter” (1959, p. 15).

Maintaining one’s position in society requires her to play her role convincingly enough before others. Frank Abignale, as dramatized in the film *Catch Me if You Can* succeeded in fraudulently passing himself off as a pilot, a doctor, and a lawyer because he did a sufficient job of playing the role. But playing the role does not simply mean as I step in front of you, you *assume* I am who I say I am—we often use props and team cooperation to achieve our goals. Successful role performance includes team collaboration, as two professors are expected to demonstrate “collegiality” before students, even if they are in great disagreement. Furthermore, we use props, including artifacts like licenses and diplomas to verify our authority or tools and instruments which make us look official. Some claim driving a white pickup truck, wearing a hard hat, carrying a clipboard, and walking as if you know what you’re doing is the key to getting into otherwise restricted areas—role performance plus prop usage. In Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, this was the intended function of the “Dauphin” and the “Duke” working together: One person’s authority is doubtful, but a second witness lends credibility to the situation. This is not to say that all roles we play are fraudulent, but rather that they require the audience around us to believe we are who we say we are. When a visiting priest processes into the sanctuary, his vestments, which are props, his performance of the Mass, and the support of any and all nearby ministers, including altar servers, music leaders, lectors, eucharistic ministers or deacons or fellow priests all lend credibility that the priest is, in fact, a priest and not an impostor. Should, for example, the priest show up without an alb, or the music minister refuse to play the processional

hymn, or he fails to use any of the expected calls or salutations, the congregation would have reason to view him with suspicion.

Finally, an important aspect of role performance is the “backstage.” There, the actors determine how best to perform their roles for the audience. They make necessary adjustments to the “script” and counsel or bargain with team members who do not play their role well. They may also malign the front stage in what Goffman calls “stage talk”; indeed, something may literally separate the backstage from the front stage. Goffman gives the example of a kitchen in a restaurant with waiters, chefs, hosts, and other service workers preparing the proper “show” for the diners (and possibly maligning them, like those snobs at Table 3 who put in a tricky order but won’t pay a dime more than 15% tip!). Presently I am involved in union negotiations at the university where I teach; both sides of the table engage in a great deal of “backstage” work, including discussing who will talk, what attitudes we assume, what we think about the other side, and who we can consider a “team member” and who not. In a church setting, we find the backstage in a sacristy and in all of the “behind-the-scenes” actions of coordinating lectors, cantors, sacristans, Eucharistic ministers, and others. On a larger scale, this includes ecumenical councils, USCCB conferences, and other such meetings where actors establish policy, attitudes, and positions before bringing things public.

The take away from Goffman’s work is essentially that people ought to think of every social interaction in terms of performance; people constantly play roles before audiences. The role we play and the audience before whom we play the role affect how our performance is evaluated and whether our role is trusted. We typically go through our lives before different audiences without thinking too much about this unless we commit a faux pas. The minister who comes to church drunk, the “tough guy” who cries when a little girl loses her cat, or the “proper lady” who experiences inopportune flatulence all commit faux pas—it shatters the image their audience held of them, although in many cases it may be repaired by bringing the new audience “backstage” as it were. We can maintain our positions and our roles by virtue of “sticking to the script” and ensuring that our audience accepts our performance. If I stop “playing” the husband to my wife, or, worse still, if I begin playing husband to another woman! then her confidence in my role is lost and I no longer maintain the role. If I fail to maintain my per-

formance as a teacher, perhaps by swearing out a student or demonstrating incompetency in my lecturing or grading abilities, I lose my position as a teacher. If team members with whom I conduct research “switch sides” on me, I may lose credibility as a researcher and become a pariah. This may be overly reductionist, but one can see that much of our interaction requires portraying and responding to pre-established and mutually understood roles.

We should easily see the implications of this theory for pastoral ministry. The priest who rushes through confessions, who fumbles over the prayers of the Mass, who spaces out during a visit, or even simply takes on the wrong “persona” in a pastoral setting—as a business leader, a comedian, an elitist—will fail in his task as a pastor because those coming to him for ministry will lose confidence in his performance. To give an extreme example, the overall failure of the Catholic hierarchy in the sexual abuse crisis led to “scandal” in the literal sense. The backstage work of shuffling around predatory priests and maintaining an air of silence, when it was revealed to the front stage, brought about an extreme loss of face for Church authority. Many Catholics, especially those of weaker faith, lost faith in the church because the shepherds committed a major faux pas, both those who were guilty of sexually abusing congregants and those who covered the problem up. To this day, the persona of the priest has lost credibility among certain segments of the population. Any priest who has been subject to derision connected to the scandal understands poignantly how the persona of the priest affects pastoral ministry. The task of pastoral ministry becomes markedly more difficult, if not impossible, due to loss of confidence in the role.

B. Personae and Internet media

Goffman wrote 60 years ago—well before the advent of “Web 2.0” and social media sites. Nonetheless, his ideas, especially the notions of dramaturgical presence, have seeped into contemporary social scientific discussions of social networking sites. Four authors in particular show the significance of his thought for social media, and I shall attend to some ideas found in each of their books: Turkle (2011), James (2014), Baym (2012), and van Dijck (2013). The first two authors write as psychologists concerned about how social media constrain individual identity, and the last two write as sociologists interested in how social media open or close opportunities for social expression.

Turkle (2011) focuses on identity formation as one challenge of the Internet. Following the insights of Erik Erikson, she contends that identity formation in adolescents requires role experimentation (p. 260). The world of Web 2.0, expects people to represent themselves on the Internet “as they are,” that is, in an “authentic” manner. For youth who do not know yet who they will be, however, this poses a challenge. Some of the youth Turkle describes “try out” new styles of presenting themselves online—should they be “flirty” or “witty?” (p. 192). Will the “flirtatious” attitude go across well with their friends, and will it “feel right” to them? Should they “like” the Harry Potter franchise on Facebook, or will that make them seem less “sexy” to their peers? (p. 273). What comments should they make? should they use proper grammar or not? what pictures should they post? whom do they tag in their statuses, etc? All of these questions have their “real world” analogies: what do I say to my peers? what style of language should I use (slang or proper language)? how do I physically portray myself? with whom do I associate? Online, however, many of these “try-outs” cannot be reneged—they live on digitally even if the author of the post has moved on “in real life.” Moreover, while youth, just like any other persons, have complicated lives, the multiple facets of their character may not be easy (or socially possible!) to represent through conventional social media. The star athlete who likes chess cannot join the school chess club Facebook site unless he is willing to play the performance of a chess nerd in front of his football teammates. Some may try out “false identities” on social media, befriending strangers and describing their lives in fictitious manner, but in so doing, they also are restricted in their activities (can I be “me” when I’m someone else?). One option may be to assume different aspects of their personalities through different social media, but then they must retain a highly fragmented social media presence. Otherwise, they simply have to maintain careful role performance online. Youth therefore face two important challenges in their identity formation: first, they have a hard time deciding what persona to convey on the Internet, and second, they have the added difficulty of figuring out how to “be true” to multiple aspects of their lives with different audiences. “What” they are supposed to be depends on the acceptance of the audience who observes their performance, namely their fellow youth.

James (2014) focuses on moral development as a second problem with the Internet. As children grow,

they make mistakes; and part of moral formation involves learning from those mistakes and growing past them. She notes:

At one point or another, most of us have made a poor decision, disrespected another person, or said things we've regretted. For those of us who grew up before the digital revolution, those missteps are likely forgotten—or exist only in our fuzzy memories or in the memories of direct witnesses. Today it's a whole different ball game. The potential exists for our mistakes to live on, and even outlive us, casting an eternal shadow over our reputations. (pp. 27–28).

Teenagers make mistakes, and, assuming the mistake is not of a dire nature (e.g., cases like the Steubenville rape case), there ought to be room for a person to grow past them. This is, after all, a major part of Christian ethics—though we are sinners, we work with God's transformative grace to change our lives for the better. As Aristotle himself astutely observed 2400 years ago, character formation forms a crucial part of ethical conduct, and is best addressed in one's youth. But how can the teen move on, change her ways, grow past her faults or become a more mature person when the evidence of her sin remains visible for all to see? Is there any real growth as a person if one's sin remains visible to all? Must we all wear scarlet letters proclaiming our sin to the world? Or must we, like Augustine, write a public *Confessio* recanting our past life and affirming our true conversion?

James takes this insight further and adopts the dramaturgical language of Goffman, noting that this relates to the aspects of our lives that we present on the Internet. Privacy concerns include both on what information appears readily available online, what information others share about me online, and how the audience participates, whether through passive acceptance of what I present or through actively trying to find information about me (what Goffman calls being a "spotter"). Since social interaction entails division of performances, how do we separate Levi the son, Levi the husband, Levi the teacher, Levi the student, Levi the Catholic, Levi the citizen from each other? Where does privacy fit into the equation, and how do I maintain proper audience segregation? Will my "team members" play along without my explicitly demanding them, to or do I need to ask them to "untag me" from a potentially face-losing misstep? What role do the audiences play as well? As an example, a friend of mine visiting from Washington, DC wanted to go to the

Castro (the gay district) in San Francisco. As a friend and partial tour guide, I took him there. He tagged me in his check-in at a bakery we stopped at. Now, I did nothing immoral in this scenario—I had a piece of cake with a friend, nothing more—but to the wrong audience, being in the Castro could be scandalous. In this case, I have to worry about my own online image, as well as my friend's inclusion of me in his "performance," and whether I risk offending my close friend by asking not to be tagged or risk offending others by being visible in this case. Thus, James presents the difficult cases of how to overcome social missteps, how to maintain backstage presence, how to segregate audiences, and, importantly, how to be a cooperative audience member in her writing.

Baym (2012) examines how digital media have become extensions of our normal social connections. She observes that much of the fear surrounding new technologies simply presents a new version of an old worry, but does mention that aspects such as interactivity, the temporal structure of communication, and the reach of new media represent dramatic changes over older forms of communication media. Of note for us today, she discusses the fact that communication with others often entails numerous verbal and non-verbal cues. In face-to-face communication, for example, things like tone of voice, pitch and volume convey a certain amount of information, but so too does "body language," including proximity, facial expression, hand gestures, and even posture (p. 103). Thus, if I assume an oppositional posture and an apathetic expression and state with a sarcastic tone of voice, "I'm very interested in what you have to say," I express an entirely different idea from assuming a posture toward you, looking you in the eye and with a sincere tone of voice saying, "I'm very interested in what you have to say." When we switch from digital to non-digital communications, the form of verbal and non-verbal cues become very important. Baym writes, "Cues given off become highly informative in sparse cue situations" (p. 119). This means not only that people read spelling errors, grammatical language, and personal aggrandizement or effacement as indicative of who the speaker is, but that even sparseness of communication or breadth say something. I am probably unsuccessful as a social media persona because I hate the 140-character format of Twitter and tend to write overly long Facebook posts, while my friends who have 40 or so comments typically begin with a witticism and a short comment. This comic from PhD comics demonstrates the agony

many a student will feel in ensuring that they give off the right cues to their professors (who sit as social superiors) as well as the lack of care of cues given off by the professors themselves (ironically itself a social cue of practiced indifference to the student). The “content” of a communication, in terms of the pure information, is dependent not only on the language that is used, but also the persona of the person conveying it, the manner in which it is conveyed, the tone, the medium, and the audience who is privy to it.

Van Dijck (2013), using the tools of Actor Network Theory (ANT) and political economy, examines the ways that particular social media platforms shape our presentation of ourselves. She examines the technology itself, the ownership, its governance (or lack thereof), the users and their usage, the content of the medium, and the business models (p. 28) to understand how the various parties connected to a social medium shape and are shaped by it. Facebook, for example, has developed a business model-turned-ethos of “sharing”—sharing not only your personal thoughts, pictures, and stories, but also sharing your personal data with advertisers and big data corporations. Mark Zuckerberg, the founder and CEO, has developed this as a total business model and the mantra for the company. Facebook has also developed and adapted numerous algorithms such as the Newsfeed, People You May Know suggestions, Like buttons, and cookies to maintain our attention and encourage us to share more information. Invitations to “say what’s on your mind,” “tag a friend,” or “accept a friend request” solicit our attention and ask us to behave in certain ways. At times, users have pushed back: While complaints have often arisen with new format changes, the incorporation of “Beacon” (similar to the “Like” button, but more explicit about sharing your personal info) was met with incredible hostility, resulting in the company retracting it (p. 48). The character of Facebook, including the users, what they share, how it is presented to them and others, and what happens monetarily with this information, is a process of constant reshaping as developers propose new ideas and user bases shift their focus and their demographics. Ten years ago, it was largely a site devoted to college students and their social life. Later, it opened to other demographics, who may have shared personal information and used it as a way of keeping up with distant friends. Today, Facebook is largely an article sharing site, where the content presented through the Newsfeed is so well curated that one can often find it difficult to discern at first glance what

a friend shared and what comes from a targeted advertisement. What to share, with whom it is shared, and why it is shared are increasingly influenced by Facebook programmers. The stage, the performers, the teams, the props, and even the audience are constantly in flux.

Of course, if one is concerned about how these media are limiting or shaping our presentation of selves, she can just opt-out, right? Van Dijck points out that the way major social media companies, such as Facebook, YouTube, Google, Twitter, and others have cornered the market and extended their reach to other, non “socializing” aspects (such as marketing or politics), their ubiquity among our friends and peers, and their power in lobbying legislatures (so that really “being off the grid” is much more difficult than getting on the grid) make it hard for a person to opt out. Social, legal and institutional pressures encourage us to remain on these media and use them in particular ways. I, for example, don’t have Instagram, or SnapChat, barely use my Twitter handle and post to Facebook much less frequently than I did five or seven years ago (though I often “lurk”). A result of this, however, is that I often feel isolated from my friends; I hear fewer things about their lives personally as they “forget” about me through lack of exposure. I’m also likely to miss out on important opportunities that may be advertised through these media, or it may be hard for me to access certain information if an organization primarily announces it through Twitter or the like. The person who is actually “off” of Facebook is likely to lose a great deal in their social experience—these technologies have become “normalized” into our lives the way that cars or televisions have, but with greater consequences to our social lives (although, if you didn’t see the latest episode of “Game of Thrones,” you may lose the ability to carry on conversations at the office as well). When you try to act on another stage, or when you try to play a disparate role from the one the setting has circumscribed for you, other actors will resist. You lose your possibility of social interaction if you are not present on the front stage with other actors, but it’s also increasingly difficult to play the game if you do not like the script!

These four authors then present us with conclusions about online role performance of which we ought to be keenly aware. When we present ourselves online, we are playing roles—adopting personae for the audience with whom we communicate. We can negotiate some of whom our audience is through careful cultivation of our online identity and the media through which

we act, but our performance will be checked by audiences who behave in bad faith, outside observers who catch our performances, and programmed algorithms that filter our expression to different audiences. Maintaining the identity we wish to keep becomes a difficult task of “character preservation” and curation. We also have to understand and anticipate the ways that communication takes on different nuances in different media, the different characters and settings of these different stages, and how and whom we operate based on these things. Presentation of the self through social media becomes a team effort, and one must be aware that as much or more effort is needed in presenting the various aspects of our “selves” to different audiences as we need offline. Social media, therefore, represent a new frontier and a new “stage” for persona expression.

C. *The persona of the pastor on social media*

The last section demonstrated the prevalence of the notion of online persona among social researchers. Baym and van Dijck make explicit reference to Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis, and James and Turkle, while not making direct reference, still maintain some of the dramaturgical language. All would agree that we should pay careful attention to the personae we portray on social media and the way we express ourselves to the audiences connected to us. Different sites will facilitate different personae or different aspects of our personality differently from others; some promote brevity, while others encourage verbosity. Some have a leftist character while others veer more conservative. Some, like Last.fm or Academia.edu focus on one aspect of the users’ personalities, while others are more general. Each social media site functions as a stage or setting, complete with its own available props, team members, and audience privy to the poster’s performance.

Pastors, as I have suggested already, have particular personae they ought to foster *as* pastors. The character of these personae will have, of course, a fair degree of leeway for personal flair and style, but only within certain bounds. No one pastor must be like another, but all should express a certain “pastor-ness” in their online behavior. One of the most important considerations the pastor should be aware of is the risk of scandal—does the portrayal of the persona online lead faithful Christians to lose faith? This does not require the pastor to engage in actual sin—as Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 10, there is no sin in eating meat sacrificed to idols, but we should avoid it if it

affects other believers’ conscience—but it does require circumspection. Some comments, expressions of taste, or other communications may be out of the bounds of good taste for a spiritual leader. Other concerns of the pastor could be related to ministry to a specific congregation or evangelization to non-believers as well.

With these concerns laid out, and mindful of the dramaturgical nature of social interaction, I offer three guiding questions for the pastoral use of social media: What is the nature or “setting” of the medium? What is the character of the medium? And what is the persona of the person posting?

First, what is the nature of the medium? If Marshall McLuhan was correct, then “the medium really is the message.” The means by which we convey information delimits and shapes the message communicated. Breaking off a relationship by text message, for example, is considered extra insulting because of the trivial nature of text message communication—Baym notes that face-to-face is still considered the most intimate form of communication with talking on the telephone less intimate, and online chatting less still (2010, p. 50). Thus, one should ask “is the medium a broadcasting platform, or is it conducive to more closed discussions? Does one communicate through short messages, longer texts? Is it primarily textual, auditory or pictographic?” Some media, like Twitter or Youtube, are intended to be broadcast to as large an audience as possible. Others, such as Facebook or Tumblr, offer more variety in choosing the audience. Others still, such as SnapChat and messaging services (including Facebook’s messenger, instant messengers, or Korea’s KakaoTalk), are intended for much more private communication. We know, for better and for worse, that Twitter offers a platform whereby one can share a message with the world. This can be good for sending out brief messages affirming the Gospel message, or for embarrassing yourself and your nation in a highly public manner. An archival medium such as Facebook is not conducive for changing one’s mind or retracting a statement, while more temporary media such as Snapchat can be. Photographic media like Vine or Instagram can convey non-verbal messages, while others like Yik-Yak are entirely textual.

We should first note two “obstacles” of sorts with the nature of media and their influence on pastoral ministry. The first is a problem explained in part by Hubert Dreyfus (2001) 15 years ago: Our lives are embodied lives and phenomenologically, we are embodied beings, but Internet communication obviates this. Not

only are we unable to convey many non-verbal cues, but certain types of ministry are prescribed. It would be hard to have a real “ministry of presence” without being present to one of the faithful. How does one reassure another with their bodily co-presence when there is none? The perspectives of phenomenologists including Dreyfus, Gabriel Marcel, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty remind us that an important part of our lives, a part that is not least of all inscribed in pastoral settings, is being bodily present. Moreover, certain functions within the role of the pastor seem to require corporeality. Confession, spiritual direction, and most importantly, Eucharist all seem to demand corporeal expression rather than online mediation. The second obstacle is the democratic nature of the Internet. Mass media tend to be broadcast media—they are one-way forms of communication. Social media, on the other hand, are communicative insofar as people are able to respond. This is a great benefit in some situations, but any theologian or pastor who has found herself arguing with an “arm-chair warrior” about dogma or biblical interpretation on Facebook will recognize that democracy without preference for authority presents new challenges. We may note with some seriousness that, at the moment, many virtually-eradicated preventable diseases are returning because the authority of the National Institutes of Health has been undermined by bad science articles spread through democratic media. It will be hard for a pastor to maintain an authoritative air on such media, which may undermine the ability to properly minister. The two obstacles of incorporeality and social media democracy do not forbid the possibility of social media pastoral ministry, but they do entail limits on what all can be done ministerially.

On this question, we should also consider what a pastor looks like in each medium. Twitter only allows brief messages, beatitudinal messages, as it were (#BlessedArethePoor). Broadcast ministry is therefore possible, but only in highly condensed format; there can be no sermons, no exhortations, and certainly no theological treatises. On this front, Twitter may be better for pastoral work than pure theology. Facebook may allow more personal communication, though the Newsfeed function makes “inside jokes” or “backstage talk” a danger. In such media, the audience may include anybody you know, but it may also include absolute strangers and even those who wish harm on you. Personal messages should therefore not be sensitive messages. Messenger services allow for personal ministry, but tend to be very intimate on that front, lim-

iting outreach. Forum media or limited group media may be good for group ministry, or community building, but are increasingly marginal. If one wishes for an analogy to “the real world,” one might think of how different settings affect ministry: being the sandwich board-wearing street preacher at Sather Gate is a very different style of ministry from meeting a group of students in the campus ministry center. The style of ministry, the words chosen, the detail or openness of the pastor depends very much on how public, how permanent, and what format communication occurs in each medium.

Second, what is the character of the medium? In “non-social” media, character has been an oft-cited concern for years now in the U.S. CNN, Fox, MSNBC, Associated Press, NPR, Breitbart, the Blaze, Vox, TYT, and other organizations have a definite “character,” most often reduced to political leanings. Of course, a more careful analysis will reveal the character is a bit more complex than that; NPR, for example, is more “intellectual” or “high brow” in nature, Fox is more sensationalist in tone, and MSNBC is often conflictual in its presentation. A pastor knows, therefore, that if he is invited onto the Oprah Winfrey show, he will have to present himself differently than if he is invited onto the Bill O’Reilly show (apologies for outdated references—this is what happens when you don’t have television).

Social media likewise can have a “character” to them, shaped, as van Dijck has alluded, by users, content, owners, and business models. Today, one can see this moreso on some sites than others. Last.fm has the character of music lovers. Academia.edu has the character of self-promoting academics. LinkedIn has the character of self-promoting entrepreneurs and business persons. Tumblr is known for its political leftism, 4chan for its reactionism, Reddit for its masculine conservatism, and Pinterest for its home-style charm. Early Facebook was college students only, and the “character” was often college social life—inside jokes, romantic interchanges between co-eds, pictures of parties, invitations to parties, statuses about parties, backstage chat about professors (who were not on Fb), coordination of social plans, etc. In this context, ministry would be quite difficult. What college student, turning to “the Facebook” (as it was known) would welcome a message about Jesus’s personal love when she was just looking to tease her friend about how much of a fool he made himself the night before? This, of course, is not really what the Facebook of today is; today’s Facebook

is a source for news, political opinion, sharing family events, and other such things. We should therefore first ask if the character or ethos of the medium is well-suited for ministry and evangelization. Sites that encourage genuine interhuman interaction (if there be any) would be fertile places for ministry, while places that promote narcissistic navel-gazing (of which there are many) would not be. Moreover, the character of the users on the site and the purpose for which they use the site should also be noted; people who use 4chan to troll each other are unlikely to take seriously ministerial efforts. Tumblr users may be more sensitive to important issues, but often have a distrust for organized religion. Reddit has a reputation for proud anti-theism—evangelization may be ripe for the setting, but highly unwelcomed!

Let me add one further complication before moving on. At this point, it would seem that the more “pedestrian” social media such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook would be the most ideal place for pastoral presence. It should be remembered ultimately, however, that “Facebook” is not a place—it is a business. Facebook exists to carry out Milton Freedman’s slogan of “maximizing shareholder value.” To that end, everything that is shared or viewed is done in the context of commoditization. There is no “free” sharing. This is true also for any major multi-million dollar or billion dollar social media platform; all is done for the sake of profit. If you are not paying directly for use of the service, then you can be certain that the information you are providing is being used for commercial purposes. Thus, any pastoral work carried out in such a context will necessarily be done within the confines of late-stage capitalistic systems. The character of the setting, a commercial setting of data mining, cannot be formally separated from the content of ministry carried out therein. The message with more “likes” will always win out over the unpopular, but important, message. I make no claims as to how that shapes the Gospel message, but it should be noted. If we need an analogy from “the real world,” in this case we ask if we’re carrying out ministry in a raucous frat house, a bustling stock exchange, or a college chapel. We may note that it is not *impossible* to minister in difficult situations—Paul, after all, preached at the Areopagus—but that the manner in which we minister will be affected.

Finally, and perhaps most important, what is the persona of the person who is using the social media, i.e., is the pastor being a pastor? If we reflect on the experiences of the adolescents James and Turkle inter-

viewed, we recall that many of them felt anxious about having to “always be on.” If we list our names on Facebook with a “Rev, Br, or Sis” preceding or an “SJ, OP, OFM, CSC” following, do we represent well our positions as religious persons? The public, including the faithful, has a certain image of what a pastor should look like. A person who is boastful, sarcastic, overly political, or bellicose likely does not fit the “persona” of pastor very well. Likewise, a person who posts or shares about heavy metal concerts, trips to the bar, lavish vacations probably does not either. A friend of my wife knows a pastor who often “likes” provocative pictures of scantily clad young women on Fb. Some pastors I know spend all day posting politically-motivated articles on Fb or arguing against ideological opponents. Joel Osteen has gained an infamous reputation for his self-promoting use of Twitter and other social media. Is this “pastoral”?

Here, of course, comes the greatest difficulty. The longer I spend in and around seminaries, the more I understand that priests are not perfect, and that, even if they were, they would not fit my own image of perfection. Pastors have friends, hobbies, musical tastes, movie interests, political ideologies, disagreements with others, and various “tastes” including art, food and drink, and music that some may deem “distasteful.” These are all important components of a well-rounded and balanced life, and a pastor who lacked these things would be worse because he could not understand “the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties” of his flock. And here we return to my experience as a college freshman: the priest sans collar is still a priest, just in a more obviously human form. The challenge on social media, however, is a challenge of whether the priest is “wearing his collar” or not. Political opinions, verbal chastisements, sarcastic comments, flirtatious interactions, airing of grievances, gossip, offensive jests, and other such expressions are clear faux pas for a person portraying the persona of the pastor. If this is a worry for some pastors, they ought to exercise caution as aforementioned in deciding which social media to use and for what purposes. Perhaps they maintain a Facebook account for keeping up with family and friends with high privacy settings while maintaining a twitter and Youtube account for public ministry, and a Facebook page for the parish for communication with the flock. Perhaps they utilize pseudonyms. Perhaps they have accounts on less “personal” social media like Tumblr, Reddit, and Imgur. Most certainly, they will need to pre-deter-

mine, perhaps with other pastors, the “rules” of their performance on social media. A visiting priest shared his own experience of a visitor coming to the rectory on his day off, asking, “Is there a priest home?” In his “civvies,” the priest responded, “Does it *look* like there’s a priest home?” from which the man decided to leave. Certainly, this is not an example we wish to emulate, but the point is helpful: Just as the priest knows “collar on” requires different role expression, so too should social media profiles for pastors express the same circumspection and self-awareness. Not everyone who sees your post on Facebook will know you “were only joking.”

D. The show must go on!

It is at this point that I must stop myself. I am not an expert on pastoral theology (that was my lowest grade at in college), but I do have experience in ministry. I cannot say what the best expressions will be for ministry—the form of the medium will shape that as much as anything—but I can note that non-verbal cues will be important. I cannot say whether group ministry or personal ministry will be best on social media—though again, I will note it likely depends on the form of the medium. What I can say, however, is that the role the pastor plays, the stage he plays it on, and the character of the setting will determine a lot about how the ministry can be done and how it will be received. Facebook is not a good place for hearing confessions. Twitter is probably bad for delivering homilies. YouTube will not be a good place for group bible study. The pastor who evangelizes through 4Chan, who provides “digital absolution” on Tumblr or who holds mass on Facebook Live risks losing face in making dramaturgical missteps. The pastor who acts “un-pastorly” on a medium that “doesn’t forget” also commits social faux pas. But the pastor who uses media as the media are designed with careful role performance and attention to the audience and setting will have learned what is an important task for the future of the church, namely how to be pastoral on social media.

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Book Reviews

Cali, Dennis D. *Mapping Media Ecology: Introduction to the Field*. New York, Bern, Frankfurt, Berlin, Brussels, Vienna, Oxford, Warsaw: Peter Lang, 2017. Pp. xxii, 256. ISBN 978-1-4331-2763-2 (paper) \$52.95.

Media ecology remains a puzzling area of communication study for many people, seemingly drawing on a disparate group of individuals arranged in varying patterns according to the scholars writing about them. Media ecologists write not only about communication, but about other areas—the ideas and environments in which humans live. Dennis Cali sets out an introduction aimed at university students in which he attempts both to describe media ecology and to introduce the key themes and approaches of media ecology. He organizes his book in a fairly straightforward manner with chapters addressing the nature of media ecology, the themes of media ecology, various interconnections, the “canonical figures,” and particular approaches to study out of which media ecology grows.

In a forward by Casey Man Kong Lum we encounter some of the history of media ecology, including the various individuals who make up the core researchers or writers of media ecology. Lum also points out the importance of the graduate program at NYU, which offered a Ph.D. in media ecology through a graduate program founded and led by Neil Postman. That program more or less ceased after Postman’s untimely death in 2003; however, the media ecology group of scholars continued to meet regularly at the conventions of the Media Ecology Association and through the work of the journal, *EME: Explorations in Media Ecology*. Lum helpfully maps out the particular conventions and the themes addressed in the journal, thus foreshadowing Cali’s work in the book. His approach provides a good introduction to Cali’s vol-

ume, which tries in more detail to bring the reader to a knowledge of media ecology.

In his own preface, Cali describes the things that brought him to media ecology: some incidents in his own research history, including puzzling things about the rise of the Internet and its effect on his students, a chance observation of a neighbor's television set with which he made a connection to children's attention spans. He goes on to describe his motivation for the book as well as his choice of title. He chose "mapping media ecology" because he had in mind the image both of a roadmap and of a set of coordinates which would guide a adventurer, a traveler, or an explorer.

The first sections of the book—Foundational Questions—seeks to situate media ecology both in a traditional definitional sense and through an operational definition. Cali suggests a number of approaches that might help conceptualize the field of media ecology: He includes the ideas of media ecology as a metaphor, a theory group, a great books series, a study of media as environment, a discipline, a meta-meme, and a perspective. One of the interesting approaches that does appear elsewhere in writings about media ecology falls under his third point, that media ecology forms a kind of great books curriculum. Here, he characterizes his topic as based in a set of canonical writers. Many of these writers, identified only retrospectively, studied communication or other aspects of human life with an implicit understanding that these functioned as an ecosystem or an ecology. However they did not use that language, only being identified as media ecologists by later scholars who recognized in them a distinctive approach to a bigger picture view of communication or human activities. Cali clarifies this a little bit when he discusses media ecology as a perspective, a way of looking at human behavior and the human environment. In this view, he finds some help in Neil Postman's identification of a key analogy: "the introduction of any new agent into an environment changes that environment. More than this, some media ecologists argue that the introduction of a new technology, particularly one that comes to dominate a culture, society, or an era, transforms the environment, affecting how people process information, how they think, and how they relate" (p. 10).

In a second introductory chapter, Cali presents a number of themes that appear in media ecology work. Some of these already appear in the sentences quoted above and include consciousness, technology, change, balance, environment, culture, and interconnectedness.

A good number of the writers and scholars who explore media ecology often combine these themes. For many of them, technology serves as the catalyst: As they recognize the changes technology introduces to human culture, they note that technology even affects human thinking or consciousness. Across these themes we can recognize an assumption of the connectedness of the various tools and human life. The next chapter has Cali describing what he calls the "margins of media ecology" (p. 50). Here he suggests that media ecology lies alongside of a number of other academic areas of study, for example the philosophy of technology, computer mediated communication, medium theory, or media causation. Each of these areas considers human communication technology, technology and society, or the role and impact of communication in different ways, some of them overlapping with media ecology study and others focusing on different aspects in greater detail. By listing them, Cali helps to differentiate media ecology from other areas of study.

As Cali suggested in his "metaphors of media ecology" chapter's reference to a great book series, he presents a number of the canonical figures of media ecology. While not everyone who claims the identity of a media ecology follows all of these figures, these individuals appear frequently enough as to lie at its heart either as pioneers of the kind of thinking or research claimed by media ecology or as sources of ideas from which many people develop their own thinking. These include, for example, Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, and Eric Havelock. In introducing them, Cali follows a common pattern. He provides a brief biographical sketch and then gives a description of the people, ideas, or cultures that influenced them—as, for example, a teacher, a religious background, a geographical place, or an educational institution. He also mentions people with whom these scholars worked as mentors or colleagues or perhaps students. Next comes a brief listing of their scholarly contributions and the themes that appear in their work. And, in a very helpful move, Cali offers what he calls a series of heuristics to understanding the individual's significance. These could include key concepts that the individual used, a set of questions that the scholar asked in developing his or her own thoughts, or attitudes towards the technology or society in which they lived.

The next general division of the book consists of five sections, each different with just one chapter. These chapters describe different areas of study found within the media ecology tradition: orality and literacy stud-

ies, technology studies, culture studies, bias studies, and language studies. In each one of these chapters Cali typically identifies three scholars and then sketches out their particular approach and summarizes what they bring to the area of study. Of necessity, these serve as shorter introductions than he provided to the canonical figures. However, they prove helpful in fleshing out a sketch of the media ecology world. In orality and literacy studies the reader meets the work of Eric Havelock and his studies of Homeric culture and the impact of writing; Jack Goody and his studies of literacy in more contemporary and newly literate cultures; and Elizabeth Eisenstein with her historical studies of the impact of the printing press in medieval Europe.

Under technology studies we find Neil Postman, particularly in his concern for the moral aspect of the message, captured most tellingly in the title of one of his books, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. We also find Lewis Mumford and his examination of the post-industrial era at its beginning; Albert Borgmann and his ideas of design, particularly of tools and of the things that Cali terms “focal practices.” In the chapter on cultural studies we meet James Carey and his concern for ritual communication (that is, communication not simply as a containing media but as a practice), and Edward Carpenter’s anthropological studies used to understand the role of communication. Cali points out the long collaboration between Carpenter and McLuhan, leading up to some of McLuhan’s most significant publications. Closing out cultural studies is the more contemporary work of cultural critic Camille Paglia.

The section on bias studies introduces Harold Adams Innis, another Canadian scholar who moved from economic history to a study in which he identified communication as containing an inherent and implicit bias towards either time or space, in terms of how communication fostered different cultural thinking. He does of course, become a key influence on McLuhan. Daniel Boorstin, who served as Librarian of Congress in the U.S., is cited for his studies of what he calls pseudo-reality or the pseudo-event—things created as media events. These events simply exist as things to be reported or to be viewed and, as such, reshape the culture and its understanding of itself. Finally we meet a European, French scholar Jean Baudrillard, whose understanding of the hyper-real leads to a critique of the idea of reality itself, virtual reality, and people’s interaction with a completely artificial environment.

The last section describing media ecology approaches has to do with language studies. A number linguists take a larger view of language as an environment or of language itself as so tied up with human cognition that humanity becomes connected to its language in inescapable ways. Here Cali includes Alfred Korzybski, whose approach to general semantics asks people to consider the semantic environment in which they live. Susanne Langer, a philosopher of language and of symbols, suggests different ways of understanding human thought not only as discursive but also as processing what she calls the presentational symbol with its role of symbolic transformation. Finally Cali adds the work of Benjamin Lee Whorf, the semi-amateur linguist whose studies of Native American languages led to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which claims that the language somebody speaks shapes that person’s basic understanding of the world, often referred to as the linguistic relativity hypothesis.

The last chapter provides both a summary of the book as well as a guide for those who might wish to practice media ecology. This most pedagogical chapter of the book not only sums up individual people and the themes that they used but actually provides what might well be a roadmap to student assignments. In fact Cali includes a proposed outline for a student assignment in which he shows how a student might take a common communication technology, for example, an app for mobile telephone, and analyze it using media ecology methods.

The book itself works well as an introduction to media ecology, though it may actually presume some prior knowledge of the scholars Cali discusses. Even though Cali provides a brief introduction to each scholar, those introductions are probably not enough to really help an introductory student. So, this work would do very well as something a teacher could use to supplement a series of lectures or other instruction. The student could use this book as a kind of handbook in which to look up various materials or to follow the rather substantial reference list in each chapter where Cali provides the requisite reading lists for the people whom he discusses.

The book itself does contain reference lists at the end of each chapter as well as an index. The volume forms part of the Understanding Media Ecology series published by Peter Lang.

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Kuypers, Jim A. *Partisan Journalism: A History of Media Bias in the United States*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014. Pp. xv; 303. ISBN 978-1-4422-2593-0 (Cloth) \$56.00; 978-1-4422-5207-3 (Paper) \$34.00; 978-1-4422-2594-7 (eBook) \$32.00.

The Tet Offensive, initiated by the North Vietnamese in 1968, resulted in mass casualties of North Vietnamese, Viet Cong, and American soldiers. On February 27, 1968, CBS anchorman Walter Cronkite proclaimed, essentially, that the war was unwinnable: “[It] is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out then will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did the best they could.”

Reactions to Cronkite’s statement have resulted in great debate about its effects on perceptions of U.S. involvement in the war. Jim Kuypers identifies the statement as an example of “snatching defeat from the jaws of victory,” a total misreading by the media of U.S. success in response to Tet (p. 79). Across its 12 chapters, the author covers four major periods in American journalism: partisan journalism in the early years of the country, objectivism in the early 20th century, a “conspiracy of shared values” in the 1960s, and the emergence of a competition of partisan viewpoints in the past 35 years. As the author puts it, he “makes an argument” about how liberal bias in the “establishment” media has changed throughout history, “how it transformed itself first from a partisan press to professional, objective, fact-based journalism, then how it changed yet again back into a biased and overwhelmingly liberal press, then again transitioned into a ‘partisan’ press with new conservative competition” (p. 6).

Kuypers begins with a detailed look at the origins of newspapers in America. He draws from literacy rates, the movement of news inland through the U.S. post office, and the formation of the Democratic Party under Martin Van Buren. Kuypers argues that newspapers existed to be partisan, and their function was to carry highly edited versions of political discourse out of eastern cities. “Thus, rather than reading and analyzing ‘news’ for themselves, many people absorbed a regurgitated version of publically accepted ‘news’ that had been edited by literate (and loud) locals” (p. 19). His historical overview continues in Chapters 2 and 3. Here, he takes us through the 19th century and identifies use of the telegraph during the Civil War as a critical incident in the growth of objective news reporting. Telegraphs were used to report facts, and a “new jour-

nalism” emerged separating news from editorials. Also arising in this era was advocacy journalism, an attempt to not just report a story, but to act as a force of social good, to become agents of change. The author refers to the “Golden Age of Objective Journalism” as the profession turned toward objectivity at the turn of the 20th century. Kuypers is thorough in his illustrations of publishers’ pursuit of ethical standards and fight for respectability among newspapers in the 1960s.

Kuypers weaves together extensive accounts of the Vietnam War provided by historians and journalists at the time (in the chapter “Three Presidents and a War”). The journalistic accounts, he argues, are overwhelmingly left leaning, and often do not reflect favorable public opinion of early involvement in the war. An overriding cause of the accounts is reliance on sources within the U.S. military whose perspectives were at odds with military leaders. Moreover, the press could not possibly have the depth and breadth of sources and knowledge of the North Vietnamese casualties, mistakes, disagreements, and so on in order to provide balanced reporting. Kuypers does take on Watergate for a brief period, arguing that journalists took what he considers routine dirty tricks to extraordinary lengths out of a desire to hurt President Nixon. The chapter is fascinating, and it alone serves as a strong case study of the relationship between organizations (public, corporate, governmental, etc.) and the press that frames their image to an audience.

Chapter 5 lays out the post-Nixon aftermath of the Watergate era. Kuypers draws from Herbert Gans’ four principles that comprise journalism. He references both Noam Chomsky and Rush Limbaugh in the same sentence, highlighting their agreement that it is the east coast liberal publications that set the tone for other publications, and his data illustrate that agenda as decidedly liberal. The author introduces framing analysis as a methodology to understand how language is used to shape perceptions of the news. Chapter 6, which takes up polling, provides an excellent backdrop to extend the power of framing questions and the use of data to promote ideologies. Two case studies, public views on President Clinton’s impeachment and British manipulation of polls during World War II, exhibit the powerful framing capacities of polls: “A consistent problem with polling is simply the poor quality of the polls themselves” (p. 139), by which he means misleading wording, the desire to use polls essentially *in place* of news, and obfuscating results to fit a liberal template. He also draws from cases on gun control

(Columbine and Virginia Tech) and school vouchers as a means for making his case.

Rush Limbaugh's emergence in the mid-1980s on radio and the rise of the Internet transformed journalism. Kuypers opens with a bio of Limbaugh (which draws from a bit of framing when he cites from Roger Streitmatter's comparison of Limbaugh to Pablo Picasso and Kuypers's own reference to Limbaugh's "panache") and then lays out Limbaugh's ability to take up conservative values and serve as a response to the liberal press. Limbaugh's skillful deconstruction of the left, his AM radio savvy, and his ability to embrace a national role at just the right time in history are lauded. As an outgrowth of Limbaugh's success and the rise of the Internet, Kuypers offers up three forces that gave conservative voices a much more conspicuous presence: Freerepublic.com, The Drudge Report, and conservative bloggers. The author presents these as alternatives news sources or, seen another way, as fact checkers who deconstruct the templates of the media-left.

Kuypers also identifies the conspiracy of values among most journalists that occurs simply through the way journalists live their lives. To support this contention, he provides data that exhibits that well-known journalists have incomes and live lifestyles among the top 15% of Americans while at the same time voting predominately for Democratic candidates and espousing liberal values. He also devotes some space to actual journalistic fraud, including references to Stephen Glass, Jayson Blair, and Janet Cooke. He goes on to provide an overview of President Clinton's mastery of "media manipulation" based heavily on denial of virtually all accusations and replacement with spin that bolstered the president's image. Kuypers identifies Matt Drudge's coverage of the Monica Lewinsky affair as the "tipping point" that challenged the liberal media that chose not to cover the story (namely, *Newsweek*.)

In the late chapters, the author moves to a case study of the 2000 election which illustrated an extension of the Clinton strategy of controlling how things are spun rather than the content of stories themselves. He cites embedded reporting as a way for the public to make up its own mind, and that both the armed forces and journalism are held in higher esteem when embedded reporting is used. He provides some statements from self-critical liberal journalists that seem to reveal liberals implicating themselves. Later, he presents poll and content analysis data that show perceptions among the public were that the media openly rooted for and celebrated Obama's win in 2008.

The book is titled "partisan journalism" not "democratic party journalism," and "media bias," not "liberal bias." At its heart, though, this book has a clear agenda. One gets the impression that Kuypers sets out to prove that to deny a liberal bias in the media is foolish, and he does a fine job of it. A major strength of this book is the sheer volume of data to back up his claims. He explains framing, polling research, case studies, and media templates, which he would describe as liberal narratives that express a conspiracy of values among journalists, values that journalists themselves admit to possessing. He draws from a wealth of sources including the PEW Center for Media Research and the Media Research Center. Most interesting is how major events led to divisive positions among influential media, with most landing on the liberal side. There is much to provoke counterargument, but it is very good scholarship.

Published in 2014, the book predates a world marked by media coverage of violence and the chaos surrounding the Trump administration. While coverage of some world events (terror in Boston, Paris, London, and Las Vegas, and the campaign and election of Donald Trump, including the massive miscalculation by pollsters and pundits in predicting his win) have underscored Kuypers' point; the next major research questions must involve the rise and role of social media—that is, when source and "the media" are one and the same. Those questions will include how to handle a president's tweets, an opponent's counter tweets, video shot by citizens, and so on. Just what differentiates "fake news," biased news, and the truth?

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Lemish, Dafna and **Maya Götz** (Eds.). *Beyond the Stereotypes? Images of Boys and Girls and their Consequences*. Göteborg: NORDICOM, 2017. Pp. 247. ISBN 978-91-87957-76-5 (paper). 250,00 kr; €25,00. Individual chapters available in pdf format from <http://www.nordicom.gu.se/en/publikationer/beyond-stereotypes>.

Twenty years ago I was contacted by a local news reporter in the city where I was an Assistant Professor asking me to comment on the final report of the *National Television Violence Study*. One question especially struck me. She asked: "So why do we need this report? Does it say anything *new*?" I was thrown by her question but did manage to point out that the fact that the report *didn't* say anything "new" **was** newsworthy.

Even with all the research evidence about the impacts of exposure to media violence, the report confirmed that levels of violence in television programming remained as high as ever.

This memory came to me while reading *Beyond the Stereotypes?* because this book provides ample evidence that, even with decades of research about the power of media to shape the perceptions of youth, content designed for children across the globe continues to perpetuate long-standing gender stereotypes.

The chapters in this text represent a wide range of theoretical perspectives, content, and consequences. Authors examine content from a variety of media forms—television series (animated and live action), music videos, and advertising; digital magazines, YouTube channels, and social media sites; and a print novel—and from countries in North America, South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. Youth ranging from preschoolers to teenagers participated in the research described.

The editors divided the text into two sections: “Interventions” and “Consequences.” The eight chapters in “Interventions” describe attempts by media producers to create alternatives to the overwhelmingly narrow, sexist gender norms and the hypersexualization of females so prevalent in child-targeted content.

Some chapters highlight attempts to challenge sexist norms—primarily in creating non-traditional female characters—and authors acknowledge the potential difficulty in market positioning, merchandising, and audience acceptance associated with such characters. In one chapter, Anna Potter describes the challenge faced by the producers of a UK re-boot of a popular 1960s U.S. TV program (*Thunderbirds Are Go!*) to re-vision existing characters in less stereotypical ways. While staying true to the original copyright and successful merchandising line, the creators looked for ways to increase the visibility and status of female characters.

Potter points out that increasing female representation in animation makes commercial sense as a way to attract more girls to the programs, a point echoed by Lindsay Watson in her chapter, “Creating New Animated TV Series for Girls Aged 6-12 in Britain.” Indeed, the economic realities of the children’s media business are not overlooked in these chapters.

Most of the chapters highlight female characters who defy gender norms and act in non-traditional roles. Katy Day (“Disruption—Not Always a Bad Thing”) describes “kick ass girls” who understand the performative nature of gender and who purposefully disrupt gender scripts by embodying characteristics across the

genders. Dafna Lemish (“Innovations in Gender Representation in Children’s Television”) describes a Canadian program, “Annendroids,” in which the lead character embraces aspects of both “girlhood” and “boyhood.” This program also features a genderless android character.

Two chapters discuss representation of transgender teens. Nancy Jennings (“Teen Drama and Gender in the U.S.”) and Lemish (“Innovation in Gender Representation in Children’s Television”) describe programs in which transgender teen characters reject their female bodies—and all things feminine—in an attempt to form new, male identities. Conceptualizing gender as a fixed binary (either male or female) retains the conventional understanding of gender, even while offering an alternative representation. Such an approach is likely more palatable to most audiences.

Two chapters provide sobering evidence of the prevailing nature of sexist representations in children’s content. Tamara Amoroso Gonçalves, Mariana Hanssen, Bellei Nunes de Siqueira, and Leticia Ueda Vella (“Advertising to Children and Gender Stereotypes in Brazil”) and Nelly Elias, Idit Sulkin, and Lemish (“Gender Segregation on BabyTV”) detail the frequency of traditional sex role representations in Brazilian advertising and on the BabyTV channel. One particularly problematic finding from BabyTV is that non-human characters are more gender stereotyped than human characters, “suggesting that the more freedom of choice the animators have to determine gender, the less egalitarian they become” (p. 98).

The 13 chapters in “Consequences” describe studies examining the impact of exposure to and use of media. Some of these highlight responses to professionally produced media *for youth*, and some address the influence of media produced *by youth*. These chapters are informed by theoretical approaches including cognitive social learning theory, cultivation analysis, the media practice model, uses and gratifications, feminist theory, psychoanalysis, social constructivism, self presentation, and identity formation theory. At their core, these chapters address the question of how youth use media (both as consumers and as creators) in their growing awareness of self and others. When do they internalize the messages? When do they resist? When do they demonstrate critical awareness? And when do they take action?

The power of media images to shape perceptions of beauty, and the association of physical beauty with happiness and power, are explored by several authors. Kara Chan, Maggie Fung, and Tabitha Thomas

(“Perceptions of Physical Beauty among Boys and Girls in Hong Kong”) asked 9–12 year olds to describe the personality traits associated with attractiveness. The children described “good looking” children as friendly, cheerful, and popular; while “not so good looking” children were described as mean, lonely, and unpopular. Maya Götz and Ana Rodriguez (“I Just Want to Look Good for You”) queried German adolescents about music videos and discovered that a majority think it “makes the women singers strong” when they present themselves in a sexy way. A majority of girls expressed the desire to look like the women in music videos, while a majority of boys said they would like to have a girlfriend who looked like the female artists.

Carmen Llovet, Mónica Díaz-Bustamante, and Kavita Karan (“Are Girls Sexualized on Social Networking Sites?”) examine the sexualization of children in media by analyzing comments posted on the Instagram page of a 10-year old female model. While most of the comments on the page referred to the child’s beauty or desirability, many observers remarked on the inappropriateness of her clothing or poses. The authors suggest that the mixed messages in the Comments themselves are fodder for youth exploring how to present themselves.

Götz and Caroline Mendel (“Stop Propagating It Is ‘Normal’ to Look like Models”) present evidence from a survey of youth diagnosed with eating disorders about the role of the media in contributing to their disease. One program—*Germany’s Next Top Model*—was identified by over half of the participants as having a “very strong influence” or “some influence” on their illness. The authors argue that this program not only perpetuates unrealistic body standards and the equation of thinness with success, but it rewards contestants who conform perfectly to the norms of others. This disempowering message seemed resonant for the struggling participants.

Perceptions of gender are the topic of several chapters. Johanna van Oosten (“Macho Boys and Sexy Babes on TV”) conducted a short-term longitudinal survey of Dutch adolescents and discovered that hypergender orientation (i.e., subscribing to extreme gender stereotypes) is associated with heavy exposure to certain television genres. The data show both cultivation effects as well as selective exposure effects. Aanchal Sharma and Manisha Pathak-Shelat (“The Cultivation and Reception Effects of Gendered Images”) illustrate how the cultivation process and psychoanalytic approaches to consumption help explain the impact of Indian media on boys’ and girls’ perceptions of self and others.

Linda Charmaraman, Amanda Richer, Brianna Ruffin, Budnampet Ramanudom, and Katie Madsen (“Escaping from Worries or Facing Reality”) describe a set of findings from a survey of U.S. adolescents launched as part of a larger Media & Identity Project. Their findings indicated that youth do look to mainstream media for role models and often are frustrated with perceived stereotypes. These findings were more pronounced for girls and sexual minority youth.

A few chapters explore youth-created content. Alexandra Sousa and Srividya Ramasubramanian (“Challenging Gender and Racial Stereotypes in Online Spaces”) report on *Latinitas*, the first digital magazine in the U.S. created by and for young Latinas. The magazine features content that challenges stereotypes commonly found in mainstream media, and creates community while building important media literacy skills. The magazine, and its companion social media sites, provides a voice to an often marginalized population.

Self-presentation on social media is explored by Monica Barbovschi, Tatiana Jereissati, and Graziela Castello (“Representations of Gender on Social Media among Brazilian Young People”) and Michael Forsman (“Duckface/Stoneface”). In both of these chapters, the authors report on the curation strategies of youth as they construct their social media profiles for impression management. Participants describe how girls strive to navigate the line between “sexy” and “slutty” while boys attempt to be seen as stoic (“Stoneface”) and strong. Informants describe the norms of their different audiences and their strategies for successful impression management. Forsman reported that some participants practiced “stereotype vitalization” as they challenged gender norms by being “ugly” or “silly” (“Duckface”).

Overall the chapters in this volume provide a comprehensive examination of the state of media created for and by youth around the world. The chapters offer some hope for empowering youth to become critical consumers and producers (prosumers) of media content that more authentically meets their needs. And it celebrates the creators who are already exploring new ways of addressing gender in youth-targeted media. But it also highlights how much of the media content—including that produced by youth themselves—conform to traditional gender stereotypes. Clearly there is a long way to go. And this text should be part of the discussion.

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