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A Theological Inquiry Regarding the Practice of the Eucharist in Cyberspace

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A THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY REGARDING THE PRACTICE OF THE EUCHARIST

IN CYBERSPACE

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Doctor of Philosophy

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by

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March 2013

Advisor: Theodore M. Vial, Jr.

ABSTRACT

This study looks at the Eucharist in cyberspace, beginning with a case study of a

faith community who met with controversy after the group shared the ritual in

cyberspace. Based on a qualitative study of the practice and its aftermath, the theoretical

analysis includes the nature of the Internet itself and its capacity as a location for

networked communities; its capacity to operate as a communication medium for a

religious ritual; and the involvement of active users.

The users in this case were members of a religious community interested in

preserving their Eucharist theological tradition. The first set of major issues revolves

around the process of negotiating the manner in which the practice and the use of

technology can be reconfigured to accommodate the innovation. Such reconfiguring

involves a level of interaction in which the criteria of a networked community for

Eucharist can be said to exist. Negotiating a use of the Internet should give attention to

aesthetic elements that makes for a robust engagement using the medium. The next set of

major issues involve evaluating whether or not a Wesleyan/holiness theology of

Eucharist, nuanced by a Calvinistic view of Christ's presence, would be fitting to an

online venue. I explored a creative redeployment of these theological traditions in terms

of Eucharist in cyberspace being a networked communication of grace characterized by

the agency of the user, who joins other participants in a sacramental encounter with

Christ. I analyzed what each piece looked like theologically in tandem with a cultural perspective of the Internet and religious practice in cyberspace. I concluded that there was theological warrant for adapting the Eucharist to cyberspace for a legitimate practice that could fulfill the religious and theological purposes sought by a networked community.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2008 an online class affiliated with Nazarene Bible College[1]

engaged in a practice that many would regard as inappropriate.[2] This faith community

shared the Eucharist in cyberspace. Creating a "cybersanctuary," by utilizing an mp3 file

from a church website, and a chat room, the professor and his online class observed this

sacrament together.[3] The enthusiastic recounting of this online event via an electronic

communiqué to various constituencies of the college was met with controversy

concerning the legitimacy of this practice. My stake in this work is that of an insider--a

faculty member of this college-- who was intimately involved with online education for

ministerial students at this institution. I am also an ordained minister in the Church of the

Nazarene.

The scope of this dissertation and its case study is much broader than analyzing a

specific incident[4] and its aftermath. The theoretical issues that have wider implications

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[1] Subsequent references to the college will use the initials "NBC" to stand for "Nazarene Bible College," based in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

[2] Robinson-Neal notes in her qualitative research on examples of "virtual worship" in the three dimensional world of *Second Life*, that her review of the literature has shown that "there are certain practices such as Holy Communion for those of the Catholic and certain Protestant faith that are not appropriate for online worship experiences." Andree Robinson-Neal, "Enhancing The Spiritual Relationship: The Impact of Virtual Worship on The Real World Church Experience," *Online- Journal of Religions on the Internet* 3.1(2008), http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/volltext/2008/8296/pd/robinson_nealpdf (accessed February 22, 2010), 241.

[3] NBC Professor, July 28, 2011, phone.

[4] Others besides Nazarenes are interested in issues that arise with regard to Eucharist in cyberspace. An example is pastor and theologian Douglas Estes, who has been involved in the emergence of cyberspace

and need to be resolved, rest on two considerations. The first has to do with the nature of

the Internet itself and its capacity to operate as a venue for a religious ritual such as the

Eucharist. The second has to do with the nature of the Eucharist itself and whether or not

reformatting it for this venue[5] is appropriate in the first place. In this case, the manner in

which performing the Eucharist in cyberspace also involves conversation about

theological tradition and innovative Christian practices. I use the discourse of media

studies, and religion and media studies, to look at the nature of cyberspace and related

religious practice. I then relate these to theological discourse informed by

Wesleyan/holiness and Calvinistic views of the practice of the Eucharist.[6] The thesis of

this dissertation is that a Wesleyan/holiness and Calvinistic view of the Eucharist is

compatible with the claim that a meaningful Eucharistic practice can occur in a

cyberspace community.

Theoretical Framework of The Analysis

The structure and methodology for this dissertation, as it progresses from Chapter

2 through Chapter 5, involves a theoretical framework that encompasses the nature of

cyberspace, religious communal practice in cyberspace, and a discursive theological

framing of the practice of Eucharist in cyberspace.   In each chapter, a description of the

nature of cyberspace is formed in an interrelated, tripartite development so that

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churches, who writes that by his "unofficial count, most virtual churches and Internet campuses have
chosen to abstain from celebrating the Lord's Supper in any regular fashion, often for fear of offending
people who have different sacramental views." Douglas Estes, *SimChurch: Being the Church in the Virtual
World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 117.

[5] The question of appropriateness for this venue involves under what conditions the Eucharist can occur
legitimately in light of the fact that there is precedence for the practice being done in non-traditional ways.

[6] The reason why these two distinct traditions are considered in this case will be explained in Chapter 5.

networked community, communication media, and the agency of the user are each discussed.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the nature of cyberspace to foreground religious practice in cyberspace as *networked communication media characterized by the agency of the user*.[7] First, I show that the user community can function as a legitimate community. Second, the communal aspect can be tied to communication media. Early in the history of Internet studies, scholars Lorne Dawson and Nancy Baym contended that in "detecting the presence of community online," researchers should give "due consideration" to "formative factors" found in research on computer-mediated communication so that complexities and differences (i.e., uniqueness) of online communities are understood.[8] Cyberspace as found in media communication has characteristics that determine what kinds of issues need to be resolved so that a "purposeful and critical, yet appreciative"[9] negotiation can occur. The most significant issue is that media is malleable according to its use by the audience, rather than possessing innately deterministic qualities that shape an audience beyond its control. Third, the protean nature of the medium forms the basis

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[7] My emphasis is on the user of technology as an active agent as opposed to the concept of technological determinism, and technological agency, both of which are sometimes used synonymously in the discourse of media studies.

[8] Dawson builds on Baym's original analysis and argues for four sets of formative factors to which research of virtual communities should give due attention. These are technical, cultural, social and immediate situational factors. Dawson also notes what some claim constitute "warrants" for "being considered evidence of the existence of a virtual community" according to the "degree that it displays six elements: (1) interactivity; (2) stability of membership; (3) stability of identity; (4) netizenship and social control; (5) personal concern; (6) occurrence in a public space." Lorne L. Dawson, "Religion and the Quest for Virtual Community," in *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet,* ed. Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan (New York: Routledge, 2004), 82-83.

[9] John Ferre, "The Media of Popular Piety," in *Mediating Religion: Conversations in Media, Religion and Culture,* ed. Jolyon Mitchell and Sophia Marriage (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 89. Ferre is citing a study done by Iorio's of Mennonites with this being her characterization of a Mennonite communities' perspective and use of media.

for the concept of the agency of the user. Chapter 2 features the integrative nature of community, identity and embodiment in cyberspace life compared to non-cyberspace life, in light of the fact that boundaries between lives online and offline blur. Such blurring means that people and technologies co-create opportunities for interaction both in cyberspace and non-cyberspace so that there is agency within and in relation to the Internet. Therefore, the chapter provides the foundation for understanding the capacity of the Internet as a venue for communal ritual practice that can be shaped by its users.

In Chapter 3, I apply the tripartite development followed in Chapter 2, adding the element of religious practice. I discuss the Eucharist as a religious ritual in cyberspace as *networked communication media characterized by the agency of the user in carrying out religious praxis.* I look at the online community of NBC as a networked community, within a communication medium, functioning as agents. Chapter 3 begins the case study. In it I present and analyze the actual narrative of how the community at NBC practiced Eucharist in cyberspace. I explore the idea that the ritual of Eucharist arose within the context of a networked community, a social location in which robust religious communal experience occurred and was strengthened when the ritual took place online. As a social location in mediated communication I show that in keeping with a ritual view of communication introduced in Chapter 2, the Eucharist performed in cyberspace becomes a meaningful zone of symbolic interaction for ritual practice. I also discuss a concept of aesthetics that is compatible with what NBC did, in aiding in the online practice to fulfill its religious purpose within the medium of cyberspace. The agency of the user will also be discussed regarding the way that the ritual was used to experiment, yet solidify, the identity of the users and user community. I use this to argue that ritual observance in

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cyberspace enables meaningful shaping of media by a human agent. Embracing agency in cyberspace, therefore, does not compromise the identity and embodiment of the human person.

In Chapter 4, I continue with the second half of the case study, giving a narrative of the reactions of two different listservs of Wesleyan/holiness scholars, and suggest terms of negotiation that involve a strategies of reconfiguring and innovating cyberspace for this practice. I argue that the Eucharist in networked communities does not compromise a solid practice of this communal rite, as some suggest in their reactions. I also argue that Eucharist in the mediated communication of cyberspace need not compromise a commitment to materiality. I also contend that it need not cut the user community off from materiality so that the handling of symbols is compromised. Finally, I argue that reconfiguring the Eucharist in terms of agency of the user does not compromise being fully human in cyberspace.[10]

Discussions in Chapters 3 and 4 concern negotiations about media usage in a faith community, and are informed in large part by religion and media scholar Heidi Campbell, who has called for a "systematic approach to the study of religious communities' engagement with new media forms." In light of this statement, she also introduces the "social shaping of technology (SST) approach" that offers a dynamic and robust basis for studying how religious communities "negotiate their uses of media, especially in an age of new digital, networked technologies."[11] Campbell explains that

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[10] We do not become robots, as we are in control. Technology does not have the power to alter any aspect of us beyond our choice.

[11] Heidi A. Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 41.

there are religious communities that have historical life practices and interpretative

traditions to consider in the "contemporary outworking of their values," all of which

inform their choices with regard to technology; thus, there is a need for what she calls the

"religious shaping approach to technology."[12] The latter, labeled RSS, I use to identify

and analyze the key values and beliefs operating for the professor and the class who

engaged in configuring the Internet so that they experienced a meaningful sharing of the

Eucharist.

I also find Campbell helpful as she points out that "assumptions and beliefs

underlying these technological choices" need to be considered.[13] Campbell concurs with

media theorists such as Ferre, who spotlights "the range of approaches taken" in media

scholarship on religious communities' use of media finding that the SST approaches have

been overlooked. This means that acknowledgment that these communities are audiences

who are "active participants in technology decision-making, rather than passive

respondents to the powers of technology,"[14] has also been neglected. As an insider who

offers theoretical considerations for entering a process of negotiation, I seek to

understand issues and the processes of community negotiation and also to stake a claim

of what kinds of assumptions and issues should be considered in moving toward a

solution. Scholars of the Internet, Lorne Dawson and Douglas Cowan, contend in their

volume on religion online that its presence is growing daily.[15] Some growth is in the

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[12] Heidi A. Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media,* 41-42.

[13] Heidi A. Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media,* 44.

[14] Heidi A. Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, 62.

[15] Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan, "Introduction," in *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet,* ed. Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan (New York: Routledge, 2004), 6.

realm of religious groups who want to adapt religious tradition to online venues. The case study of NBC is an example of a religious community not only grappling with the Internet's capacity to operate as a venue for religious ritual, but whether or not a highly valued tradition surrounding the religious ritual of the Christian Eucharist is *itself* compromised by attempts at innovation and reconfiguration for cyberspace.

Chapter 5 builds on Chapter 4, which suggests that a controversy like this within a faith community can be construed as a "kiln" out of which a refined stance can be taken, and move toward proposing how innovating and reconfiguring technology occurs according to faith commitments. I explore what those theological commitments are and show how they can be adapted theologically to foreground the practice for a faith community concerned about expressing their tradition in a new technological mode.

Those involved in the controversy narrated in Chapter 4 reflected, in large part, the mentality of traditioned Christian scholars. I borrow the term "traditioned" from Sheila Davaney's characterization of the post-liberal understanding of those such as Lindbeck[16] regarding the use of tradition for Christian theology. The presumption of a traditioned community is that paramount to the theological task is discovery of, and conformity to, normative nonambiguous Christian practice. Thus, theologians from that tradition presume that with an increase of knowledge they will "find" the most "accurate" and "exacting" rendering of tradition, and in doing so "must" judge how far a current practice deviates from an essential norm. This includes judging particular aspects of newer expression of that practice to be heretical in light of previously determined, non-

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[16] Sheila Greeve Davaney, *Pragmatic Historicism: A Theology For The Twentieth Century* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 32, 197. Davaney notes that Kathryn Tanner departs from Lindbeck, which I do in the same manner as Tanner.

ambiguous heresies they believe are operating in a newer form of practice. This is an anachronism in the sense that current concerns are deemed similar to those of long ago, and upon being exposed in the new practice, the practice is rejected.

Kathryn Tanner offers an alternative in a theological methodology that is more satisfying in dealing with Christian communities who value their tradition and yet see the need to adapt to changing realities (including the use of the Internet) for the Eucharist. Tanner employs cultural theory from those such as Stuart Hall. Hall's work is compatible with audience reception theory.[17] Using cultural theory, Tanner shows that when there is a desire for commonality within a community, and an avoidance of divisiveness, the typical response in the history of Christianity has been to prevent disagreement by enforcing "a uniformity of conceptions by setting up a hierarchy of interpretative experts and consolidating their power to transmit a preferred sense."[18] This scenario is contested, however, when practitioners within these traditioned communities become active agents, not passive ones. The discursive frame of reference that brings cultural theory to bear on theological controversy provides a central approach in this dissertation to understanding the dynamics of what occurred in the case study, and also aids in thinking in terms of further dialogue toward a solution.

Tanner proposes that the community of faith should function as a "*genuine* community of argument" that is unified in promoting "Christian social practices," but is yet "marked by mutual hearing and criticism among those who disagree, by a common commitment to mutual correction and uplift, in keeping with the shared hope of good

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[17] See chapter 2 for a discussion about audience reception theory.

[18] Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 123.

discipleship, proper faithfulness, and purity of witness."[19] This viewpoint is compatible

with the view of an active audience shaping the technology for use, while preserving

what they deem valuable as the essential aspects of a traditional practice such as the

Eucharist. The NBC online class narrated in Chapter 3, and a few scholars in the

controversy discussed in Chapter 4, fall in this category, being willing to think in terms of

a community of argument.

The case of NBC illustrates users being challenged by those who believe they are

responsible to maintain a dominant articulation of tradition. I find Tanner's insights

helpful as I point out that in the case of NBC, users do not simply muddle through what

the Christian response might be in a specific situation, but reflect the spirit of theological

work today vis-à-vis innovation.   To use Tanner's words, they are "freeing and

empowering . . . the variety of ways that Christianity can be put together and pulled apart

for novel rearrangements."[20] Tanner maintains that the community of argument produces

a "richness of so variegated a Christianity [that is] ever dissolving and resolving itself

again into new organized wholes."[21] Further, in her view, present practices have

legitimacy on their own terms even if Christians in another time and place would not

completely agree or disagree. The practice is still within a "genuine tradition of

argument."[22]

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[19] Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture,* 123-24.

[20] Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity And The Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), xvii.

[21] Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity And The Trinity,* xviii.

[22] Kathryn Tanner, "Tradition and Theological Judgment in Light of Postmodern Cultural Criticism," in *Tradition and Tradition Theories: An International Discussion,* ed. Thorsten Larbig, Siegfried Wiedenhofer (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 244.

In Chapter 5, I creatively redeploy[23] theological tradition, looking at the practice in tripartite fashion as *networked communication medium of grace characterized by the agency of a user, who joins other participants in a sacramental encounter with Christ.* I will redeploy the Wesleyan/holiness tradition, concerning Eucharist theology with regard to each aspect of the tripartite development, arguing that Wesleyan/holiness views are compatible with each of the concepts in such a development. But I will redeploy Calvin with regard to his compatibility with the Wesleyan/holiness tradition regarding the presence of Christ when the Eucharist itself is understood as a communication medium. Such traditions most directly inform the understanding of the Eucharist theology of the Church of the Nazarene reflected in the practice of the NBC online class/faith community.

I show that a Wesleyan/holiness view is compatible with a sacramental encounter with Christ in a networked community. I make the point that there is theological warrant to understand Eucharist in cyberspace as both a reflection of the coming together of a network as a community, as well as serving to perpetuate this community. Eucharist in cyberspace can be a local and universal communal practice because of the nature of networks as community on the Internet. The Wesleyan/holiness tradition contends that the Eucharist cannot be understood apart from its essential nature as a communal activity. Further it cannot be separated from the context of the church functioning as a community. The section on network community will focus on Wesleyan/holiness theologians, including the Wesleys, showing that the communal aspect related to the Eucharist can be innovatively retained in cyberspace.

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[23] I will explain this term I borrowed from Kathryn Tanner in Chapter 5.

I show that the Eucharist itself is a communicative medium of grace that is conducive to a spiritual and real encounter with Christ. I demonstrate as well that the concept of spiritual presence as real presence, alongside a commitment to reconfigure use of the medium to employ tangible symbols is a notion that can be supported first by Calvin, and then by proponents of the Wesleyan/holiness tradition of Eucharist theology. I argue that the nature of the Eucharist as an encounter with Christ, as it was first understood by Calvin, contributes a highly developed view of the spiritual presence of Christ in the Eucharist complements a view of the real presence found in the Wesleyan/holiness Eucharist theology. I use the theological anthropology of the Wesleyan/holiness tradition to show that it is compatible with view of the agency of users in the Eucharist, meaningfully fulfilling its theological function within cyberspace.

The Definition, Description and Use of Key Terms and Phrases

Before proceeding to the analysis beginning in Chapter 2, the unique character of this discussion calls for clarification of terms used throughout the following chapters. Explanation of the use of these terms in this dissertation helps facilitate as much as possible the discussion of the main ideas without being caught up in the ambiguity of the terms used various ways in the literature.

The place I begin is the general and key overarching term: *cyberspace.* The term is recognized by the literature surrounding the development of the Internet as being pioneered by the author William Gibson in his 1984 science fiction novel *Neuromancer*.[24] Gibson's novel tells the story of Case, a "cyberspace cowboy," a

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[24] See Jeffrey P. Zaleski, *The Soul of Cyberspace: How Technology Is Changing Our Spiritual Lives* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 30; Katherine N. Hayles, *How We Became Post-Human: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Infomatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 36; David

computer hacker who lost a life he had once had, a life in which he had "jacked into a custom cyberspace deck that projected his disembodied consciousness in the consensual hallucination that was the matrix."[25] He made the mistake of stealing from those for whom he had stolen, and in this ostracized state, "still dreamed of cyberspace, hope fading nightly . . . he'd see the matrix in his sleep, bright lattices of logic unfolding across that colorless void. . . ."[26] Cyberspace as a concept began in science fiction as a computer generated world that captured the imagination of those in computer technology. Hayles notes that in this instance science fiction actually "had considerable effect on the development of three-dimensional virtual reality imaging software."[27]

Cyberspace is considered a key concept in computer or cyberculture, and is described as "the space created through the confluence of electronic communications networks such as the Internet" that enables communication "between any number of people who may be geographically dispersed around the globe."[28] In the early days of the Internet, the literature is replete with interest in how to define this "new world," so that life related to it can be understood. For example, from an architectural, engineering, mathematical perspective, Michael Benedikt proposes that cyberspace is a "globally networked, computer sustained, computer-accessed, and computer mediated,

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Bell, Brian D. Loader, Nicolas Pleace, and Douglas Schuler, eds. "Cyberspace," in *Cyberculture: The Key Concepts,* (London: Routledge, 2004), 50-53; and Heidi Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online: We Are One in The Network* (New York: P. Lang, 2005), xv.

[25] William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace Books, 1984), 5.

[26] William Gibson, *Neuromancer,* 4-5.

[27] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Post-Human: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Infomatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 21.

[28] David Bell, Brian D. Loader, Nicolas Pleace, and Douglas Schuler, eds. "Cyberspace," in *Cyberculture: The Key Concepts,* 50.

multidimensional, artificial or virtual reality" to which "every computer is a window."[29]

As such, he writes that like the "real world," cyberspace "will continue to enlarge, to fill in, to 'complexify,' evolve, and involve indefinitely." He predicts that "second generation builders" will find this new reality to have its "own, seemingly self-evident rules." Benedikt is an example of early attempts to develop the idea of cyberspace as its own world by exploring rules and principles of cyberspace using "decidedly low-altitude mathematics." He takes the technical topological aspects, calling them "rubrics" and tries to show that can be applied as "rules and principles of natural, physical space." Such "rubrics" that describe this world are: "dimensionality, continuity, curvature, density and limits."[30] Michael Heim enters the conversation taking a metaphysical approach. As he explores the ontology of cyberspace, he believes it is important to recognize that "Cyberspace is more than a breakthrough in electronic media or computer interface design. With its virtual environments and simulated worlds, cyberspace is a metaphysical laboratory, a tool for examining our very sense of reality."[31] Another prominent writer from early literature regarding cyberspace as its own world is Margaret Wertheim, who writes that in mid-1998, there were one hundred million people accessing the Internet on a regular basis. She describes the world accessed by the Internet by saying, "In a very profound sense, this new digital is 'beyond' the space that physics describes, for the cyber-realm is not made up of physical particles and forces, but of *bits* and *bytes*." She adds in a way reminiscent of Benedikt and Heim:

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[29] Michael Benedikt, "Cyberspace: Some Proposals," in *Cyberspace: First Steps.* ed. Michael Benedikt (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 122-23.

[30] Michael Benedikt, "Cyberspace: Some Proposals,"132.

[31] Michael Heim, *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 82.

It may be an obvious statement to say . . . but it is also a revolutionary one . . . The electronic gates of the silicon chip have become, in a sense, a metaphysical gateway . . . . Here, either mechanistic, or relativistic, or quantum laws apply. Traveling from Web site to Web site, my 'motion' cannot be described by *any* dynamical equations.[32]

The sense that cyberspace is a type of world has continued in conversations about life on the Internet. Recently, Sherry Turkle writes of the circles she moves in at places like MIT, where she is given business cards on which people include the name of their avatar in *Second Life* alongside their "real-life" names.[33]

The interest in defining cyberspace as being its own new space and location, and possessing metaphysical qualities, has given way to descriptions of its function as a social location. Jeff Zaleski, in his recorded interview with John Perry Barlow, another pioneer in the creation and use of cyberspace, asks Barlow to define cyberspace. Barlow describes cyberspace in terms of its function as "any information space, but it's interactive information space that is created by media that are densely enough shared so that there's a sense of other people being present."[34] Zaleski, as does Barlow, explains that cyberspace is "virtual space created through activation of a computer," and also maintains that cyberspace is space defined by its interactive character.[35]

In this study I explore cyberspace according to the manner most consistent across the literature, as life on the Internet in which social activity defines a social location. Thus, cyberspace is the term for the general setting of a computer generated

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[32] Margaret Wertheim, *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace* (London: Virago, 2000), 228-29.

[33] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 160.

[34] Jeffrey P. Zaleski, *The Soul of Cyberspace: How Technology Is Changing Our Spiritual Lives* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 29.

[35] Jeffrey P. Zaleski, *The Soul of Cyberspace,* 30.

interactive social location. In my discussion, evaluation of issues related to life in cyberspace in general, and religion in cyberspace vis-à-vis a Eucharist ritual in particular, shifts almost exclusively to its nature according to its function. In the interest of highlighting its uniqueness and avoiding entangling discussions of tautological import, in my commentary and analysis, I speak of cyberspace not as an opposite of "real" space or "physical space," but as an opposite of "non-cyberspace." As the discourse is neither consistent in its understanding of the nature of cyberspace, nor of the way that it uses terminology related to it, I neither alter nor explain completely the use of these terms in the literature I engage beyond my own use of the term for my analysis.

The next significant term is *virtual*, which I compare to that which is *non-virtual.* In this, it is my intention to not lapse into "real world" versus "virtual world" in my interpretations. However, as with cyberspace/non-cyberspace, there are some who are not able to escape this dilemma in their discussions. I use the term "virtual" to describe the mode of experience within the interactive location of cyberspace. It is in the use of this terminology with regard to cyberspace that discussion can bog down into issues of "What is real?" or "How close to non-cyberspace experience does the experience in cyberspace need to be before it can be counted as real?" The question of how advanced the technology should be to be "real enough" is answered when it is shown that its use as a mode of experience has a broad application. In a collaborative article by Internet scholars Stephen O'Leary and Brenda Brasher, in the early days of the Internet, the issue of how sophisticated technology was going to have to become so that the virtual was "real enough" was very important. The two made enthusiastic predictions of what the

new technology might bring forth in online religious community and practice.[36] But in an article nearly ten years later, one of the authors, O'Leary, writes that he also doesn't see that there would be much change in the virtual experience of cyberspace in the basic mode of interaction, even if more advanced technology was utilized.[37] The view that cyberspace as a detached, separate world, is more about interactive social space, no matter how advanced virtual experience becomes, also moves in the direction of viewing the social space as integrative with non-cyberspace life. For example, Sherry Turkle, in light of her long association with MIT, makes the point that technological advances has come to mean a greater and more radical integration of technology into everyday life, with people "always on"(always online). She characterizes new levels of sophistication in the technology itself being very much about this integration.[38]

In cyberspace, virtuality describes "computer systems that create a realtime 3D audio and visual experience depicting a simulation of reality or an imagined reality." This experience in a simulated world is generally known as "virtual reality" or "VR,"[39] and can involve forms of virtual interaction, such as cyborgs and avatars.[40] Although in

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[36] Stephen O'Leary and Brenda Brasher, "The Unknown God of the Internet," in *Philosophical Perspectives On Computer-mediated communication,* ed. Charles Ess (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 264.

[37] See Stephen O'Leary, "Utopian and dystopian possibilities of networked religion in the new millennium," in *Religion And Cyberspace*, ed. Moren T. Hojsgaard and Margit Warburg, (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 41-43.

[38] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together,* 151, 293-96.

[39] David Bell, Brian D. Loader, Nicolas Pleace, and Douglas Schuler, eds."Virtual Reality," in *Cyberculture: The Key Concepts,* (London: Routledge, 2004), 178.

[40] A cyborg is a "cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism," carried out in various ways. Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149. An avatar is an animated figure of a person, placed within the animated world of a cyberspace site. See David Bell, Brian D. Loader, Nicolas Pleace, and Douglas Schuler, eds. "Avatar" in *Cyberculture: The Key Concepts,* (London: Routledge, 2004), 8.

the literature, virtuality is typically referenced in this way, it has come to refer to a variety

of ways to interact on the Internet other than exclusive engagement in an immersive

world of virtual reality. For example, Campbell points out that virtual--in the sense of

virtual relationships--should be thought of as "real" in the sense "that they represent

actual social interactions, though they are mediated."[41] She also observes that a debate

has raged on through those such as virtual community pundit Howard Rheingold, who

argues against those who insist that anything labeled virtual is a simulation, and therefore

less than real.[42] As will be shown in Chapters 3 and 4 in this dissertation, this tension is

reflected in the remarks of the professor who completed an online Eucharist with his

students. This professor wrote on May 21, 2008 to the administration and faculty of

NBC about the experience before it was sent to the wider constituency. As he described

the experience, he used the term "virtual" as an adjective to describe the mode of the

experience, stating that he and his students "virtually" passed the bread and the cup to

brothers and sisters in three time zones, and stated that it "became a sacred experience

that I will never forget."[43] In subsequent correspondence to me, in 2009, he makes it a

point to tell me that he "never referred to this experience as 'virtual communion.'"[44] In a

2011 phone interview, when asked why he made this qualifying statement about the

phrase "virtual communion," he emphasizes that he did not want to use the word

"virtual" because, as he states "I believe it was real. . .we were transcending the

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[41] Heidi Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online: We Are One in The Network* (New York: P. Lang, 2005), 48-49.

[42] Heidi Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online,* 41-42.

[43] NBC Professor, email to Nazarene Bible College email list of Faculty; Cabinet' Adjunct, Mary 21, 2008.

[44] NBC Professor, email to Janice L. Duce, May 12, 2009.

technological barrier; there was still a spiritual connection.'"[45] He also states that the

experience was not exclusively "virtual" because each student had their own physical

bread and drink at their individual computers.[46] As is also noted in Chapter 3, NBC uses

the term "VC" to refer to the virtual classroom, which is defined as occurring online, but

is also distinguished by its "interpersonal" nature.[47] The NBC professor uses the term

"virtual" in the sense used by Campbell and Rheingold, who show that "virtual", refers

primarily to the mode of communal interaction and exchange in a communication

medium.[48]

 The emphasis on the fact that "virtual" has come to refer to the mode of

experience and interaction is illustrated by the fact that characters such as avatars can be

said to exist in different and less advanced, sophisticated, and immersive forms of

virtuality. For example, Sherry Turkle makes the point that even a social networking

profile on Facebook functions like an avatar.[49] Douglas Estes says that even an email

account could be one's avatar. Estes, who has been an advocate and practitioner in

"virtual church," observes that one's avatar is "a rudimentary representation of you in a

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[45] NBC Professor, July 28, 2011, phone.

[46] NBC Professor, July 28, 2011, phone.

[47] "The online instructor's supreme achievement in the virtual world is communication from personality to personality." Ken W. White, "Face To Face In The Online Classroom: Keeping It Interpersonal and Human," in *The Online Teaching Guide,* ed. Ken W. White and Bob H. Weight (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2000), 11.

[48] In Chapter 2 I show that Howard Rheingold later decided that he did not prefer the term "virtual" to describe the online communities with which he had experience.

[49] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together,* 191.

virtual environment." [50] Thus, the primary use of "virtual," in keeping with the general sense of the literature, refers to mode of environment and the mode of the user in such an environment. I will use the term "virtual" in the sense of the mode of involvement in the experience online that does not have to be fully immersed in "virtual reality."

The next term to define is *online.* This term refers to the mode of delivery of interaction that occurs using the *Internet.* Bell defines "online" as "the act of using a computer network, such as the Internet."[51] This is the way I use the term in my interpretative analysis, with reference to its opposite as either "offline" or "onground." Bell defines the Internet as simply "an international 'network of networks' that uses a common set of standards. . . to permit the interconnection of millions of computers, enabling such services as electronic mail and remote access to information."[52] In this analysis, the Internet is a title for the infrastructure that makes possible an online mode of delivery, a virtual mode of experience, and the setting of cyberspace as a social location.

Regarding theological terms, there are two that need to be explained. The first is the use of the term *Eucharist* as the descriptor of the event and also as a referent for theoretical and theological discussion. Although other terms are used within the Calvinist and the Wesleyan/holiness traditions, such as "The Lord's Supper" and "Holy Communion," I will use the term "Eucharist." The term denotes the general theological

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[50] Estes explains that the term *avatar* of Hindu origin is from Sanskrit meaning "decent." It is "the word for the decent and embodiment of a deity in human form." Douglas Estes, *SimChurch,* 81-82. Its general usage can be adapted for any religious tradition, including Christianity when it is used in a general sense of a person representing themselves in a virtual mode. The term and the concept behind it reinforce the idea of agency. The concept of agency is explored in chapter 2 of this dissertation.

[51] David Bell, Brian D. Loader, Nicolas Pleace, and Douglas Schuler, eds. "Online," in *Cyberculture: The Key Concepts,* (London: Routledge, 2004), 147.

[52] David Bell, Brian D. Loader, Nicolas Pleace, and Douglas Schuler, eds. "Internet," in *Cyberculture: The Key Concepts,* (London: Routledge, 2004), 121.

theme and traditional discourse for the sacrament, "variously called 'the Eucharist,' 'the Mass,' 'the Sacrament of the Altar,' 'the Breaking of Bread,' 'Holy Communion,' or 'the Lord's Supper.'"[53] Van A. Harvey defines the "Eucharist" as a "proper noun derived from the Greek word meaning 'to give thanks, and refers to the SACRAMENT [sic] of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion." He notes that it is the proper noun used after New Testament times to denote the "central theme in the drama of Christian worship."[54] Thus, this term is used to refer to the practice of the Christian church and accompanying theological reflection. The second is the term *Wesleyan/holiness,* which I use to refer to the theological tradition and discourse discussed in this dissertation.[55] A leading scholar defines the term this way:

> The term *Wesleyan/holiness tradition* thus serves a dual purpose-the word *Wesleyan* indicating the common theological roots the tradition shares with Methodism, and the word *holiness* distinguishing this tradition from that part of contemporary mainline Methodism that does not identify with the holiness movement.[56]

My work is informed by conversations within the Wesleyan/holiness discourse and is also directly related to the doctrine and practice of the Church of the Nazarene.

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[53] B.A. Gerrish, "Eucharist," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of The Reformation,* vol. 2, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 71-72.

[54] Van A Harvey, "Eucharist," in *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 88. Here the term is also used as a descriptor of the general discourse surrounding this sacrament across various Christian traditions and perspectives regarding this sacrament.

[55] There are two other prominent examples, see J. Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994); Mark R. Quanstrom, *Grace to Grace: The Transforming Power of Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2011), 13.

[56] Rob T. Staples, *Outward Sign And Inward Grace: The Place of The Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1991), 13.

Conclusion

In the following chapters, I examine the event of the Eucharist in *cyberspace* as that of a setting described and defined by its function as a social location and created by online interaction. I discuss the *virtual* as the mode of experience within the interactive social location created in cyberspace. I use the term *online* to refer to the mode of delivery that hosts cyberspace using the *Internet.* The analysis is framed according to the essential features of what constitutes meaningful community, the nature of the medium as a ritual space, and issues related to technology as shaped by active users.

I also show that cyberspace can accommodate meaningful religious ritual, and that the features that go into the Eucharist--according to Calvinist and Nazarene/holiness traditions--are compatible with innovative practices in cyberspace. A networked community found in cyberspace has the capacity to experience community in a theologically significant way, such that Christians can seek and find authentic sharing together and with Christ a Eucharistic experience. Theologically, the Eucharist itself is a mediating event in which the ritual functions as communication between Christ and His church. Users in cyberspace can innovate and reconfigure the medium of the ritual to retain the essential features of an experience of Christ communing with the cyberspace faith community as it partakes of symbols and experiences anew a mediation of grace. Further, I show that the user is a free and active agent, fully engaged as an embodied agent redeploying Wesleyan/holiness Eucharist theology in cyberspace. I also include an understanding of the agent, or user, in terms of the *imago dei*, which encompasses an understanding that the user/user community is fully human as their Creator intended in

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their worship through Eucharist in cyberspace, empowered to apply their tradition to practice in this mode.

CHAPTER TWO: CYBERSPACE AS NETWORKED MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

The problem of traditional Christian religious practices occurring in cyberspace revolves around the legitimacy of the Internet as a location of religious community. Media scholars Maxwell and Campbell, each in separate treatments of the topic, indicate that reactions range from hailing online religious practice as a fresh halcyon, as glorified "Internet-as religion," in which being in cyberspace itself is a spiritual experience, a "transmundane 'hyper-space;'"[57] to that of describing global computer networking as the Tower of Babel[58] in which humankind creates its own universe. Although there are many implications of these kinds of descriptions and perspectives, the most poignant issue behind these perspectives is arguably not religious practice in a newer medium such as cyberspace, but the nature of cyberspace itself.

As I examine the general nature of the cyberspace phenomenon, which has implications regarding religious in cyberspace in general, and pertinent issues regarding the practice of Christian Eucharist in cyberspace in particular, I take my cues from Stewart Hoover's "cultural studies" approach, which looks at cyberspace as a "lived context."[59] Thus, the examination of cyberspace within the medium of the Internet

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[57] Patrick Maxwell, "Virtual Religion in Context", *Religion* (2002): 32, 344.

[58] Heidi Campbell, "Approaches to Religious Research in Computer-Mediated Communication," in *Mediating Religion: Conversations in Media, Religion and Culture,* ed. Jolyon Mitchell and Sophia Marriage, (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 215.

[59] Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in The Media Age* (New York, Routledge, 2006), 16.

reflects an approach that has a "role for media . . . as integrated into life rather than in their potential influence on life."[60] Campbell identifies Hoover's phrase, "the Culturalist turn," as describing the study of how users "derive personal meaning and significance" from engagement with media.[61] Campbell provides a framework toward understanding the negotiation process for NBC and its constituency, which will receive more specific attention in a further chapter. The discussion in this chapter approximates what Campbell discusses regarding users and user communities in their approaches to technology. When the question arises of whether or not to accept, reject, or reconfigure/innovate the Internet for a religious community,[62] the nature of the medium and implications for what kinds of communal life are possible need to be resolved.

I use the description, *networked communication media characterized by the agency of the user*, as a starting point to examine the nature of life in cyberspace. Influenced by the analytical strategy of David Morgan, each section of this chapter explains each key word or phrase to lay a foundation for the analysis undertaken in later chapters.[63] In this chapter, I examine the nature of cyberspace with regard to its nature as: networks, communication media, and the active agent. These are intertwined with issues of community, identity, embodiment, and negotiation between technologies such as the Internet, communities in general and religious communities in particular.

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[60] Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in The Media Age*, 16.

[61] Heidi A. Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* , 42.

[62] Heidi A. Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, 112,122.

[63] David Morgan, "Preface," in *Key Words in Religion, Media And Culture,* ed. David Morgan (New York: Routledge, 2008), xii-xiii.

Cyberspace As Networked Communities

A nagging concern regarding the Internet is whether or not it can be said that real community can take place in cyberspace.[64] I believe that online communities are networks, and that this reflects the kinds of connections and interactions characteristic of contemporary society as a whole. In the section below I will show that "network" is an adequate way to describe community. Therefore when persons in cyberspace are involved in networks they are involved in community. Further, I will argue that connection through networks need not invariably isolate participants from communal involvement with others. Characterized as a network connection, networked communities are integrative, meaning that they do not inherently represent a detachment from one's onground community and embodied identity.

Toward Community As Networks in Cyberspace

In this subsection I will survey the various ways in which both classic and contemporary understandings of community from a sociological viewpoint have informed the conversation of whether or not real community can exist online. The concern about whether or not real community can exist online is ubiquitous among those who study online group interactions. I will argue that the fullest understanding of community in cyberspace as networks is ameliorated when networks as community is fully embraced.

In light of "[the] modern fragmentation and loss of community" social observers and social researchers are "generically" and "fretfully engaged" in developing a viable

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[64] See the introduction where the use of this term is defined.

definition and sturdy criteria for what constitutes community.[65] "Classic"

conceptualizations of community for the modern period go back to the context of change

in Europe in the nineteenth century. This perspective fears the passing away of an older

way of life as it gives way to modern, urban life, and is found in classifying, theorizing,

and critiquing Western culture, especially in the work of Durkheim, Marx, Toennies, and

Wirth.[66] In contrast, some contemporary theories of community such as the social

constructionist approach, grounded in the work of Thomas, Schultz, Berger, and

Luckmann, is more concerned about how people live in communities and less about

defining it.[67] In the developing tradition of the latter approach are those such as

community scholar Anthony Cohen, who considers the two main elements necessary for

community to be that of consciousness (i.e., "There is a community in which I believe I

am involved") and boundaries (i.e., perceived by those involved as who is included while

being cognizant that there are those who are not).[68]

    With regard to whether or not community can be justified online, a similar divide

exists. Kayahara found that those against the idea of valid community in cyberspace

were not only nostalgic, in their orientation in classic theories about community, but were

mainly concerned about group dynamics and the effectiveness or feasibility of things

such as social control, collective/joint action, and ways that community involvement

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[65] Paul Atkinson and Sara Delamont, "Qualitative Research Traditions," in *The SAGE Handbook of Sociology,* ed. Craig Calhoun, Chris Rojek and Bryan Turner (London: Sage Productions, 2005), 46.

[66] Jennifer Kayahara, "Community and Communication: A Rounded Perspective," in *Networked Neighborhoods: The Connected Community in Context*, ed. Patrick Purcell (London: Springer-Verlag, 2006), 129. I am indebted to her work for classifications and clarity regarding scholarship in the areas of community, networks, and neighborhoods as communities.

[67] Jennifer Kayahara, "Community and Communication: A Rounded Perspective," 137.

[68] Jennifer Kayahara, "Community and Communication: A Rounded Perspective,"137-38.

online helps others look beyond their own self interests to cooperate with others for the sake of the welfare of the life of the group. Among this group of sociologists, she found that there was a tendency to question the quality of these relationships, in which people can be anonymous, create a different persona, or are in and out at will.[69] But those who believe that community can occur online focus on the experiences and perspectives of individuals, including: sociability; mere association for its own sake; support that involves providing assistance; a sense of belongingness; and a sense that one is a part of something larger than one's own self.[70] Debbie Herring in her study of a Usenet/newsgroup called "uk.religion.christian," says that, in studying this group, it was "deemed sufficient that the people being studied considered themselves a community."[71]

Those who look upon the idea of community in cyberspace with disfavor tend to emphasize a nuanced, neighborhood approach to the concept of community. The neighborhood approach begins with the physical setting and assumes that the setting determines the depth of interaction. According to Kayahara, the neighborhood approach, that predates the advent of the Internet, originates in the work of Wirth with an emphasis on settings as he writes about the shift to urban from rural settings.[72] Others, such as Effrat, examine urban--life settings using an ecological approach, where communities are

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[69] Jennifer Kayahara, "Community and Communication: A Rounded Perspective,"145-46, 152.

[70] Jennifer Kayahara, "Community and Communication: A Rounded Perspective," 140-43, 151.

[71] Debbie Herring, "Virtual as contextual, a Net news theology," in *Religion And Cyberspace,* ed. Moren T. Hojsgaard and Margit Warburg (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 150, 152.

[72] Jennifer Kayahara, "Community and Communication: A Rounded Perspective, 133. I should note here that the researchers of Wirth's Chicago School found that those migrating to the city discovered that they really didn't leave behind their rural villages, but in a sense brought significant cultural aspects with them that were significant markers of what they considered to be their community. "What" and "who" as significant markers of the presence of community will be more apparent throughout the rest of this chapter.

thought of in terms of "spatially delimited entities."[73] The same can be said for a

contemporary response also working from a neighborhood orientation,

communitarianism. Kayahara writes that Etzioni characterizes community as constitutive

of "common values, consistent membership, regular social interaction, and the ability to

exercise control over its members." The bias is toward physical space, but it is important

to notice that even here, the emphasis begins to emerge that community has to do with

relationships in the community, interwoven as an effective network of individuals--not

just "one on one" among individuals.[74]

    Robert Putnam is a strong voice from the neighborhood nuanced approach,

emphasizing reciprocity in social capital in community, and can't see this as happening

effectively apart from onground engagement. Putnam's defines his idea of social capital

as, "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate

coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit."[75]

    According to Atkinson and Delamont, Putnam, in *Bowling Alone* (2000)*,*

represents a manifestation of the spirit of some community studies, in which the search

continues for "community and the nostalgia for past intimacies."[76] In this spirit, Putnam

and other social researchers, such as Ryan and Calhoun, contend that this kind of capital--

what they call neighborhood community--cannot be fulfilled in so called online

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[73] Jennifer Kayahara, "Community and Communication: A Rounded Perspective,"133.

[74] Jennifer Kayahara, "Community and Communication: A Rounded Perspective,"135.

[75] Jennifer Kayahara, "Community and Communication: A Rounded Perspective,"136.

[76] Paul Atkinson and Sara Delamont, "Qualitative Research Traditions." 47.

community.[77] Putnam would like to see community ties that are completely face-to-face, which is found in establishing strong local ties based on place. Putnam's idea of social capital is offered in light of his critique of the decline civic engagement of all types, which he documented over a thirty-five-year period, ending in the mid-90's.[78] One of his major concerns is whether online community can sustain and perpetuate civil life and provide leverage for political action.

Howard Rheingold takes Putnam's critique very seriously as he examines as early as 1993 his online community experiences in what was, from early on called WELL.[79] He began his involvement as early as 1985 in a computer conferencing conversation and email exchange forum, which lasted approximately seven years. At some points, he spent an average of two hours a day, seven days a week in the forum.[80] For online life, Rheingold, in trying to grapple with the high level of communal involvement and exchange he encountered in WELL, uses a term for such exchange that is similar to Putnam's: "collective goods." These goods are things of great value that the group recognizes, and can only attain by banding together. For WELL, the three main collective goods are: social network capital; knowledge capital; and communion (support). These occur either exclusively online, or in a combination of online and offline. Rheingold contends:

> Social network capital is what happened when I found a ready-made community in Tokyo, even though I had never been there in the flesh. Knowledge capital is

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[77] Kayahara, "Community and Communication: A Rounded Perspective,"136,148.

[78] Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading On The Electronic Frontier,* rev.ed. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 386.

[79] The letters stand for "Whole Earth Lectronic Link."

[80] Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community,* xv, 42.

what I found in the WELL when I asked questions of the community as an online brain trust representing highly varied accumulation of expertise. And communion is what I found in the Parenting conference when Phil's and Jay's children were sick, and the rest of us used our words to support them.[81]

Rheingold, also sensitive to the criticism of Putnam and others regarding online community and political action, notes the example of a Japanese town, Zushi, in which environmentalists were able to leverage the online support of worldwide environmental advocates in stopping a local development program they deemed an environmental threat to their community.[82] Putnam is convinced that media like television and the Internet helps to create a situation in which people retreat from public involvement to pursue a life in front of a screen, which boils down to merely an individual endeavor.[83] Rheingold counters with another community scholar, Wuthnow, who argues that the tendency to pursue interests apart from institutional association may indicate a change in the manner in which collective civil engagement occurs.[84] Has involvement in cyberspace, by its very nature, tended toward isolation and a lack of leverage for group action? By 2011, when it comes to online social connection and political involvement, the opposite has been the case. Bill Wasik chronicles the emergence of the "flash mob" phenomenon produced by social networking. He writes that these mobs have formed for various reasons, ranging from social, playful mobs, to political ones, or simply to just to wreak havoc. The main point cannot be escaped. Wasik writes:

What we usually want to avoid is the flesh and blood, the unpleasant waits and stares and sweat entailed in vying against other bodies in the same place, at the

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[81] Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, xxviii.

[82] Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, 210.

[83] Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, 387.

[84] Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, 388.

same time, in pursuit of the same resources. And yet: On those rare occasions when we *want* to form a crowd, our tech can work a strange, dark magic.[85]

Clearly, when newer trends reflect that the Internet is not always, by nature, an experience of promoting physical isolation, a fresh approach to understanding community is needed that takes into account not only essential qualities of communal life, but the unique nature of interacting digitally.

I believe the network approach, instead of a neighborhood orientation, is this fresh approach, and that it can and should be the most accurate way to define community. As I have reflected on the literature surrounding networks and community, I have come to think that this shift is necessary to put to rest the kind of nostalgia and neighborhood orientation about community that hinders openness to the idea that genuine community can exist in cyberspace. Network analysis is not exclusively about online networks, nor is it always concerned with questions about community, as there are both network communities and noncommunity networks.[86] But, what the network approach does is frame conversations about online community to emphasize that "network" is a more accurate reflection of the way individuals in the twenty-first century navigate personal connections and communal ties in their lives.

The network approach represented by Barry Wellman is much less concerned about locality in the sense indicated above than it is about the quality of relationships related to the variety of network ties, in which a person is socially engaged. Interestingly, Rheingold adopts insights from network analysis to rethink his discussion of online

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[85] Bill Wasik, "Crowd Control," *Wired,* January, 2012, 78.

[86] Kayahara, "Community and Communication: A Rounded Perspective,"138.

communal experience. In a final chapter of the revised publication of this work in 2000, Rheingold adds one entitled: "Rethinking Virtual Communities." In this, he writes:

> If I had encountered sociologist Barry Wellman and learned about social network analysis when I first wrote about cyberspace cultures, I could have saved us all a decade of debate by calling them 'online social networks' instead of 'virtual communities.'[87]

Campbell indicates in her work regarding religious social networks functioning as online communities that "online religious communities do exist, and some people do describe these online networks as a form of church as well as a community."[88] She also states: "A networked view of community offers an important new approach, not only to examine patterns of online communication and interaction, but also to describe the evolution of community ties within society as a whole."[89]

The type of social research provided by social network analysis points to existing data based on the experience of contemporary communities and the way that people connect. Wellman and Gulia, as far back as 1992, conclude that "most community ties are specialized and do not form densely knit clusters of relationships."[90] They suggest that such community ties characterize the Internet. The Internet amplifies both a specialized and a diversification of *personal portfolios of social ties.*[91] The shift from place-to-place to person-to-person networking, facilitated by the Internet, is toward a

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[87] Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*,359-60.

[88] Heidi Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online,* xix.

[89] Heidi Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online,*38.

[90] Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, 363.

[91] Barry Wellman and Bernie Hogan, "Connected Lives: The Project," in *Networked Neighborhoods: The Connected Community in Context,* ed. Patrick Purcell (London: Springer-Verlag, 2006), 164-65. Emphasis mine.

social structure that Wellman calls "networked individualism."[92] The significance of Wellman's characterization of this shift should not escape notice because he argues that the advent and growth of the Internet and social networking did not change the local, close knit pastoral community but simply reflects the individual networking that was already occurring.

Wellman and Wang's published findings indicate some evidence that social connectivity continues to change related to the mode of connectivity, but social connectivity, and the abundance of friendships among adult Americans, has not declined. Furthermore, this trend is similar among Internet non-users, light users, moderate users, and heavy users across communication contexts: offline, virtual only, and migratory from online to offline.[93] Wellman and Wang, in their quantitative study, respond to what they believe is an unwarranted concern about the decline of friendship and social connectivity with regard to the Internet.[94]

In the study, Wellman and Wang ask survey questions about friends based on the venue in which the friends were known: offline, virtual, migratory,[95] and asked for respondents to name the number of friends in these categories.[96] Regarding offline

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[92] Barry Wellman and Bernie Hogan, "Connected Lives: The Project,"162, 165. According to Wellman and Hogan, "networked individualism" is a characterization that flies in the face of those such as McLuhan (change from bounded community to global village), Cairncross (the death of distance) and Friedman (the world is flat).

[93] Hua Wang and Barry Wellman, "Social Connectivity in America: Changes in Adult Friendship Network Size From 2000-2007," *American Behavioral Scientist* 53, no.8 (April 2010): 1149.

[94] Hua Wang and Barry Wellman, "Social Connectivity in America," 1150,1152.

[95] Hua Wang and Barry Wellman, "Social Connectivity in America," 1157. Wellman and Wang use the term "migratory" to describe friendships in which online contacts migrate from online to face-to-face encounters.

[96] Hua Wang and Barry Wellman, "Social Connectivity in America," 1154.

friendships, survey questions ask about "friends outside of one's household with whom

they see or speak to at least once a week." They find that compared to McPherson et.al,

who find that 23% of Americans adults did not have anyone available to discuss

important matters; the less restrictive question above yielded only 5% who indicate that

they do not have any friends with whom they see or speak with weekly. More

significant, heavy Internet users actually show the largest increase of offline friends

during 2002-2007. This shows that the advent of the Internet does not necessarily mean

that people have become more isolated, and that Internet use inherently creates isolation

in adults. Their analysis shows that just more than one fifth of all Internet users report

having one or more virtual friends who are online only. The higher the level of Internet

use, the more virtual friends, and for those who do have virtual friends, they tend to have

quite a few. Their analysis shows that migratory friends are less common than virtual

friends. But when they do have them, they often have more than one. Heavy Internet

users are the most apt to have more migratory friends. They conclude that friendship is

still abundant, although meeting new friends online is not yet prevalent.[97] Wellman and

Wang speculate that with Internet use becoming normalized, the boundaries between

online and offline are "ever blurring." Socially, they suspect, there is a reciprocal

feedback process of "those with more friends use the Internet more to keep in contact;

those with heavy Internet use develop more friendships."[98]

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[97]Hua Wang and Barry Wellman, "Social Connectivity in America," 1155-57, 1162.

[98]Hua Wang and Barry Wellman, "Social Connectivity in America," 1164.

Rheingold chronicles how the WELL community found that both migratory and exclusive online involvement produces what he calls real life relationships.[99] Rheingold gives an example of one WELL participant who threatened online suicide, and proceeded to "kill" himself there by using a scribbling program extracting all of his history and his existence in posts, creating an eerie, moth eaten appearance in conversational threads. In offline life, when he actually did commit suicide, many WELLites attended the funeral. Wellman observes difference in the eulogies offered offline to those posted online. In the offline funeral, eulogies and interactions are reserved and cordial. Online, eulogies and other related exchanges were visceral including WELLites attacking each other with accusations of hypocrisy in their expression of sorrow, and a lack of sincerity with regard to friendship.[100] For this community, emotional expressions of concern manifested online, rather than offline, showing that online should not be presumed to be inherently less personal and social than offline.

Clearly, thinking of connections and community as networks is compatible with understanding cyberspace as a social location for community, as networks characterize online interaction. But the question is still being debated as to whether or not networking is adequate for a significant aspect of community, that of friendship. The study by Wellman, mentioned above, notes that the word "friend" began expanding with the beginnings of Facebook and MySpace.[101] However, those who participate as well as

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[99]Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, xv-xxxii; 1-55. Incidentally, Rheingold uses the term "real life," and/or the initials IRL for "in real life" in order to contrast it to life online. The extent to which this is meant to judge how "real" life actually is online compared to offline is not the point in using this term. The term or phrase is merely a referent term of distinction for the sake of his narrative.

[100] Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, 23-24.

[101] Hua Wang and Barry Wellman, "Social Connectivity in America," 1154.

critique these connections are not automatically duped into believing that the idea of true friendship no longer matters. Instead, pundits such Steven Levy of *Wired* magazine show concern about looking at the Facebook phenomenon, evaluating how participants choose to define relational significance. For Levy, the idea of friend on Facebook raises, differently, the idea of connection in cyberspace; however it is not the technology of Facebook that changed the idea of friend. Instead, the technology reflects the way friendship and connection is, in large part, perceived. Otherwise cyberspace connection would not have resonated so quickly and easily for people searching for friendship and community. Levy, in his editorial in *Wired* magazine, calls for a "Facebook reset" as he laments that, "for too many of its half billion active users, that carelessly assembled cohort known as the friend list has become a monster."[102] But, he writes that what was once a casual collection of "friends" is now enough a part of everyone's life, that Facebook should designate a day that allows users to easily wipe their friendship slate clean, to "refill the coordinates of our respective social groups only with appropriate people." His whimsical suggestion allows one to avoid awkwardness in eliminating people, and ease in inviting only ones who are most significant in one's life.[103] But most importantly, he shows that ultimately users come back to the same basic concerns about authentic connection and that the issue is not whether or not online connections "should be" but, how they can be adapted to perpetuate significant personal ties for the user in cyberspace.

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[102] Steven Levy, "Facebook Reset," *Wired,* March, 2011, 62.

[103] Steven Levy, "Facebook Reset, 62.

In thinking about Facebook and its implications for Christians who participate in it as a part of their communal religious practice, Internet pundit, Jesse Rice affirms similarly as others that social networking online would not have resonated as it has with people if it did not give a sense of authentic connection. Rice takes his cues from psychology, quoting psychologist Janet L. Surrey. She writes:

> Authentic connection is described as the core of psychological wellbeing and is the essential quality of growth-fostering and healing relationships. In moments of deep connection in relationship, we break out of isolation and contraction into a more whole and spacious state of mind and heart.[104]

Building on her ideas and others, Rice locks on the idea that connections must be suitable to the basic human need to experience a connection, and that the most suitable description is a "sense of home."[105] Utilizing the basic idea of home, according to Rice, Facebook satisfies the characteristics of home to a great extent. The four, homelike qualities that Facebook uniquely facilitates are: (1) a place where we keep the stuff that matters to us; (2) a place where we find family; (3) a place where we feel safe because we can control the environment; and (4) a place where we can "be ourselves."[106] Thus, Rice adds that when it comes to younger generations and online church, the core issue is not online versus offline life. The question is how to navigate a composite of both. Another way of framing the question would be not "What is community?" but, "Who is community?"[107]

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[104] Jesse Rice, *The Church of Facebook: How The Hyperconnected Are Redefining Community* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook Publishing, 2009), 28.

[105] Jesse Rice, *The Church of Facebook,* 49,51.

[106] Jesse Rice, *The Church of Facebook*, 76-83.

[107] Jesse Rice, *The Church of Facebook,* 170-71.

The picture of what is going on in communities in cyberspace is not complete until the integrative nature of community, identity, and embodiment in cyberspace, is acknowledged. The latter is explored in the next subsection, where I show that these things that are associated with onground communities are not necessarily completely eliminated in cyberspace.

The Integrative Nature of Community, Identity, And Embodiment in Cyberspace

I have shown that if the network view of community means that the user's experience of community can be summarized by what Wellman has called a *portfolio of personal ties*, spread over cyberspace and non-cyberspace, then the Internet integrated into mainstream life is neither inherently a means of isolation nor inevitably a denial of onground life. In this subsection, I take into consideration other aspects of community involving identity and embodiment arguing that even for exclusively cyberspace connections, one cannot completely escape connections associated with onground life at some level. Thus, with regard to community, identity, and embodiment, the conversation moves beyond pointless hair-splitting over "How much community must I experience while I am online for to ever count as community?" or obsessions over "How much of me must be where for it to always count as the real me?" Below, I will first discuss how some qualitative researchers of online life have come to recognize that users and user communities with regard to their bodies and identity reflect integration of bodies and identity. Second, I will show that other research of communities indicate that community identity often integrates online and offline life.

I glean the idea of the integration of identity and the body/embodiment within cyberspace from Baym et al., who look at these trends through qualitative research about

the Internet. They emphasize that online participants cannot completely leave behind the influence of certain cultural biases and social influences when they are in cyberspace.[108] Baym and Markham contend that more than an instrument of research, the Internet itself is a location of major transformations of media convergence, and the nature of online life is about mediated identities, redefining social boundaries, and transcending geographical boundaries.[109]

Orgad notes that the separation between online and offline, in an important sense, cannot be strictly ascertained. The separation, she notes, has been "deconstructed." She writes: "Researchers have consistently argued for the need to frame the online both in its own right and in relation to other contexts and realities."[110] Gajjala affirms strongly that she thinks research that treats offline and online as distinct, or even mutually exclusive, is a mistake. She notes that she helps her research students understand the interrelationship "between meaning-making in their everyday lives and in online settings." Further, she endorses a practice in which her students "become the interface" in examining online and offline data.[111] Gajjala contends that since becoming the interface occurs by re-coding the self through the interplay of online and offline practices, there is a real sense one can

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[108] Lorne Dawson, "Religion and the Quest for Virtual Community," 82-83. See Nancy K. Baym, "The Emergence of On-line Community," in *Cybersociety 2.0: Revisiting Computer-Mediated Communication and Community,* ed. S. Jones (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998). Dawson provides an excellent summary of Baym's contribution to this discussion.

[109] Annette N. Markham and Nancy K. Baym, "Introduction: Making Smart Choices on Shifting Ground," in *Internet Inquiry: Conversation About Method,"* ed. Annette N. Markham and Nancy K. Baym (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), x.

[110] Shani Orgad, "QUESTION TWO: How Can Researchers Make Sense of the Issues Involved in Collecting and Interpreting Online and Offline Data?" in *Internet Inquiry: Conversation About Method,"* ed. Annette N. Markham and Nancy K. Baym (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 37.

[111] Radhika Gajjala, "A Response to Shani Orgad," in *Internet Inquiry: Conversation About Method,"* ed. Annette N. Markham and Nancy K. Baym (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 62-63.

never really leave their body behind. Embodied, material practice that is also raced, gendered, and classed are present at the online/offline intersection. She comments: "I produce myself through acts of knowledge, memory and everyday habit-reaching for conversations and sites that recognize my presence."[112] Therefore, integration of online and offline means integrated community, identity, and the integrated body.

Bakardjieva thinks we need to move away from a preoccupation with the debate about authenticity, and look at the ways the Internet presents new ways of thinking about practice along a continuum.[113] She also does not believe the Internet is a separate reality, but one of the many ways people interact. In light of this, she prefers the term "virtual togetherness," as this reflects more accurately, in her view, the new vehicle of "multifarious practices" in which people "traverse the social world and penetrate unattainable regions of social anonymity as well as . . . expand their social reach."[114] The virtual cannot be thought of simply as liberating or superior, nor as detached and inferior. Instead, she notes that cultures online have their roots in forms of life existing in the real world, and as for the social aspect in particular: "people bring . . . stocks of knowledge and systems of relevance generated throughout their unalterable personal histories and

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[112] Radhika Gajjala, "A Response to Shani Orgad,"62-63.

[113]Maria Bakardjieva, "Virtual Togetherness: An everyday-life perspective," in *The Cybercultures Reader,* ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 239-47, 251. She actually focuses more on new ways of thinking about practice along a continuum from private consumption to community consumption (in the traditional sense of community); and a new private/public continuum in which there is no critical point at which a person or group's behavior online can be characterized as private versus public.

[114]Maria Bakardjieva, "Virtual Togetherness," 237-38.

social experience."[115] Yet, Bakardjieva, in her response to Orgad above, also says

regarding the Internet:

> And I am ready to bet that as we move into the future . . . online and offline data
> will be routinely collected and used for what they are-complementary records of
> events unfolding within the same social world and not as specimens from two
> different planets.[116]

Haythornthwaite and Kendall present evidence of community identity integration

in their article summarizing studies done on the Internet and community. They indicate

that there are trends in Internet use that show computer-mediated communication

becoming more and more integrated with everyday life. These studies present the

intersections of online and offline life, reflective of this integration.[117] First they note that

Mesch and Talmud completed a longitudinal study of two suburban communities in

Israel, finding that online presence can have a "local civic benefit" through participation

in electronic rather than face-to-face forums. They found that such forums also

encouraged greater participation. Second, they cite Hampton's study that compares

online communication topics used across disadvantaged and advantaged communities in

the United States, finding that the Internet "affords social cohesion and collective action"

among the disadvantaged. Third, they note studies by Ling and Stald, who conclude

from data from Denmark and Norway pertaining to "intimate technology" (i.e., mobile

phones) that the use of this technology reinforced the identities and lifestyles of an

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[115]Maria Bakardjieva, "Virtual Togetherness,"238. She says that if "virtual community" is used, with the
traditional meaning of community maintained, that it can be regarded as an aspect of "virtual togetherness."
When she writes of "real world," she is using it as a referent to non-virtual, a distinction between the virtual
and non-virtual.

[116] Maria Bakardjieva, "A Response to Shani Orgad," in *Internet Inquiry: Conversation About Method,"*ed.
Annette N. Markham and Nancy K. Baym (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 60.

[117]Caroline Haythornthwaite and Lori Kendall, "Internet and Community," *American Behavioral Scientist*
53, no. 8 (April 2010): 1083.

intimate circle or community. Fourth, they tell of Mazat's study, in which 26 online

communities were studied in the Netherlands, finding that "place-based interaction and

embeddedness facilitate online community interactions." Fifth, the study by Erickson is

discussed because it compares communication practices on two micro-blogging sites:

Jaiku and Twitter. He found the Jaiku community to be more "tuned to conversation in

which people have a sense of others and so develop mutual feelings of familiarity and

trust." By contrast Twitter users rely "more on geographical references to establish a

sense of place." Sixth is the study by Lev-On discussing Gush Katif, a group of 21

Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip who maintained community cohesion online after

being dismantled during Israeli withdrawal from the area. Seventh is the study by

Shklovski, Burke, Keisler, and Kraut of musicians from New Orleans who, after being

scattered by Hurricane Katrina, maintained a flourishing community connection through

the Internet and mobile phones, strengthening their ability to rebuilding the physical New

Orleans and gain a renewed identity with regard to physical location.[118]

Cyberspace As Communication Media

The Internet, in which users engage in cyberspace, is primarily a communication

phenomenon. Internet scholars such as Karaflogka believe that part of understanding the

way religious users relate to the Internet involves a sound comprehension and perception

of it as a communication technology.[119] Therefore, the Internet needs to be understood as

a communication medium utilizing relevant theoretical considerations from the discourse

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[118] Caroline Haythornthwaite and Lori Kendall, "Internet and Community," 1088-90.

[119] Anastasia Karaflogka, *E-religion: A Critical Appraisal of Religious Discourse on The World Wide Web*(Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2006), 86-87.

of communication theory in order to understand the nature of cyberspace and further

discussions about the religious use of cyberspace in later chapters. For a robust

understanding of the Internet as communication media, in this section I examine two

views of communication: the transmissional perspective of communication, and the ritual

perspective of communication. For the transmission perspective, the Internet is a

significant means of communication in the sense of transmitting, or interaction by

sending and receiving messages. For the ritual perspective, the Internet is also a location

of shared life and culture.

Cyberspace through the Internet became possible when the development of

technology reached a point in which there was a fusion of computer technology and

telecommunications.[120] Baran and Davis explain that mediated communication can be

thought of as a continuum that stretches between *interpersonal communication* on one

end (the telephone is an example), and traditional *mass communication* on the other end

(television is an example). They also state that where "different media fall along this

continuum depends on the amount of control and involvement people have." They write

that new communication technologies rapidly fill the middle.[121] For my purposes, the

term "mediated communication" includes the idea that as the Internet is such a medium

that fills the middle. Therefore, an analysis of it should include observations of

interpersonal aspects of communication, as well as recognition of characteristics of some

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[120] David Lyon, "A Sociology of Information," in *The Sage Handbook of Sociology,* ed. Craig Calhoun, Chris Rojek and Brian Turner (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 226.

[121] Stanley J. Baran and Dennis K..Davis, *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future,* 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006), 7.

aspects of mass communication as the transmissional and ritual perspectives of mediated

communication are examined.

The Transmissional Perspective of Mediated Communication

The transmissional model of mediated communication comes out of mass

communication theory, attributed to those such as Harold Lasswell, who succinctly

describes communication from this model as "who says what to whom through what

medium with what effect."[122] Roger Silverstone adds that the transmission model

"presumes directness and intent, command and influence" with regard to

communication.[123] The transmission view reduces the "problem of communication" to

that of the need to bring as near as possible, that which is far, by means of mediation.

Applied to the Internet, this medium is often judged as legitimate based on how well it

solves the "problem of communication," serving as a medium of bringing the other as

close as possible. No one would deny that maximizing the ability of communication

medium to transmit effectively is a worthy pursuit. But the problem arises when there is

both an unrealistic criteria of perfect connection forced upon a medium such as the

Internet, or worse, when such a medium is subjected to a utopian fantasy in which the

connection facilitates an unrealistic vision of connection.

To relieve the burden of such reified expectations of transmissional

communication, I will use the work of John Durham Peters and Kevin Robins, each of

which call into question the legitimacy and even the harm that undo emphasis on perfect

connection can do. In Peter's theory of communication a demand for the immediate as a

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[122] Stanley J. Baran and Dennis K. Davis, *Mass Communication Theory*, 212-13.

[123] Roger Silverstone, "The Sociology of Mediation and Communication," in *The Sage Handbook of Sociology,* ed. Craig Calhoun, Chris Rojek and Brian Turner (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 193.

goal of communication is problematized. Kevin Robins critiques the utopian dream of immediacy that technology can bring as a leftover notion that took hold after the Enlightenment. The idea of "otherness," explicated by each, although in different ways, can be applied to the Internet and yields a healthier transmissional outlook with regard to the Internet that not only cannot fulfill perfect connection, but indeed doesn't need to.

The concept of the *noosphere* is an extreme idea based on a viewpoint of the Internet as the perfect transmission for users. Some Internet pundits envision in the future the fulfillment of the ultimate dream of perfect communication in which the far will be not only be brought near but actually united with what had been at a distance. An example is what Erik Davis points to in his articulation of the concept of the *noosphere*, originated by Teilhard. This is the idea that since the days of the telegraph, "electric infotech" has created a kind of communication "nervous system," which, in the advancement of media, has been driving toward what cyberspace presumably now makes possible. This is the emergence of "a worldwide computational brain" in which there is an ever evolving "global consciousness formed out of the discussions and negotiations and feelings being shared by individuals" such that the "more minds that connect, the more powerful this consciousness will be."[124] While it is certainly advantageous to hope that the Internet could foster greater understanding and some effectiveness in transmissional communication, there is a problem if this view is *distorted* in such as way that it places undue stress on this kind of connectional vision. Peters is helpful in coming to understand that notions such as the *noosphere* place too much stress on the medium, opening the door to apocalyptic fears of control and manipulation. Notions such as the

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[124] Erik Davis, *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic And Mysticism in the Age of Information* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2004), 350.

noosphere, also closes the door to the affirmation of otherness that includes the boundary of control maintained by embodiment.

Peters looks at the history of communication over time, and sees a distinction between a dialogical outlook, which goes back to a Socratic search for "soul-to-soul" communication tightly coupled in dialogue, and a "loosely coupled dissemination," which goes back to the seed-scattering communicative style of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels.[125] He argues that throughout the history of Western culture, there has been an uneven dominance of the value of dialog over dissemination. Peters has helped me understand that it is possible that an over-emphasis on communication as dialogue creates undue stress on any venue of communication and social life. Peters writes: "'Communication', whatever it might mean, is not a matter of improved wiring or freer self-disclosure but involves a permanent kink in the human condition . . . that we can never communicate like angels is tragic and yet blessed."[126]

The alternative, he proposes, is not a denial of contact or an attenuation of communication. Instead, he writes, "the most wonderful thing about contact with each other is its free dissemination, not its anguished communion."[127] Quoting Adorno, he elaborates that the ideal in communication should be a condition "in which the only thing that survives the disgraceful fact of our mutual difference is the delight that difference makes possible."[128] This makes communication a common, messy business because it

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[125] John Durham Peters, *Speaking Into The Air: A History of The Idea of Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 35.

[126] John Durham Peters, *Speaking Into The Air,* 29.

[127] John Durham Peters, *Speaking Into The Air,* 31.

[128] John Durham Peters, *Speaking Into The Air,* 31.

both allows and encourages difference. The dynamic in the encounter of healthy communication is an encouragement of otherness in networked mediated communication technology. Suspending a type of reciprocity that suppresses otherness might become the stuff on which, on rare occasions, dialogue might actually arise.[129] Thus for Peters, "communication is a dance of differences, not a junction of spirits . . . less about connection and accurately transporting" spiritual and mental content, and more about "establishing lived conditions of partaking and expression that are just and loving."[130]

Robins shuns a sanguine notion about the Internet is a way similar to Peters. Robins also emphasizes that a simplistic notion of eliminating distance in communication at all costs too easily eliminates an "otherness" that attaches itself to "distance."[131] Here is how Robin's worry is unpacked: If direct community is the best of community, served by geographical location and face-to-face encounters, then meaningful encounters with another to be truly other cannot occur until it is face-to-face. Communication technology steps in to substitute this, and in doing so, attempts to create a new type of intimacy based on "merely the desire to encounter others on another basis," and also creates false "conditions of the immediate face to face community with an immaterial world and the simulation of immediacy."[132]

Robins et al. sees the tendency to prefer the substitution of communication technology to face-to-face, as starting with the Enlightenment, which, among other

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[129] John Durham Peters, *Speaking Into The Air,* 62.

[130] John Durham Peters, *Speaking Into The Air*, 65.

[131] Kevin Robins, "Against Virtual Community: For A Politics of Distance," in *The Cybercultures Reader,*ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 229.

[132] Kevin Robins, "Against Virtual Community," 227,229.

things, was "laced with communitarian nostalgia." This constituted an obsession with the tragedy of distance, with a need to close all gaps and merge, with others in a kind of social transparency. Robins believes this may, ironically, constitute an abolition of otherness. He says that a need to close gaps creates a situation of immediacy over healthy mediation, in which the border between interiority and exteriority is destabilized and a border between self and other is not important, but an impediment.[133] Robins notes the work of Dorinda Outram, who sees in this early period a harbinger for nineteenth century developments in media, a dual preoccupation with self and anxiety about a lack of mobility. Overcoming this caused the development of communication and community, culminating later into searching for a fulfillment of utopian fantasies.[134] Robins also invokes Heidegger,[135] who observed in his time that new media neutralized distance in shrinking time and space. Robins adds Sennett's concern that technological immediacy could serve to insulate one against being truly touched by another.[136]

I find Robins helpful in ways similar to Peters because both develop the problematic elements that undue emphasis placed on technological possibilities, such as what the Internet, affords. I agree that when a communication medium is *only* thought of

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[133] Kevin Robins, "Against Virtual Community," 230.

[134] Kevin Robins, "Against Virtual Community," 231. See Dorinda Outran, "Enlightenment Journeys: From Cosmic Travel to Inner Space" (Paper presented at the Colloquium of the International Group for the Study of Representation in Geography, Royal Holloway College, London, September, 1996).

[135] In the essay cited by Robins, Heidegger says that "the frantic abolition of all distances brings no nearness." In the same essay Heidegger writes: "Nearing brings near-draws nigh to one another-the far and, indeed *as* the far. Nearness preserves farness. Preserving farness, nearness presences near-ness in nearing that farness. Bringing near in this way, nearness conceals its own self and remains, in its own way, nearest of all." Heidegger's discussion establishes Robin's point, even though the essay is concerned with a larger, more complex notion beyond the topic of otherness and media. See Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 165, 175.

[136]Kevin Robins, "Against Virtual Community," 231-32. See Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994).

in terms of transmitting then the ultimate development of its technology *might* embrace the insular and the simulated, driven by the desire for immediacy, and fueled by the anxiety of non-mobility and distance. It is helpful to get a grasp on the nature of the Internet in terms of what it should not be. I disagree with Robins because I do not think that the answer to otherness is only onground face to face embodiment to preserve a sense of self and empowerment. I think that his concern is met by what Peters affirms, and that is the idea of dissemination rather than perfect dialog. Such theoretical considerations turn into complex ennui, unless what is added to it is another view of communication that capitalizes more on what it can be as a location of shared life without lapsing into extreme utopianism. It is the Internet understood in light of the ritual perspective of communication.

<div align="center">The Ritual Perspective of Mediated Communication</div>

In this subsection I introduce and explore a viewpoint of mediated communication developed by James Carey called the "ritual view of communication," and the manner in which the latter helps to understand the nature of the Internet as a ritual space. According to this viewpoint, the idea of communication is linked to terms such as "sharing, participation, association, fellowship, and the possession of a common faith" exploiting the "ancient identity and common roots of the terms 'commonness,' 'communion,' 'community,' and 'communication.'"[137] In doing so, Carey tries to move away from a view of communication as transmission exclusively. He writes:

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[137] James W. Carey, *Communication As Culture: Essays on Media and Society,* 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor & Francis, 2000), under "Chapter 1: A Cultural Approach to Communication," http://www3.niu.edu/acad/gunkel/corns465/carey/html (accessed May 28, 2010), e-book, 4.

A ritual view does not exclude the processes of information transmission . . . it merely contends that one cannot understand these processes aright except insofar as they are cast within an essentially ritualistic view of communication and social order.[138]

This is indeed a striving toward commonality, like-mindedness; in fact, a "consensus demanding communication," with technological communication surely becoming a "solvent to social problems and a source of social bonds."[139] The ritual perspective is also about embracing otherness and sharing, rather than preoccupation with fusion and unification.

Carey defines communication as "a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed."[140] Carey's theory of communication as culture, involving a ritualistic appraisal of communal life with regard to communication, is helpful in understanding the kind of communication that the interactive nature of cyberspace produces, and thus the kind of community and culture it engenders.

Carey contends that inverting the relationship of communication to reality, from that of the symbolic as a secondary descriptor of reality, to that of bringing reality into existence, is in the "construction, apprehension, and utilization of symbolic forms."[141] Thus, he adopts the outlook that indefinite, undifferentiated space is claimed, named, and configured as representations or symbols of (presenting reality), and symbols for

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[138] James W. Carey, *Communication As Culture,* 6.

[139] James W. Carey, *Communication As Culture*, 6-7.

[140] James W. Carey, *Communication As Culture*, 7.

[141] James W. Carey, *Communication As Culture,* 8.

(creating the reality they represent).[142] Hence, communication as culture is both a function of culture and a producer of it.

Cyberspace is culture, mainly in the sense that its cultural features and communal, ritualistic, aspects cannot be overlooked in the process of understanding what all occurs in cyberspace communities. The Internet fulfills Carey's vision of a broader understanding of communication, with the hope for greater community and mutual understanding in today's world. Carey identifies a kind of "derangement"[143] coming from an obsessive commitment to a transmission view of communication, haunting the field of communication theory with models of power and anxiety,[144] crowding out the ritual order of communal life. A ritual view of communication is an aid to understanding participation in cyberspace as an opportunity "to expand people's powers to learn and exchange ideas and experience."[145]

Carey's outlook of a cultural view of communication, nuanced by Peters regarding communication as dissemination, and applied to an understanding of cyberspace, legitimizes it as a place in which power is negotiated and communication and communal life is intensified, not attenuated. Carey's view of communication as ritual focuses the study of cyberspace in expanding its possibilities in new directions, and asks questions that open the door toward greater sympathy as a location of community development and sharing.

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[142] James W. Carey, *Communication As Culture*, 10-11.

[143] James W. Carey, *Communication As Culture,* 14.

[144] This harkens back to the previous section above. Thinking of communication media exclusively in terms of transmission steers discussion about communication away from considering other aspects of culture created in communication as culture.

[145] James W. Carey, *Communication As Culture,* 14.

I also find Peters' emphasis on "otherness" compatible with the strengths of the ritual view of communication as he adds insight about the involvement of the user and user communities in cyberspace. Quoting Kierkegaard, Peters points out that the "indirect communication" of dissemination is to make the recipient "self-active."[146] The "scatter" of dissemination is a location for the play of differences in which power is not fixed, but negotiated. Audience reception theory in mass communication/media studies is compatible with this notion of communication from Peters as well as Carey's ritual view. Both of the latter lend themselves toward a robust view of cyberspace as a location of culture and will be discussed in the next major section.

Cyberspace And The Agency of The User

I have argued that the backdrop needed to legitimize life in cyberspace requires an understanding of the nature of the Internet and cyberspace itself as *networks* and *communication media.* Now, I take up the aspect of communication media dealing with *technology and the agency of the user*. In this section, I show that the agency of the user is a critical aspect of formulating the nature of the Internet and the user in cyberspace. In establishing that the user and the user community are active rather than passive agents in the social shaping of technology (SST), and particularly the religious social shaping of technology (RSS), I will begin by showing that technological determinism[147] is not a helpful view. With technological advances such as the Internet, there is involvement of the user in determining emerging realities of networked cyberspace. I will also show that in addition to the theories of active audiences, the literature that centralizes the concept of

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[146] John Durham Peters, *Speaking Into The Air*, 52.

[147] It is also known by the term "technological agency."

the posthuman indicates that there is a complex interaction between technology and the free human agent. I will then show how the free human agent is not merely a disembodied Cartesian subject, but in fact holistically and socially fully integrated vis-à-vis technology. I believe that the latter is apparent in the literature of cyberculture among those such as Barlow and Lupton. Therefore, fear that cyberspace represents inevitable control, manipulation and the dehumanizing qualities often attributed to technology itself, is unfounded.

<div align="center">Agency And Technology</div>

In this subsection I will establish that the concept of agency of the user is contrary to technological determinism. I will discuss how Heidi Campbell and religious social-shaping of technology, and the broader vision of Manuel Castells in his work regarding the networked society as a complex interaction between users and technology, breaks the mold of technological determinism. After firmly establishing this premise I will discuss the contribution made by audience reception theory and the work of Henry Jenkins on media convergence to point the way forward toward development of a sturdy concept of the agent/user as a part of the enterprise of media, such as the Internet.

Technological determinism is the belief that "all social, political, economic, and cultural change is inevitably based on the development and diffusion of technology."[148] Influential in this outlook is the work of literary scholar, Marshal McLuhan, who was influenced by communication historian, Harold Innis. The work of both predates the age of the Internet, but is still a major influence for those who seek to understand the nature

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[148] Stanley J. Baran and Dennis K. Davis, *Mass Communication Theory*, 303.

<div align="center">53</div>

of the Internet and its relationship to society in general and religion in particular.[149] An

example is Shane Hipps who has written to guide churches in this era of the Internet and

other related technologies. He writes that as Christianity is "fundamentally a

communication event," and expresses appreciation for McLuhan's writings, that "woke

me from my slumber." He is concerned that the Christian community becomes aware of

the "hidden power of media and technology as a way to understand who we are, who we

think God is, and how God's unchanging message has changed, is changing and will

change." This vague announcement is clarified as he states: "Flickering pixels compose

the screens of life . . . these screens, regardless of their content, change our brains, alter

our lives, and shape our faith, all without our permission or knowledge." [150] Therefore,

the pervasive concern of technological determinism is that technology is a clandestine

enterprise that changes life as we know it without our knowledge or permission.

Campbell is helpful with regard to providing an alternative to technological

determinism. She contends in her study of Christian communities that technology and

Internet use reveals a social shaping of technology, which she further describes as having

a presupposition that "choices are inherent in the design and development of

technological innovations." SST (social shaping of technology) opens up discussions

about technology "specifically related to policy that had been perceived to be obscured

by technological determinism."[151] Although SST does argue "similarly to technological

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[149] Anastasia Karaflogka, *E-religion*, 89.

[150] Shane Hipps, "From the Printing Press to the iPhone: Discerning the Technology Spirits," *Christianity Today,* May 2009, 13-14, 64. Hipps is a former advertising strategic planner who became a Mennonite pastor and is promoting the idea in his work that "technology quietly shapes people, for good or for ill."

[151] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media,* 50,51.

determinism that technologies are not neutral," SST focuses more in the direction of

"hegemonic institutions and groups that alter social relations."[152] SST informs what

Campbell calls RSS, or "religious-social shaping of technology," in which religious

groups shape technology, such as the Internet, for their use in tandem with their own

values and commitments. Gordon Lynch calls technological determinism a "trap" in that

it focuses so much on cause and effect in technologies that it fails to recognize the

complexity of the relationship between society and culture. Lynch points to Manuel

Castells, who in exploring this complexity, helps to break the mold of technological

determinism, and in doing do, opens the way to explore this complexity in a more

constructive, useful manner.[153] Although Castells still wants to give technology its due

for the way its usage transforms culture, he sets technological change within the a larger

social context that takes into account the active role of users and user communities as

they operate in online networks .

Castells is helpful as he does not gloss over the fact that cyberspace is a unique

culture of virtuality that appears to be its own immersive world, but upon closer

examination is a symbolic environment that is connected with non-cyberspace and a

reflection of it. In discussing what he calls the "culture of real virtuality," he notes that

cultures are made up of communication processes that involve, and always have

involved, social humankind existing in and acting through a symbolic environment. New

communication systems should be characterized not as "inducement of virtual reality but

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[152] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media,* 52.

[153] Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 53.

the construction of real virtuality."[154] He argues that when critics of the electronic media charge that the new symbolic environment is not reality, "they implicitly refer to an absurdly primitive notion of 'uncoded' real experience that never existed." Instead, he argues that all our discourses are polysemic, and our interactions with others occur "in a multiplicity of dimensions." Regarding real virtuality, he writes that it is a system in which reality itself (albeit material/symbolic) is "entirely captured, fully immersed in virtual image setting, in the world of make believe, in which appearances are not just on the screen through which experience is communicated, but they become the experience."[155] Thus pathological distortions and usages of this imaginary world are possible, but not inevitable. Castells understands that this "world" is a world of networks that is effected by, as well as affects, all of society

Castells way of describing virtuality, as a fully immersed virtual setting, only acknowledges the robustious nature of cyberspace and cyberculture. His acknowledgment that virtuality is unique with networking characteristics serves as a way to understand *the manner*, or *mode* in which empowered users function within a changing world of networks. Such a mode is a process and has two unique consequences for "social forms and processes." First, it weakens "the symbolic power of traditional senders external to the system." These are no longer transmitted through historically encoded social habits: religion, morality, authority, traditional values, or political ideology, according to Castells. Instead, to survive, social forms and processes must recode themselves into the

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[154] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society,* The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture 1, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 403.

[155] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society,* 404. His example is that of presidential candidate Dan Quayle's public "debate" with fictitious television character, Murphy Brown.

new system, "where their power becomes multiplied by the electronic materialization of spiritually transmitted habits," which is characterized by interactivity and efficiency. Second, the new communication system, which includes the Internet, radically transforms space and time. Functional networks are the new "space of flows" instead of "the space of places." Such spaces are a reintegration of localities "disembodied" from their "cultural, historical, geographical meaning." Timeless time is the other material foundation of the new culture, in which "time is erased in the new communication system when past, present and future can be programmed to interact with each other in the same message."[156] According to Castells, these networks provide a source of meaning and experience for people, individually and collectively both in and out of cyberspace/virtuality.

A networked society promotes the unique identity of a person or group. Virtuality does not simply create a new world but reinforces the one that already exists. Virtuality does not inherently mean breaking old ties, connections and offline commitments, but often, instead reinforces them. Castells writes that in the technological revolution and the accompanying transformation of capitalism along with the "demise of statism," a "widespread surge of powerful expressions of collective identity that challenge globalization and cosmopolitanism on behalf of cultural singularity and people's control over their lives and environment," is also emerging.[157] One of his most poignant examples is religious fundamentalism among Christians, Judaism, and Islam.[158] Castells

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[156] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society,* 406.

[157] Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity,* The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture 2, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 2.

[158] He quotes Martin Marty to this effect, and uses Marty to discuss fundamentalists in a network society.

quotes the expert on fundamentalism, Martin Marty, and then writes that fundamentalists are using the Internet to employ "those features which best reinforce their identity, keep their movement together, build defenses around its boundaries, and keep others at as distance."[159] What Castells recognizes on a grand scale is a reflection of what has been observed in the areas of audience reception discourse, and other related studies of the meaning of the self as user and as a free agent, as well as user communities of active, free agents.

Active audiences, and the active agents of media use, are articulated in the tradition of the audience reception theory. The active audience is based on a model pioneered by theorists such as Stuart Hall, and argues that images in media can have multiple meanings--a phenomenon called "polysemy"--so that there are various ways that spectators receive and use media according to interaction of complex power associations.[160] Reception theory also focuses on media and communication as a significant part of, and defined by, everyday life. McQuail's characterization of reception theory/analysis claims that for the audience there is "a power to resist and subvert the dominant or hegemonic meanings offered by the mass media"[161] He also says that reception theory has to do with text that is "read" through the perceptions of a meaning constructing audience. Even though the process of media as it unfolds in

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[159] Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity,* 13.

[160] Victoria O'Donnell, "Cultural Studies Theory," in *Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory Methods and Media,* ed. Ken Smith, Sandra Moriarty, Gretchen Barbatsis, and Keith Kenney (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005), 522,524.

[161] Denis McQuail, *Audience Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 19.

context is of central importance, there is also an emphasis on an interpretative community as well using qualitative, "deep" methodology. [162]

Lynn Clark and others who use a qualitative methodology have expanded approaches to audience reception in light of newer trends in theorizing about culture and ideology.[163] Also significant is that these scholars exemplify those who are not simply concerned with the alteration of texts for media use by an audience, but also focus on issues regarding media usage itself. Clark describes "accounts of media" as having to do with description or story, which "accounts" for how audiences operate in relation to the media--which also shows a self-conscious awareness of their choices in media use.[164] Hoover says that "accounts of media" are "what James Carey has called the 'publicly available stock' of images and ideas through which we understand ourselves in our social and cultural contexts, and what Ellen Seiter has called 'lay theories of media effects.'"[165] These statements endorse the shaping of media and its effects as going beyond the exclusive domain of the professional producer of media.

The concept of "convergence" as developed by Henry Jenkins explores technology as a cultural phenomenon; as a place of freedom and negotiation of control by an active audience. When Rheingold investigated the migrated online community and

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[162] Denis McQuail, *Audience Analysis,* 19-20. Neither McQuail, nor Lindlof make the point I am making here. I am simply construing what they emphasize about audience reception and interpretation to provide a basis for identifying some hermeneutical theoretical aspects in audience reception that step away from a critical orientation.

[163] Clark, Lynn Schofield, "Introduction" in *Media, Home, and Family,* ed. Stewart M. Hoover, Lynn Schofield Clark, and Diane Alters (New York: Routledge, 2004), 37.

[164] Clark, Lynn Schofield, "Introduction" in *Media, Home, and Family*, 5.

[165] Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in The Media Age*, 88.

the intensive involvement of people in online only communities,[166] he looked at MUD (multi-user dungeon/domain) culture, finding insight originating in the fandom work of Henry Jenkins.[167] In a relatively recent account of fandom culture, Jenkins finds that the epitome of "convergence culture" is anything but mere pathological escapism, a perception that dominated the concerned of earlier theorists. Instead, he sees examples of fandom as signaling a "shift in the logic of culture by which culture operates, emphasizing the flow of content across media channels."[168] His study about participation in fan culture--both in tandem with media change--prompts this perspective.

Jenkins draws from Ithiel de Sola Pool's concept of "convergence of modes," which is a process in which lines are blurred between media, "even between point-to-point" communications, such that the "one-to-one relationship that used to exist between a medium and its use is eroding."[169] Pool, in his *Technologies of Freedom*, says that freedom is fostered "when the means of communication are dispersed, decentralized, and easily available," and that central control "is more likely when the means of communication are concentrated, monopolized, and scarce, as are great networks."[170] Jenkins is concerned about whether or not, in popular culture (including culture in general and the political arena), convergence means a greater concentration of power among mass media and its agencies, or continued methods of greater participation and

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[166] Cyberspace communities exist, that consider themselves exclusively online in another world, even though I have tried to show that one cannot ever completely divorce the online from offline life.

[167] Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, 173.

[168] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old And New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press), 283.

[169] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture,* 10.

[170] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture,* 11.

collaboration among the general public. This is because convergence is both top-down, corporate driven process, and grassroots, bottom-up process.[171] Although fandom draws attention to how audiences relate to and use media, skills acquired through play in which fans engage could affect the way they work and function in the realms of education, media reform, and democratic citizenship. Jenkins is also concerned about the related issue of Internet access. Meaning making in collective, cultural experience requires extensive access to media, mainly the Internet. Access is not yet equal in American culture.[172] Jenkins presents case studies in his work that demonstrate that convergence facilitates participation, collective intelligence, and collaboration--both face-to-face or on the Internet. Across communal media channels, of which the Internet/cyberspace is an integral part, people are not only consumers, but producers of media content, pooling insights and information; mobilizing to promote common interests; and functioning as "grassroots intermediaries ensuring that important messages and interesting content circulate more broadly."[173]

<div align="center">The Active Agent And Technology</div>

This subsection will feature how the concept of the active agent connects with the concept of the agent's sense of the self as posthuman, and the effect this has on the agent as a shaper of technology, rather than becoming less human because of technology. I will begin by discussing Mark Poster's use of Foucault and Butler to establish the meaning of agency regarding the self and the digital world. I will also look at Sherry Turkle's

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[171] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture,* 18.

[172] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 22-24.

[173] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 245.

understanding about the implications of Butler's view for agency and technology. Finally, I will employ the insights of Hayles and Haraway, who show in the development of the posthuman and the cyborg respectively, a vision of a holistic active agent in the use of technology such as the Internet.

Mark Poster deals directly with understanding the human self as the active agent in relationship with technology. Poster utilizes the term "linguistic turn" to describe a major change in capitalism related to the Internet. In the linguistic turn of philosophy, there was a shift from understanding the human self in the "Cartesian-Kantian-Hegelian" mode--in which the self was the point of awareness and constituted by "consciousness or spirit"--to the view of the self as constituted by language and "negotiation within symbolic systems defined and defining itself through those systems."[174] The linguistic turn in capitalism reflects this notion with changes from "managerial capitalism" in the early stages of the industrial capitalism, to a "service economy," and to "consumer/late capitalism." The latter drove things toward the linguistic turn in capitalism in the "construction of the consumer" through the production of symbols: the language of advertising.[175] But the shift that occurred was toward the new development in the Internet/cyberspace, of "consumer as producer." Poster defines this as the consumer having the capacity to become a producer of cultural products, so that the line between producer and consumer is more and more blurred.[176]

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[174] Mark Poster, *What's The Matter With The Internet?* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 40.

[175] Mark Poster, *What's The Matter With The Internet?*, 41.

[176] Mark Poster, *What's The Matter With The Internet?*, 46. Poster's point here is similar to Jenkins' above. The latter contends that fan culture has had a part in shaping the media of which they are also consumers.

Using Foucault, Poster ponders the implications of the "figure of the Cartesian subject"[177] as digital author on the Internet. Foucault speaks of the "author function" disappearing so that the author's presence is extracted from the text. This makes way for "interpretative focus" to shift to the reader, diminishing the founding creator. For Poster, although the author function does not disappear, to a large degree, in broadcast media, digital writing linked to networks is the kind of mediation that could bring Foucault's vision to pass.[178] Thus, for Poster, not only does digital writing separate the author from the text, but the text is mobilized as it is redistributed as another text. Poster also notes that Foucault's idea of the "murmur of indifference,"[179] regarding who has spoken or written, is also experienced in the movement from the analogue to the digital author. When the subject is not defended, but compromised and constructed (in Foucaultian sense), what is achieved, according to Poster, is a new way of thinking about the formation of the self.[180] Poster also cites Butler, who points out that Foucault is concerned with a "critique of sovereignty" that does not destroy agency, but makes a way for it.[181] As Poster explains, Butler finds hope for agency in the performative function of speech acts, which points in the direction of a "body-text" relation. In various ways, and in different contexts and kinds of media, the performative incarnates the subject.[182] Poster further suggests that when the body is mediated by the interface of computers and

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[177] Mark Poster, *What's The Matter With The Internet?*, 64.

[178] Mark Poster, *What's The Matter With The Internet?*, 67.

[179] Mark Poster, *What's The Matter With The Internet?*, 67.

[180] Mark Poster, *What's The Matter With The Internet?*, 71-72.

[181] Mark Poster, *What's The Matter With The Internet?*, 72.

[182] Mark Poster, *What's The Matter With The Internet?*, 73.

networks, there is dissociation, an "actual relation that opens identity to new degrees of flexible, unstable determination."[183] Poster then states: "The body no longer constrains the performativity of speech acts to the extent that it does in face-to-face relations . . . digital authorship is about the performance of self-constitution."[184]

Like Poster, Sherry Turkle takes some of her cues from Butler regarding the agency of the self within technology. In Turkle's chapter on "tinysex and gender trouble," she gives examples of the extent of the reconstruction of identities in cyberspace through the practice of "gender-bending" in cyberspace, which is understood by those involved in cyberculture as a "chance to discover . . . that for both sexes, gender is constructed."[185] In her observations of experimentation with AI (artificial intelligence) and with the virtual worlds of simulation at MIT, she writes of a "tale of two aesthetics," a movement from a mentality of "top-down design" technology to that of rearranging "a set of well known materials" in which bricoleurs "try one thing, step back, reconsider, and try another."

The concept of the *agency of the user* is incomplete without considering what it looks like from the vantage point of theorists such as Hayles, who shows that in the realms of technology and a global information society, the cultural icon "Beam me up Scotty" encapsulates the "defining characteristic of the present cultural moment . . . that information can circulate unchanged among different material substances."[186] As the

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[183] Mark Poster, *What's The Matter With The Internet?*, 75.

[184] Mark Poster, *What's The Matter With The Internet?*, 75.

[185] Sherry Turkle, *Life on The Screen: Identity in The Age of The Internet* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 223.

[186] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Post-Human,* 1-2.

sociologist Lyon explains, information in the twentieth century came to be understood as more than mere pieces of data; it became associated with "major technological infrastructures. . . an adjective to qualify basic descriptive categories: information economy, information society , information superhighway" . . . even [the] information age.[187] In the 1950's, this was part of the result of information theory being shaped by Norbert Weiner's cybernetics and Claude Shannon's mathematical theory of communication which "reduced information to coded transmissions and simultaneously opened new ways for information" to be understood.[188] Hayles takes up the discussion of the posthuman in light of this and the development of the concept of cybernetics. As Lyon notes, cybernetics "proved decisive for both culture and commerce."[189] The word "cybernetics" is "the study of regulation and control in complex machines and systems." With regard to communication, cybernetics investigates how these systems perform tasks and make adjustments.[190]

Hayles' work is most significant for my purposes as she shows how the assumptions of theories and researchers about what it means to be human during and after the Macy Conferences[191] about cybernetics contributed to the emergence of what she calls the posthuman. Hayles is concerned about the misuse of the idea of humankind as

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[187] David Lyon, "A Sociology of Information," 224.

[188] David Lyon, "A Sociology of Information,"225.

[189] David Lyon, "A Sociology of Information,"225.

[190] Stanley J. Baran and Dennis K. Davis, *Mass Communication Theory*, 208. Hayles gives a definition: "Cybernetics was born when nineteenth-century control theory joined the nascent theory of information. Coined from the Greek word for 'steersman' cybernetics signaled that three powerful actors-information, control and communication-were now operating jointly to bring about an unprecedented synthesis of the organic and the mechanical." N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Post-Human,* 6.

[191] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Post-Human,*7, 50-75.

posthuman when she writes that "some current versions of the posthuman point toward

the antihuman and apocalyptic." She believes that such outcomes are not inevitable

because "we can craft others that will be conducive to the long-range survival of humans

and other life forms."[192] As do Poster, Turkle, and others above, Hayles looks at the

human subject, the view of the Cartesian individual, and the self as defined by liberal

humanism.[193] However, her contribution is to look from the standpoint of scientists of

information and technology who, in various ways and to varying degrees, build on the

assumptions of liberal humanism. For scientists, liberal humanism works in this way: If

humanity as "essence." is individual agency and freedom from the will of others, and in

addition, the body is simply that which the liberal subject possesses as an object of

control and mastery, then "to the extent that the posthuman constructs embodiment as the

instantiation of thought/information, it continues the liberal tradition, rather than disrupts

it."[194] What became *posthuman,* or different than human, is that with new

transformations, humans are more and more understood as being seen "primarily as

information-processing entities who are *essentially* similar to intelligent machines."[195]

What continued to be prominent for most is that one's essential self can be distinguished

from the body. As Hayles observes, this is why it is only a "small step to perceiving

information as more mobile, more *essential* than material forms." To this, Hayles adds

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[192] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Post-Human,* 291.

[193] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Post-Human,* 3.

[194] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Post-Human,*5.

[195] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Post-Human,*7.

that when "this impression becomes part of your cultural mindset, you have entered the condition of virtuality."[196]

Such a condition of virtuality explains why the cultural mindset of early pundits of the Internet is both delightful and frightening. They boldly proclaimed that they were creating a world completely separate from "real life," strongly contending that this is a world of mind, a world of freedom in which the limitations of the body are left behind. Barlow, in his famous "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace," proclaimed:

> Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of the Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather . . . . Cyberspace consists of transactions, relationships, and thought itself, arrayed like a standing wave in the web of our communications. Ours is a world that is both everywhere and nowhere, but it is not where bodies live. We are creating a world where anyone, anywhere may express his or her beliefs, no matter how singular, without fear of being coerced into silence or conformity. Your legal concepts of property, expression, identity, movement, and context do not apply to us. They are all based on matter, and there is no matter here. Our identities have no bodies, so, unlike you, we cannot obtain order by physical coercion.[197]

It would be absurd to not be concerned about the implications the above could have on unhealthy fantasies and addictions to escape through cyberspace. Such sentiments call forth notions such as technological determinism with regard to how the meaning of being human is compromised because of technology. But, such a notion is a result of precisely what Hayles points out. That is, that a view of humanity based upon a liberal human subject who is also now a package of data that can be transferred into other mediums is not the end of the story. It was premature of Internet pundits such as Barlow above to

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[196] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Post-Human,* 19.

[197] John Perry Barlow, "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace," February 8, 1996, http://projects.eff.org/~barlow/Declaration-Final.html (accessed March 23, 2011).

think that engagement online is inherently contrary to a view of the user of technology as a mind without a body.

According to Lupton, in computer culture, the discourse of disembodiment driven by cyberpunk has created a notion in which embodiment is seen as an unfortunate impediment to the "pleasure of computing." In cyberwriting the body is often referred to as "meat." Lupton cites the thoughts of feminist Internet scholar Margaret Morse, who acknowledge notions of cyberpunk culture and asks, "What do cyborgs eat?" Summarizing Morse, Lupton makes the point that "while the individual can successfully pretend…she or he will always have to return to the embodied reality of empty stomach, stiff neck, aching hands, sore back and gritty eyes caused by many hours at the computer terminal."[198] Thus, life is always lived through the body. Allucquere Stone weighs in, maintaining that no matter how virtual a subject may become, a body is attached: "It may be somewhere else-and that 'somewhere else' may be a privileged point of view-but consciousness remains firmly rooted in the physical. Historically, body, technology, and community constitute each other." She also quotes Butler who points to the "culturally intelligible body" which is all about the way that society produces physical bodies that each recognizes as members.[199]

Hayles' narrative of the *posthuman*, weaves a counter-story compatible with those such as Stone, who see that the body and a mind cannot be meaningfully separated, even in a virtual mode. Hayles takes things in a new direction when she problematizes the

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[198] Deborah Lupton, "The Embodied Computer/User," in *The Cybercultures Reader,* ed. David Bell and Barbara Kennedy (New York: Routledge, 2007), 425.

[199] Stone, Allucquere Rosanne, "Will The Real Body Please Stand Up? Boundary Stories About Virtual Cultures," in *The Cybercultures Reader,* ed. David Bell and Barbara Kennedy (New York: Routledge, 2007), 451.

tendency to decontextualize information as a free-floating, transferable entity.[200] In her

narrative of embodiment, she unfolds the idea that "not all theorists agree that it makes

sense to think about information as an entity apart from the medium that embodies it."

She contends: "Just because information lost its body does not mean that humans and the

world have lost theirs."[201] The posthuman is not simply a reinscription of the same

concept of the human subject, with a different view of the body. The posthuman is a

construction of an altogether new account. It *can mean* the emergence of a "dynamic

partnership between humans and intelligent machines" *if* "certain strands among its

complex seriations are highlighted and combined to create a vision of the . . . posthuman

as leverage to avoid reinscribing, and thus repeating some mistakes of the past."[202]

The dynamics of the posthuman, with regard to the cyborg,[203] as explored by

Donna Haraway, helps sort out what has happened culturally in tandem with technology

recapitulating to the idea of the liberal humanistic self in the discourse of information

technology. She points out in *A Cyborg Manifesto,* that the cyborg is a "creature of social

reality as well as a creature of fiction."[204] Or, as Bell quotes Haraway, the cyborg is

indeed us: "[W]e are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and

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[200] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Post-Human*, 54-55

[201] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Post-Human*, 244.

[202] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Post-Human,* 288.

[203] Cyborg is short for "cybernetic organism" and has to do with the combining of organism with machine in dynamic reciprocal and reflexive relationship between the two.

[204] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs And Women: The Reinvention of Nature.* New York: Routledge, 1991, 149.

organism . . . we are all cyborgs."[205] In this, Bell also notes that she brings the idea of

prosthesis to the fore, the idea of the body in cyberculture as a way to bring together

nature and technology.[206] Prosthetication in relation to cyberspace/cyberculture is

metaphoric, borrowed from medical science. For technology to be thought of as

functioning in a prosthetic manner is not far from McLuhan's idea of technology as an

"extension of man."[207] However, this insight from McLuhan need not lead inevitably to

determinism, but only be made to serve to recognize the interaction and interplay

between technology and the agent.

Haraway provides the perspective that things have changed, and that the cyborg is

part and parcel of culture in which the cyborg dwells. The cyborg holds the opportunity

for the good of humankind. In the same manner as Hayles, she argues for "pleasure in

the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction."[208] She also

recognizes that the culture of the cyborg can become too readily that of "the final

imposition of a grid of control on the planet, about the final abstraction embodied in the

Star War apocalypse waged in the name of defense, about the final appropriation of

women's bodies in a masculinist orgy of war."[209] Haraway sounds a note of liberation

precisely because we are cyborgs. She announces that "the main trouble with cyborgs, of

[205] David Bell, Brian D. Loader, Nicolas Pleace and Douglas Schuler, "Cyborg" in *Cybercultures: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2004), 54.

[206] David Bell, Brian D. Loader, Nicolas Pleace and Douglas Schuler, "Cyborg,"54.

[207] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964). As suggested in the book's title, he develops in his book the concept that there are many tools of culture that are extensions of humanity, including such things as clothes.

[208] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs And Women,* 150.

[209] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs And Women,* 154.

course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. *Illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all,* are *inessential.*"[210] From this perspective, therefore, a cyborg world is not afraid of "joint kinship" with things like animals and machines and "partial identities and contradictory standpoints."[211] They are also not afraid of technology, having no reason to be any more concerned than humanity has ever been about losing control over the destiny of humanity. The emerging world of the agent using "machines," and involved in life in cyberspace, continues to take part in shaping this joint kinship.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I developed an understanding of cyberspace as *networked communication media characterized by the agency of the user.* I developed these key words into discursive phrases to name subsections in which I laid a foundation to frame my understanding of cyberspace and the Internet to prepare the way to looking at the manner in which cyberspace is understood as a location of culture and a negotiation of communities who engage in practices that promote their values and practices within this venue. As *networked communication,* meaningful community can occur in cyberspace as networks, enhancing non-cyberspace life in the blurring of online or offline, as well as exclusively online, as no one ever can completely compartmentalize their lives. As *communication media,* the perspective is established of the manner in which cyberspace can be a location of culture as both a transmitting and a ritual communication medium.

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[210] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs And Women,* 151. Emphasis mine.

[211] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs And Women,* 154.

Finally, characterized as a location of the *agency of the user, the* free, emergent user and user community can negotiate the terms of meaningful engagement that does not leave behind identity and embodiment.

I am now ready to contend that religious cyberspace is *networked communication media characterized by the agency of the user in carrying out religious praxis.* What I show next is how a particular religious community negotiates use of the Internet, and all of the issues it encountered and began to resolve, especially with regard to a highly prized ritual practice: the Eucharist.

CHAPTER THREE: NARRATIVE AND NEGOTIATION OF CYBERSPACE PRACTICE

The analysis of this chapter is done in the context of Campbell's insights into the way religion engages and works through a process of negotiation regarding new media. Beyond inquiring as to the nature of the Internet and the implications this has for issues related to lived culture in cyberspace, in this chapter I look at what I believe the most important issues and terms of negotiation with regard to adapting the Eucharist entails. I frame what the Nazarene Bible College (NBC) community did as an example of the religious-social shaping of technology (RSS), as suggested by Campbell. According to RSS, participants are actively involved in shaping the Internet in light of their "values and desired outcomes."[212]

In this chapter I show how NBC shaped their practice of the Eucharist to adapt to the Internet. Such adaptation is the beginning of the religious community of NBC and its constituency[213] negotiating how it will respond to the challenge of Eucharist in cyberspace. The terms of negotiation are the issues addressed in the tripartite development of each section below according to understanding how *networked communication media, characterized by the agency of the user* relates to *carrying out religious praxis.* First, religious networked communities in cyberspace can be social

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[212] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media,* 17.

[213] The constituency involved in the dialog that ensued in the next stage of negotiation is discussed in the next chapter.

locations that foster ritual, such as the Eucharist, as well as locations in which ritual helps to reinforce and strengthen authentic religious community. Second, the Internet as a communication medium of cyberspace can be a zone of Eucharist ritual activity based on an aesthetic compatible with the intended purpose of the ritual. Third, the agency of the user can mean that the whole authentic person, including body and mind is involved in shaping and participating in the Eucharist in cyberspace.

Narrative of The Observance of The Eucharist in Cyberspace

In the spring of 2008, members from an online class community affiliated with Nazarene Bible College of Colorado Springs, Colorado, engaged in a Eucharist ritual in cyberspace. The class did this as part of a course in spiritual formation. When this class is held on the onground campus, the professor[214] celebrates the Lord's Supper with his students. For this online version of the course, the class observed the sacrament together by logging into a chat program called *Koinonia,* which is a synchronous chat venue provided by NBC for optional use by professors for online classes. The program was adapted by the professor with the help of the NBC college chaplain[215] for its use as a venue to celebrate online Eucharist. The celebration took place on May 20, 2008, beginning at 6:54 p.m. The professor began preparing the class at 7:03 p.m. and posted

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[214] NBC Professor, July 28,2011, phone. This professor is an ordained deacon in the Church of the Nazarene, therefore he is officially authorized to administer the Eucharist according to Nazarene doctrine.

[215] NBC Professor, July 28,2011, phone.

the closing of the experience at 8:53 p.m. the same evening.[216] A colleague of mine, the

professor provided me with all of the digital material used for the experience.[217]

According to the transcript, at 7:03 p.m., the professor types "PRE-SERVICE

PREPARATION." At this time, he asks the students to click on a link to open a

Microsoft Word file containing the words of a song, which they are to minimize on their

screens until they are actually ready to sing. [218] The professor asks a student in the class

who is knowledgeable with computers to assist students who might have trouble getting

into the chat room and navigating access to the Word file and other preparation materials.

In spite of technical difficulties, the student reports to the professor that he is helping the

first student make it, immediately after which text appears noting that the professor "was

electronically knocked offline."[219]

Conversation after the professor gets back online proceeds with picking up where

he left off--at the beginning--in which participants are to prepare for the experience by

downloading and being ready to listen together to the Cherry Log Christian Church audio

mp3 file,[220] and to also follow the Word file containing the lyrics to the song they will

hear on the mp3file. From 7:14 p.m. until 8:11 p.m., the conversation revolves around

finding and helping students get online and also making sure they can find these

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[216] "Transcript."

[217] I was given a printed transcript of this chat room observance; the digital picture of the bread and chalice that the professor had each student download; and access to the mp3 file used for the observance. I also drew information from the detailed email description of the experience that the professor sent to his colleagues, as well as additional email exchanges with this professor. I also drew from a telephone interview with the professor and a questionnaire from one of the students involved in the experience.

[218] "Transcript."

[219] "Transcript."

[220] This audio file contains an Eucharist celebration excerpted by the professor, assisted by the NBC chaplain containing a song, homily, prayers, Scripture reading and words of institution.

preparation materials provided in the files above. The professor writes, in the midst of

this, to everyone and then to the student providing assistance: "Everyone please be

patient. Thanks, _____, for your great help. I don't have a clue what you're doing, but

I'm grateful . . . I just locked my office door and put a do not disturb sign on it. I'm trying

to quiet my spirit."[221]

A student, referred to from here on out as Ally,[222] indicates that she is meditating

on a worship song. As the technologically savvy student continues to help everyone get

online, the professor tells those already online, and who may be struggling to stay

connected, that he will "send a note every so often to see if it will keep me connected."[223]

He also indicates that he is not only committed to staying connected technologically, but

that he is singing a worship song to stay connected spiritually. At this point, there is

indication that another student has "made it." However, another one is lost. In the

transcript it indicates that Ally begins typing a prayer: "Father, we usher in your presence

and ask that you would saturate us with your Shekinah [sic] Glory, manifest yourself here

tonight in a very real way."[224] The notes show that as technical difficulties continue, the

professor types a prayer for the success of their efforts. Finally there is a note at 8:11

p.m. from the professor: "Everyone participating is HERE."[225] Various students then

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[221] "Transcript."

[222] This is the student whose permission I have obtained to quote her words from the Transcript, as well as her responses to a set of questions provided by me regarding this experience. The name is an alias in compliance with IRB protocol.

[223] "Transcript."

[224] "Transcript."

[225] "Transcript."

type notes of short exclamations as to how glad they are that the ritual is finally going to work.

At 8:15 p.m., the professor again covers the procedure involved in engaging together using the Cherry Log Christian Church mp3 file. Also, the professor types to the students that there is an ORDER OF SERVING they will follow from, a list they should find on the right-hand side of the chat room under "users present." The professor states that when it is time, he will start wherever he is on the list and serve the next person, who in turn will serve the next, and on down the line.[226] However, another student begins having computer problems. At 8:20, the professor asks Ally to pray again. She types a prayer expressing the need for God's help, and affirming the gift of His Son, Jesus, saying, "freely you have given us your Son, and freely we lay ourselves on the alter [sic], as a living sacrifice tonight."[227] The professor then says again, at 8:25: "I will send the mp3 file. Wait to open it until everyone sees it."[228] From 8:25 until 8:31, all the students indicate that they see the jpg file of the bread and chalice, and are singing along with the mp3 file from the Cherry Log Christian church, and hearing other parts on the file excerpted from the church's website.[229]

According to the transcript, Ally asks at 8:26 p.m.: "Should we start listening?" Others type action words such as "singing" "listening" and Ally types that she is raising

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[226]"Transcript."

[227] "Transcript."

[228] "Transcript."

[229] "Transcript."

her hands in worship.[230] The professor, between 8:29 and 8:32 p.m., prods with the typed

words, "keep listening," monitoring things by typing when the participants should sing

along with the mp3 file, with Scripture reading, a homily, prayers, and words of

institution. The professor then types, at 8:32 p.m.: "Let's 'serve each other and

remember the Lord.'" Then: "When you have been served and partaken of the bread and

cup, please type in your words to the next person. As you do, you are passing the bread

and passing the cup." This means that when a student sees themselves addressed on the

chat screen, and are told that they were receiving the cup or the bread; they are to type an

acknowledgement of receiving and partaking. Also at this point, the physical bread and

cup that they each provided for themselves at their own computer stations are to be

consumed. They are to augment partaking by typing a response in the form of a prayer,

offering praise and thanksgiving to Christ. Then they offer the elements to the next

person by typing. As this occurs, they can also view the image of the bread and the cup.

Upon seeing indication that they are passing to each other in this manner, Ally types to

another student that she is passing the bread and the cup, along with the words:

> This is the body of our Lord, which was broken for you may it preserve you
> blameless unto everlasting life; take it and eat this in remembrance that Christ
> died for you. This is the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you,
> may it preserve you blameless unto everlasting life, drink this in remembrance
> that Christ's blood was shed for you, and be thankful.[231]

After everyone has been served, the students continue typing prayers and exclamatory

phrases of praise and thanksgiving. Ally, for example, types at 8:46 p.m., "Praise god

[sic] from whom all blessings flow," after which the professor, at 8:51 p.m., announces

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[230] "Transcript."

[231] "Transcript."

that he is going to give a benediction. One appears in the transcript. At this point, everyone signs off.

The next day, May 21, 2008, the professor sent a detailed email recounting the online Eucharist observance to the resident and adjunct faculty of Nazarene Bible College, and the Cabinet of the College. Containing the subject line, "cyber-sanctuary," the email began with: "I don't know exactly what to put in the subject line. I thought about 'Breaking Bread-Breaking Ground' or 'From Novel Notion to Sacred Celebration.' As you can see, I'm already working on a title for the essay I want to write."[232] In the email, the professor recounts what he calls "a creative leap into new territory for me, and I assume, NBC's online program."[233] On June 12, 2008, in an official online publication of The Church of the Nazarene, called the *Nazarene Communications Network*, the article "Breaking Bread-Breaking Ground: NBC Students Share Communion Online," appeared. It was submitted by an administrator of NBC who was among those who received the email describing what occurred. The article began: "Recently, Nazarene Bible College (NBC) Professor _____ _____ took a creative leap into new territory for himself and NBC's online program."[234] The rest of the article duplicated the exact content of the email sent by the facilitating professor to the faculty and administration of Nazarene Bible College.

In analyzing the Eucharist in cyberspace, I consider what kind of assumptions were at work and what adaptations were made by participants to translate the experience

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[232] NBC Professor, email to Nazarene Bible College email list of Faculty; Cabinet; Adjunct, May 21, 2008. "Essay" refers to the descriptive email that he is composing, here quoted.

[233] NBC Professor, email to Nazarene Bible College email list of Faculty; Cabinet; Adjunct, May 21, 2008.

[234] Nazarene Communications Network, "Breaking Bread-Breaking Ground: NBC students share Communion online," http://wwwncnew.com/nphweb/html/ncn/article (accessed September 11, 2010).

to an online mode. Then, in evaluating the controversy that ensued when the above

communiqué was released,[235] I look at what kinds of considerations can be brought to a

negotiating table. In this chapter more specific issues relevant to religious praxis, media,

and ritual are discussed.

Gregor Goethals offers some elements of religious ritual "as they have been

defined and mapped by scholars in anthropology and religious studies over the last two

decades." I argue that all aspects of religious ritual according to Goethals were evident in

the observance that took place in cyberspace. The four fundamental elements defined by

Goethals are:

> First, there is entry into specially designed zones of time and space; second, the
> attentive, dynamic engagement of persons in a participatory event; third the
> formation of community which emerges from a shared attentiveness and
> participation in symbolic temporal and spatial zones; fourth, a renewal of spirit
> experienced by individuals taking part in the ritual. [236]

Below, I show how these interface with understanding the experience as *networked*

communication media characterized by the agency of the user in carrying out religious

praxis.

Networked Community in Cyberspace Ritual Observance

The fundamental elements mentioned by Goethals that relate to the networked

community aspect of ritual in cyberspace are evident in the NBC example. These are

"attentive dynamic engagement of persons in a participatory event," and "the formation

of community which emerges from a shared attentiveness and participation" [237]

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[235] This controversy is the subject of Chapter 4.

[236] Gregor Goethals, "Myth and Ritual in Cyberspace," in *Mediating Religion: Conversations in Media, Religion And Culture,* ed. Jolyon Mitchell and Sophia Marriage (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 257.

[237] Gregor Goethals, "Myth and Ritual in Cyberspace," 257.

Engaging in Eucharist as a class was in keeping with the emphasis on community and ritual in religious praxis, which is part of the objective of the NBC course in spiritual formation. The ritual needed to be practiced in a manner that was sufficiently communal so that it achieved its purpose for the class. In this section, I build on the previous contention that networked connections in cyberspace count as community. But I also establish that religion by its very nature is communal, so that if the NBC observance is to be truly religious it has to be sufficiently communal. I argue that it was, based on two assumptions: that the communal life of a shared faith of the online community prompted the desire to engage in the ritual, and that engagement in the ritual online, in turn, promoted the communal nature of religion and religious practice for this class.

Religion can be characterized by its basic, communal nature. According to Asamoah-Gyadu, the core ingredients of religion have always been known in traditional cultures of "Africa and Australasia" as lying along the axes of "transcendent realities"[238] and "community." The axis of community is indispensible, because religious groups "constitute the community in its quintessential form because shared aspirations for deliverance from the human predicament throw people together."[239] Dawson writes that "for most people, being religious still implies being part of a group . . . the notions of religion and community go hand-in-hand."[240]

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[238] I think that these transcendent aspects are most directly and comprehensively covered in theological discourse that will be a focus in Chapters 4 and 5.

[239] J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Community," in *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture,* ed. David Morgan (New York: Routledge, 2008), 56.

[240] Lorne L. Dawson, "Religion and the Quest for Virtual Community," 75.

A viable community life is found in the NBC example that formed a basis for religious practice. The basic emphasis on community on the Internet can be found in all online courses at NBC. All six week classes begin with significant emphasis on online classmates getting to know each other in the online classroom. During the first week, each student must submit an autobiography and comment on the autobiographies of other students. In online classes, this component is acknowledged by online educators as "valuable for the students in getting to know one another and building a class bond."[241] The entire learning process in an online class is based on a model of "interactive, group-based learning" rather than simply "one-way teaching methods" or "one-on-one relationships," as in a correspondence course.[242] NBC professors[243] are schooled in the idea of an "active, constructivist form of learning--with one difference: In distance education, attention needs to be paid to the developing sense of community with the group of participants in order for the learning process to be successful."[244]

With regard to media and religion, Asamoah-Gyadu makes the point that "religion is flourishing" in the media, and the latter is not antithetical to religious experience or religious communities. Religious communal use of media in public discourse actually

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[241] Marilyn Fullmer-Umari, "Getting Ready: The Syllabus and Other Online Indispensables," in *The Online Teaching Guide,* ed. Ken W. White and Bob H. Weight (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2000), 102.

[242] Patricia Addesso, "Online Facilitation: Individual and Group Possibilities," in *The Online Teaching Guide,* ed. Ken W. White and Bob H. Weight (Needham Heights: MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2000), 112-13.

[243] All professors who teach online are required to take online facilitator training. A significant part of that experience involves them functioning as students, so that they experience for themselves what their students will experience in the online environment.

[244] Rena M. Palloff and Keith Pratt, *Building Learning Communities In Cyberspace: Effective Learning Strategies for the Online Classroom* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999), 28-29.

contradicts Western assumptions that religion is mainly a private endeavor. [245] More

specifically, and with regard to new media and community, Asamoah-Gyadu states that

"because the element of 'communing' is implied in communication, the goal of

communication is partly a call to community."[246] Dawson wants to make sure that the

quest for virtual religious community be founded on a robust understanding of religious

communal life in a Durkheimian sense. Thus, he also writes:

> The very sense of power and fulfillment that people experience in the presence of
> the sacred stems from the impact of sharing . . . embodied in religious rituals . . .
> the 'collective effervescence' ignited by the sheer presence of many people . . .
> joined together . . . in rites and ceremonies.[247]

At the core of this kind of relationship between the social and the religious, Dawson

points out, is the "face-to-face interaction of individuals mediated by their common

orientation.[248] Durkheim writes regarding religious rites and the social that: "Rites are,

above all, the means by which the social group periodically affirms itself."[249]

Dawson writes that "rituals have been performed online, but with mixed but very

interesting results."[250] Dawson suggests that the criteria of authenticity has shifted from

"a focus on the sacred as a specifiable, if mysterious, presence in this world-a thing of

some sort," to "an experience or state of mind that is intrinsically valued, that is

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[245] J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Community," 56.

[246] J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Community,"61.

[247] Lorne L. Dawson, "Religion and the Quest for Virtual Community,"75.

[248] Lorne L. Dawson, "Religion and the Quest for Virtual Community,"75.

[249] Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* trans. Carol Cosman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 287.

[250] Lorne L. Dawson, "Religion and the Quest for Virtual Community,"80.

sacralized, somewhat independently from how it is symbolized." [251] He believes that his studies ranging from techno-pagan ritual, to a Christian charismatic service in a MUD (virtual multi-user domain), to Brenda Brasher's account of an online Jewish cyber-seder, illustrate, in large part, a surrendering of the objectifying nature of what a ritual affords, such that what is produced in the interactive nature and process of the ritual is little more than what users make of it.[252]

Dawson sees the loss of the objectifying nature of ritual most keenly with regard to neo-pagan ritual online. He characterizes neo-pagan online ritual as engaging in *bricolage,* favoring an eclectic and creative use of diverse symbols, an attitude of "irreverence," and a "ludic love of parody." He also notes that "few demands of any kind are made of the participants, and they enjoy interacting in this spirit."[253] The NBC example illustrates freedom and creative use of the medium, the particulars of which will be discussed in the next section. In citing the NBC example, I make the point that the free and creative mode of religious practice that virtual Eucharist affords for the user does not mean in every case that participation means having no expectations of reverence, order, or religiously objective effect from the ritual of Eucharist.

As Dawson looks at Schroeder, Heather, and Lee's account of a Christian charismatic church service in a MUD,[254] he concludes that, for this example, even though the degree of *bricolage* described was "less pertinent," there were still things

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[251] Lorne L. Dawson, "The Mediation of religious experience in cyberspace," in *Religion And Cyberspace,* ed. Morten T. Hojsgaard and Margit Warburg (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 29.

[252] Lorne L. Dawson, "The Mediation of religious experience in cyberspace," 16.

[253] Lorne L. Dawson, "The Mediation of religious experience in cyberspace,"20-21.

[254] MUD stands for "multi-user domain," of interactive activity online.

characterizing the latter worth noting. Dawson writes that upon examination there were

some things that "detracted from the sense of it as a valid religious gathering: shorter

verbal exchanges, emotional solidarity weaker, less orderliness to the prayer meeting."

He also notes things unique to the charismatic church experience in cyberspace that could

be, in his view, attributed to an advantage to cyberspace, including: candid exchanges

between participants, worldwide access with others one would not normally have, and

experimentation in the use of virtual space that is less constrained than church in a non-

cyberspace world.[255] As shown above, these elements characterized the NBC's

community experience.[256]

Dawson also finds Brasher's documented account of a Jewish cyber-seder less

pertinent because, in his view, it was not really virtual;[257] thus, it does not cast much light

on critical concerns related to authentic community in cyberspace.[258] Even if less

pertinent, it is significant because it is a chat room example of a ritual similar to NBC. In

the Brasher example, a user named Ashley logs into a website, clicks on an icon to launch

a simulcast video of a live Seder ceremony, and accesses a chat room to interact with

both onground and virtual participants. The experience is communal and interactive as a

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[255] Lorne L. Dawson, "The Mediation of religious experience in cyberspace,"27.

[256] As the experience is recounted by the professor and the transcript of online observance is examined, the candid exchanges and spontaneous expressions of prayer attest to candid exchanges, as well as the wonder that they are interacting with others from distant places that they would not normally have had to opportunity to do so. Experimentation by users in religious expression online that they would not have expressed in an onground setting is most dramatically indicated by the participant, Ally in my email interview with her. See page 30 below where this is apparent.

[257] He is not precise as to why he thinks it is less virtual. But in looking at the Brasher examples compared to the others he discusses, one can assume that he equates virtual with being exclusively online, with higher levels of immersion of the users, with no direct interfacing or interaction with onground experience.

[258] Lorne L. Dawson, "The Mediation of religious experience in cyberspace,"26-27.

chat room, augmented by visual and audio media of the ceremony. Both onground and online participants participated in a chat room, with "many" logging in hours before the Seder itself started. Additionally, for the entire time the cyber-seder was active, "virtual participants exchanged non-stop messages to each other," with interaction also occurring with onground participants.[259] Different than the NBC experience was that a woman named Ashley, in Brasher's account, donned a pseudonym, calling herself "Sarah." Similar to the NBC account is that at least one user engaged in levels of religious emotion and expression that she would not normally do in an onground religious ceremony with others. In the Brasher account, the audio and visual media was live. For the NBC experience, the audio and visual were not, but the online group used a common mp3 file at the same time. Also of significance is that Brasher observes that a message came through to the onground person in charge of the Seder, via the online moderator, and from a virtual participant, asking if the online folks were truly participants or "merely viewers." His response was, "We don't know." According to Brasher, this shows how much "on the cusp of religious experience" the cyber-seder was.[260] This is very different from the NBC experience, as no doubt was ever expressed by those involved that all were not true participants.

Dawson cannot get past concern that online religious practice is a departure from both a traditional religious orientation of belief in the real and sacred, which "entails contact with a power assumed to be external to the religious actor," and the modern, social scientific, Durkheimian notion of "social processes thought to be at the heart of

[259] Brenda E. Brasher, *Give Me That Online Religion* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 75,77.

[260] Brenda E. Brasher, *Give Me That Online Religion*, 76.

religion." It is also crucial to note that he sees this departure as coming to characterize more and more the nature of religious practice offline as well.[261] Even if we allow that Dawson's characterization of such a departure is more unique to cyberspace, I have shown that the NBC experience with the ritual observance of the Eucharist, it is still possible that ritual in cyberspace forges a communal experience--a new form of interactivity that is not completely divorced from aspects taken from Durkheim. In the newer context of cyberspace ritual, participation can unite a religious community in a unique way, using a virtual mode.

The question then arises, is it the common orientation of the group that periodically affirms itself that makes the ritual effective, or does there need to be a prerequisite of face to face, onground interaction? I think that it is the ritual that affirms a shared faith that is essential. The NBC class illustrates Campbell's suggestion from her study of an online religious community, that "online religious community is different from other forms of online community in that it is a gathering around a shared faith."[262] In the NBC case, the online professor contends that the idea of a shared faith inspired the online observance of Eucharist, including a sense of communion with the "saints," (in terms of Christian spiritual heritage) or those who have gone before, and also with classmates, but from a distance. [263] The professor thought of this as being similar to World Communion Sunday, in which Christians in congregations on a given Sunday observe the Lord's Supper in a communion of saints that transcends time and

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[261] Lorne L. Dawson, "The Mediation of religious experience in cyberspace,"33.

[262] Heidi Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online,* 186.

[263] NBC Professor, July 28, 2011, phone.

geographical location. For the NBC professor, the reality of being connected with the

"universal body of Christ," and "enough community" so a spiritual bond was

acknowledged by the online class, compounded with a "strong sense of oneness," made

their observance not seem "revolutionary."[264] This is consonant with an observation

made by Campbell in her study of online Christian religious communities. She

elaborates:

> Within the context of Christian religious online community, members share a
> common view that God transcends the Internet and is at work and in control, both
> online and offline. They also share a common understanding that Christian
> community online is just one part of an unseen network of believers.
> Experiencing community online helps them to conceptualize this larger global
> body of Christ. They are co-laborers with Jesus Christ in community, charged to
> build a community that mirrors the divine community of love, equality, and
> unity.[265]

It was not only the uniqueness of sharing with others in a networked, believing

community that prompted engagement with the online ritual.

The religious relationships the class experienced with each other, including the

professor, in the online class prompted a desire to engage in the ritual. The NBC

professor recalls that the idea to perform a Eucharist online emerged in a conversation in

the online classroom itself. The course's focus is on spiritual formation, in which the

curricular emphasis on spiritual formation was about "developing community."[266] The

professor's rationale for developing an online version of the Eucharist for the class was

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[264] NBC Professor, July 28, 2011, phone.

[265] Heidi Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online,* 186.

[266] NBC Professor, July 28, 2011, phone.

the culmination of the class theme for that week, "We really do need each other."[267] In an

interview, the professor explained that he had made a passing comment in an Outlook

Express[268] class discussion about how great it would be if the class could be on campus

so they could share the Lord's Supper together. According to the professor, this

precipitated in "an overwhelming desire," among the students to set up a way for the

class to do it online.[269]

As to the ritual contributing to the establishment of communal religious life, I

believe that the NBC experience illustrates this as well. Typically, the observance of

Eucharist onground, according to the professor, occurs in the class in "a powerful

culmination of [the] last week's study" on the "Community of Faith--Companions on the

Way," [270] and focuses on the value of communal worship practices.[271] The professor

believes that what he and his students experienced together online achieved the same

purpose, as it was a real, communal worship practice of the Lord's Supper.[272] The

professor indicates that it was of upmost importance to ensure that the design of the

experience maintained engagement for each student who wanted to be involved. He

writes:

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[267] Reuben Welch, *We Really Do Need Each Other* (Nashville, TN: Impact Books, 1973). This book and the phrase in this title became commonly used in Nazarene circles, emphasizing community in the church.

[268] This is the program set up by NBC that is used by all classes for the asynchronous virtual/online classroom (both terms have been used interchangeable by members of the faculty to refer to online class forums).

[269] NBC Professor, July 28, 2011, phone.

[270] NBC Professor, email to Nazarene Bible College email list of Faculty; Cabinet; Adjunct, May 21, 2008.

[271] NBC professor, email to Janice L. Duce, May 5, 2009.

[272] NBC professor, July 28, 2011, phone.

It was important to me that this be an interactive process, not a passive one. The actual "passing" of the bread and the cup happened from one person to the next. After a person had been served, ate, and drank, s/he typed in words to the next person, offering the emblems of Christ's body and blood. Spontaneous prayers and reverent interjections appeared on the screen that enhanced the sense of togetherness.[273]

The transcript of the *Koinonia* chat room indicates that there is great care taken to make sure everyone who wants to participate "made it" in the chat room, knows what to do, and how to proceed alongside others. It is also noteworthy that in the chat room, on the right hand side of the screen, there is a section that lists the "users" who are "present." What is especially keen in the participatory nature of online community is that no one can be a passive observer. Everyone must intentionally respond to others and make their presence known. This is why the professor was concerned to maintain order but also encourage spontaneity--maintaining freedom of expression for everyone without a few dominating chat.[274]

I also completed an email interview to the above-mentioned student, Ally, in 2011—just over two years after the experience. In a portion of the interview pertaining to the ritual of the Eucharist as a communal experience, Ally stresses the unique nature and the results of everyone participating to a significant degree. One of my questions and her answer are given below:

Q: In what way was this experience similar to what you expected? In what way was it not?

A: Online communion had some of the same aspects of traditional communion, such as prayer, "being served" the elements by another person, and partaking "in the midst" of a community of believers. The part that was probably the most

[273] NBC Professor, email to Nazarene Bible College email list of Faculty; Cabinet; Adjunct, May 21, 2008.

[274] NBC Professor, July 28, 2011, phone.

different was that the elements were presented to me by a classmate, and not a minister. I remember feeling unworthy to pass the elements to my classmate; I was utterly humbled and broken by the act. [275]

The transcript also contains exclamations of excitement from all users that everyone was together, spontaneous expressions of affirmation of each other, and expressions of what appears to be sincere praise and thanksgiving associated with Eucharist.[276]

The Eucharist ritual observed by the NBC class was a networked community in which a high degree of communal interaction was valued and expected because the class engaged in a study about Christian community and the role the Eucharist can play in shared faith. A desire grew among the users in the class to engage in it together. What then resulted from the ritual was a confirmation of the networked community as a religious community.

Mediated Communication And Ritual Observance in Cyberspace

Goethals, noted at the beginning of this chapter, also maintains that there are elements of ritual in cyberspace on which I expand here and address as characteristic of cyberspace as a communication medium. These are: "entry into specially designed zones of time and space;" "shared attentiveness and participation in symbolic temporal and spatial zones"; and "a renewal of spirit experienced by individuals taking part in the ritual."[277] According to Goethals, mediated communication is often about creating the sense of "being there" for people who are nonetheless "situated in many different time

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[275] NBC Student, email to Janice Duce, July 15, 2011.

[276] "Transcript."

[277] Gregor Goethals, "Myth and Ritual in Cyberspace," 257.

zones and distant places," and who "'enter' the extraordinary time and space of ritual."[278]

Ritual, involving shared symbols of the NBC Eucharist observance, enabled what

Goethals calls the recognition of the "importance of shared symbols for the formation and

maintenance of community." In this section, I will follow a path that begins by

considering how the sacred, specifically ritual, can best be mediated. On this course I

look at an approach in which religious practice, designed for the Internet works from a

basic assumption about forms of religious ritual and worship aesthetics. The initial

approach adopted by Ong and O'Leary reflects a belief that approaches such as

"sacramental" as distinguished from "Word-centered" are reflective of development from

one type of sensory mode of communication to another. However, I conclude, with

Goethals and others, that both can be taken into consideration as merely aesthetic styles.

I then set out to demonstrate how the NBC observance is indicative of a theological

aesthetic that fulfills the function for which the ritual, the Eucharist, is intended.

O'Leary looks at religious practice of the sacraments with regard to ritual, stating

that the "fundamental problem of religious communication" is "how best to mediate the

sacred" in cyberspace.[279] He posits a distinction between the Roman Catholic Church

(which paradigmatically represents the sacramental orientation[280]) and the Word-centered

Church (characteristic of Protestantism). O'Leary frames his discussion with Ong's

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[278] Gregor Goethals, "Myth and Ritual in Cyberspace,"258.

[279] Stephen D. O'Leary, "Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communicating Religion on Computer Networks," in *Religion Online; Finding Faith on the Internet,* ed. Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan (New York, Routledge, 2004), 41.

[280] O'Leary doesn't seem to recognize that Protestant traditions, such as Calvinism regard proclamation of the Word as sacramental. He is using the term in this way to identify distinctions that are compatible with Ong's work.

theory of the sensorium[281] and his use as paradigmatic of the "changes in Christian

thought and communicative practice that accompanied the onset of print technology: the

evolution of liturgy, the forms and ceremonies of Christian worship, during the

Reformation era."[282] He concludes that the religious aesthetic of Roman Catholicism has

always "appealed to the aural and tactile imagination as well as the visual," while

"liturgical and cultural forms of Protestantism direct attention inward," such that, with

preaching the Word, these forms are "conceived and embodied textually rather than

sacramentally."[283] These illustrate the movement from primary to secondary orality in

modern Western culture.

The significance of this for ritual on the Internet is the understanding offered by

O'Leary, originating in Ong, that with the advent of the digital era and "secondary

orality," the "divorce between word and image begun by print is reversed, so that the

total sensorium again includes sight and sound, voice, image, and music."[284] O'Leary

predicts that "surely computer rituals will be devised that exploit the new technologies to

maximum symbolic effects . . . online confessions . . . Eucharistic rituals, more

weddings, Seders, witches' Sabbats? There will be many such experiments."[285]

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[281]O'Leary summarizes Walter Ong's theory regarding the" sensorium" in *Orality and Literacy.* O'Leary writes that this book, "traces the development of communication technology through a series of stages from pre-literacy, or in his terms 'primary orality,' through the eras of chirographic writing, printing, and electronic media ('secondary orality')." He also writes: "Ong's thesis is that each of the forms of communication utilizes a different complex of the senses and that the particular complex peculiar to the material practices of communication in each culture-the 'sensorium'-has profound impact on the formation of individual and cultural identity." See Stephen D. O'Leary, "Cyberspace as Sacred Space," 38.

[282] Stephen D. O'Leary, "Cyberspace as Sacred Space," 41.

[283] Stephen D. O'Leary, "Cyberspace as Sacred Space," 41.

[284] Stephen D. O'Leary, "Cyberspace as Sacred Space," 40.

[285] Stephen D. O'Leary, "Cyberspace as Sacred Space,"56.

O'Leary's use of Ong's theory of communication and culture is helpful to characterize the shifts occurring in communication media, and how this may affect the manner in which religious practice and ritual is adapted for engagement in cyberspace. Care needs to be taken, however, not to use a theory of communication to account for religious change to the degree that Ong and, it appears, O'Leary do. More complex nuances in theological discourse account for differences between Roman Catholic Eucharist theology and developments in Protestant Eucharist theology beyond that of mere shifts in the stages of orality and literacy. The latter surely makes valuable contributions to understanding aspects of this change and how secondary orality and attention to the sensorium characterizes the use of communication media for religious practice in general, and ritual adaptation to the Internet in particular.

I concur with Goethals, who provides a view of ritual in cyberspace that is compatible with the concept of communication as ritual while taking into account the two distinct forms of religious communication, that of "Word-centered," the other "sacramental."[286] With regard to mythic and ritualistic functions of websites Goethals believes the primary concern should be "the degree to which they expand or fall short of their traditional functions."[287] In other words, how do various religious groups[288] translate myth and ritual to cyberspace in a manner satisfactory to their particular tradition? Goethals examines websites from different Christian traditions, showing that websites

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[286] Gregor Goethals, "Myth and Ritual in Cyberspace," 262, 268. She uses this term for the purpose of labeling distinctions in the same way as O'Leary above, and with the same lack of recognition of the crucial sacramental characteristics found in Protestant theologies such as Calvinism.

[287] Gregor Goethals, "Myth and Ritual in Cyberspace,"264.

[288] She speaks of various kinds of religious groups. I limit my use of her analysis to discussion of Christian groups.

have often been designed to create events that give users a sense of entering and experiencing a sense of religious renewal from participating in rituals through the website.

The Word-centered orientation is a style primarily concerned is to transmit information for religious conversion, instruction and worship. An example of Word-centered is a website established by the American Bible society. A member of the creative team for the website states that "the Web may become an authentic ritual space, particularly for the 'ritual reading of biblical texts in the Judeo-Christian tradition.'" NBC's observance of Eucharist reflects the aspects of the sacrament for this tradition that is compatible with a Word-centered approach. The professor makes sure that the text of Eucharist observance such as songs, homily, Scripture, and prayers of consecration from Cherry Log Christian Church convey clearly the meaning and function of the Eucharist.[289] However, Goethals also notes that when some "Word-centered" oriented groups use the Internet for worship, the key to translating sacred text that is central to such worship "lies in finding the auditory and visual analogies for aesthetic and other elements of Word-centered worship." These involve "prescribed movements, liturgical prayers, music and environmental images," translated into meaningful engagement that mirrors worship in the Word-centered tradition." [290] In some ways the NBC observance includes mirroring what would occur in an onground version of Eucharist observance. For example, prescribed movement, such as when the participants are to partake of the

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[289] "Transcript."

[290] Gregor Goethals, "Myth and Ritual in Cyberspace,"261-62.

elements and pass them to the next person. Goethals thinks that even with these kinds of adaptations some Word-centered groups will find the "experience" less than satisfying.[291]

In contrast, to the Word-centered orientation, or style is what Goethals calls a "sacramental" or more liturgical style of tradition--such as the homepage of a Benedictine monastery--that is "distinguished by its breadth, complexity, and integration of the visual and music arts." While information is also important, more effort is put into "encouraging participation in a Catholic liturgical tradition." Goethals shows that theologians of this type of religious communication are more likely to resist cyberspace adaptations because they are committed to a "wholeness of human experience in which the physical and the spiritual coalesce," and that "authentic ritual is essentially antithetical to the abstractions of cyberspace."[292]

Goethals hints that attention to aesthetics plays a significant role in developing and evaluating websites set up to create different kinds of ritualistic experiences.[293] I believe that establishing a theoretically sound aesthetic for cyberspace is a key to making a way for rituals in cyberspace to be legitimate, authentic, and religiously satisfying. In looking at what the field of aesthetics offers, I begin with what Meyer and Verrips write that there has been a recent move beyond "divides entailed by neo-Kantian aesthetic discourse," which, among other things, "yielded rather static and disembodied approaches to aesthetics[294] They also show that there are divides between religion and

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[291] Gregor Goethals, "Myth and Ritual in Cyberspace," 266.

[292] Gregor Goethals, "Myth and Ritual in Cyberspace," 267-268.

[293] Gregor Goethals, "Myth and Ritual in Cyberspace," 262.

[294] Birgit Meyer and Jojada Verrips, "Aesthetics," in *Key Words in Religion, Media And Culture,* ed. David Morgan (New York: Routledge, 2008), 24.

media based on similar, dematerialized and disembodied understanding of religion. In the field of religion and media, a turn is being made toward a broader approach. This turn has been "instigated" by various media and "cultural forms" that "induce a sense of spiritual presence," including the "sacred sites in cyberspace."[295] This is connected to the idea of media as being taken seriously as "material forms through which the senses and bodies of religious practitioners are tuned and addressed."[296] Meyer and Verrips introduce what they call *sensational form.*

Briefly, there are three ways sensational form functions. First, "sensational forms organize encounters," involving the process by which "religious traditions endorse specific modalities" so that religious encounters with others and the divine can occur. This also has to do with "appropriate modes of getting in touch that involves the senses in various ways."[297] Second, sensational forms "address and form people's bodies and senses in distinct ways." The "sensorium and the body" are "key sites for shaping religious subjectivities, in which personal inclinations and shared sensational forms merge into a distinct habitus." Third, "bodily and sensory modes that are implied in forming religious subjects are also key to invoking and affirming links among them."[298] The aesthetic aspects point toward religious communities thriving and coalescing around a "shared aesthetic style." This can involve "inducing" across the range of "shared moods," "shared religious style-materializing in, for example, collective prayer, a shared

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[295] Birgit Meyer and Jojada Verrips, "Aesthetics,"24-25.

[296] Birgit Meyer and Jojada Verrips, "Aesthetics," 25.

[297] Birgit Meyer and Jojada Verrips, "Aesthetics,"27.

[298] Birgit Meyer and Jojada Verrips, "Aesthetics,"28.

corpus of songs, images, and modes of looking, symbols and rituals, but also a similar

clothing style and material culture," forging a "collective religious identity."[299]

For identifying the specific aspects that I believe constitutes a satisfying aesthetic

approach to Eucharist in cyberspace, I use Gordon Lynch's aesthetic understanding that

can serve theological purposes because it serves its basic function of being "concerned

with making value judgments."[300] More specifically, it has to do with conscious

judgment about what "we find attractive, interesting, worthwhile, stimulating, enjoyable

and inspiring," which not only has implications for "establishing our sense of identity in

the world," but "wider questions about what we believe is genuinely good, enjoyable, and

worthwhile."[301] Here I adapt Lynch's criteria, reducing his nine criteria toward a

theological aesthetic for popular cultural artifacts, to three, showing how these are

reflected in the NBC observance of the Eucharist in cyberspace.

The first aesthetic criterion, taken from Lynch asks the following: "Does it

exemplify *originality, imagination,* or *creativity?*" He qualifies this with regard to

practice: "Does it go beyond or make imaginative use of standard conventions . . . or

introduce us to something we have not previously seen . . .[or] is it in some way

innovative or going beyond existing structures and experience?"[302] I believe the NBC

experience did so, especially in the creative manner in which they compensated for the

fact the experience took place in an online venue. Attention was given to create the

notion of being in a place, a cybersanctuary, or a zone, as Goethals suggests. This

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[299] Birgit Meyer and Jojada Verrips, "Aesthetics,"28.

[300] Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture,* 186.

[301] Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture,* 188.

[302] Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture,* 191.

involves setting up of the chat room as a place for ordered, organized ritual. The professor intentionally developed the experience in a way that would involve all five of the senses. The students "created their own worship environment at their individual computer stations, including the bread and cup."[303] This provided taste, smell, and touch in handling the elements.

The visual was also incorporated when the students were sent a digital picture of the bread and chalice they were to also download and arrange to view on their screen during the observance. This was meant to create a collaborative environment of worship and a sense that they were sharing this image as they virtually passed the elements portrayed in the picture. In another email to me, which included an attachment of this digital picture, the professor explained: "This image had special significance for me because it is a picture I took when I served communion to a Spiritual Formation class in the mountains a few summers ago."[304]

The audio aspect also provided the sense of a sanctuary environment, as this element provided music from the Cherry Log Christian Church website. The students, as noted above, were also provided with a Word file containing the words of "Come Share The Lord," which they were to sing along with the recording on the mp3 file that they downloaded.

This experience by the NBC class invoked imagination and creativity, and was original in that a significant experience was created using the senses with a relatively low

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[303] NBC Professor, email to Nazarene Bible College email list of Faculty; Cabinet; Adjunct, May 21, 2008.

[304] NBC Professor, email to Janice Duce, May 11, 2009.

level of technological sophistication.[305] In a phone interview, the professor and I discussed other specific things about the experience related to imagination and creativity. These were done to compensate for not being face-to-face and used less sophisticated technological means. Intentionality in written communication made up for lacking verbal and visual cues.[306] He notes that people become more expressive online in ways they would not be in person to make up for things that can be experienced in total physical presence with others. He believes that sometimes these things not only compensate, but augment, a sense of togetherness. In typing, people own the expression of their emotions, or they heighten their physical engagement by acknowledging that they are clapping their hands or singing loudly, for example. In light of this, the professor reiterated--adamantly over two years later--that he is "thoroughly convinced that it was an authentic, genuine, sacred experience."[307]

The second criterion regarding aesthetic judgment combines three of Lynch's criteria. This inquires whether or not an online experience offers a "satisfying *reflection of human experience;*" the experience makes possible "a *sense of encounter with 'God,' the transcendent or the numinous,*" providing "*genuinely pleasurable experiences, whether emotional, sensual, or intellectual.*" The significant qualifier also noted by Lynch is that the aesthetic will "make us more aware of the nature and texture" of a particular

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[305] This was not only true for 2008, but most definitely for the time of this writing. I should point out that NBC maintains a low level of expectation for technological sophistication for the technology required for these classes for the sake of ease and scope of access for persons who want to obtain a bachelor degree online.

[306] "Transcript."

[307] NBC Professor, July 28, 2011, phone.

experience.[308] I am primarily concerned with whether or not, in the aesthetic use of various kinds of materials, the experience delivered on these counts. I believe these three criteria are strongly implied in what the NBC professor writes to his colleagues in an email. He states that he is "pleased to say that everyone was able to move beyond the initial curiosity, novelty, and fascination to a prepared heart for the sacred moment shared."[309] I believe the sense of a sacred experience, not to mention the material used that made it a pleasurable moment of religious praise and celebration, can be demonstrated in some things the students typed, as shown by the transcript.

Preparation for the event was done with attention to detail, conveying a commitment to a high level of engagement for a meaningful experience for each student. As already noted, this involved attention to the sense of sanctuary and participation, but by also making sure students were able to be present, to navigate, and to know when and how to use materials provided by the professor. High priority was given to be sure and set a positive tone for the experience.[310] Students also conveyed in their posts, as noted in the narrative, many religious expressions of joy and thanksgiving, [311] which were in keeping with the concept of Eucharist celebration. After all, "Eucharist" is "a proper noun derived from the Greek word meaning 'to give thanks' and refers to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion."[312] When interviewed, Ally noted that the experience contained many aspects she recognized as a "traditional communion" service,

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[308] Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture,*191.

[309] NBC Professor, email to Nazarene Bible College email list of Faculty; Cabinet; Adjunct, May 21, 2008.

[310] NBC Professor, email to Nazarene Bible College email list of Faculty; Cabinet; Adjunct, May 21, 2008.

[311] "Transcript."

[312] Van A. Harvey, "Eucharist," 88.

but that there were some that surprised and delighted her, especially that "the elements were presented to me by another student and not a minister," and also when she passed the elements to the next person, she was "utterly humbled and broken by the act."[313]

The central aesthetic piece of the observance that prepared the students and the professor to partake of the elements and pass them to each other was the use of the mp3 file from Cherry Log Christian Church. This aesthetic choice provided students with music, prayers, a homily, and words of Scripture and institution. Listening to the file myself, I understood how it added texture to the observance, in the aesthetic sense suggested by Lynch. The singing is a recording of a group of people with average voices gives the sense of congregational singing. There are also voices in prayer by two lay celebrants, and the homily by a minister. After reading 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, the minister ends with the words: "It is our custom in this congregation to serve each other bread and the wine with the words of institution: 'This is the bread of Christ, this is the fruit of the vine, or some such words. Serve each other and remember the Lord." [314] Listening to these words, I find that they fit well with what the online class performed, and I can see how hearing these words adds an aesthetic boost to observing the Eucharist in cyberspace.

Thomas Madron, a United Methodist pastor, practitioner, and advocate of online Eucharist, writes what he believes should characterize an "authentic" worship experience online. Besides being interactive and participatory, through the use of media that makes it interactive, he writes that the Eucharist should include "instructions on how to prepare

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[313] NBC student, email to Janice Duce, July 15, 2011.

[314] Cherry Log Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), "Invitation To The Lord's Table," http://www.clccdoc.org/sermons/first_service/communion.mp3 (accessed September 11, 2010).

the physical elements of bread and wine for use in the service," and there should be "options for feedback to a 'real' person." Writing about his practice of offering an ongoing offering of the Eucharist at a website, one in which participants are likely to return, he notes that the site needs to "change and not be static," and "make use of the variety of media opportunities."[315] For his website and for the one-time NBC experience, aesthetic variety is an important part of giving appeal to the experience. To connect with the divine and fulfill the function of Eucharist, Madron notes that the service needs to be "biblically based" and tied to "appropriate readings each time the site is accessed."[316]

The third aesthetic criterion is based on whether or not what is done successfully serves the "*function* for which it has been created"[317] I believe the above shows that the online observance was deemed by everyone involved as serving its intended function. What I want to note briefly are the added elements for ensuring that the experience served its function well. The professor was intentional in providing order to the passing and sharing of the elements. From the time he and the students passed to each other, he types the name of the first person, indicating that he is serving them. After serving this student, he then tells this person who to serve next, reminding them who is to be served last and also typing to the class to "proceed as you feel lead."[318] This does more than communicate what order is to be followed: it is an interpolation to be sure that no one

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[315] Thomas Wm. Madron, "Can we provide Holy Communion over the Web?" (November 30, 2010), http://holycommuniontheweb.org/holycommunion.pdf (accessed February 23, 2011).

[316] Thomas Wm. Madron, "Can we provide Holy Communion over the Web?"

[317] Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture,* 191.

[318] "Transcript."

jumps in to fill an empty space that occurs on the screen for a few moments.[319] The

professor also makes the experience seamless, so that the purpose of the experience is

accomplished, by having on his computer a Word document that contains statements for

the sacrament observance to use when passing the elements. The Word document also

contains words of inspiration he could quickly paste in the chat room in real time. He is

also intentional about ending the experience by dismissing the table so that chat room

postings did not drift aimlessly beyond the intention of the online community gathering.

The professor inserts a prepared benediction, which he pastes into the chat room.[320]

In this section, I have covered aspects of the ritual of the Eucharist in cyberspace

that can be done using mediated communication. I believe it adds another weighty

consideration to negotiating whether or not Eucharist in cyberspace can serve its intended

function. I have pointed out that whether or not a tradition that uses the Internet is more

Word-centered or sacramental, characteristics of each should be considered in deciding if

the ritual can fulfill the commitments of these traditions when translated into cyberspace.

I have shown that theoretical considerations need to be given to the concept of secondary

orality and its implications. Further, I have developed the idea that the most helpful

insights informing negotiation involve theological aesthetic considerations, not only in

evaluating the event in cyberspace, but as criteria to use in designing the experience.

Agency of The User In Cyberspace Ritual Observance

Understanding the user as a human self and an active agent means seeking to

retain identity and embodiment; in shaping the experience in a way that retains one's full

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[319] NBC Professor, July 28, 2011, phone.

[320] NBC Professor, July 28, 2011, phone.

humanity.   When practitioners of their faith engage in the Eucharist in cyberspace are

deemed as merely disembodied entities, fear can emerge that such users are less than

human--posthuman cyborgs. In Chapter 2, I explored these issues regarding cyberspace

practice in general, and argued that the concept of agency of the user within a model of

social shaping in relationship to technology lays these concerns to rest. In this section, in

light of the religious social shaping of technology (RSS), I explore the issues of identity

and embodiment specifically with regard to ritual such as Eucharist. In the NBC online

observance of Eucharist, users sought to affirm and heighten their identities, sometimes

by engaging their bodies in different ways in a virtual environment. For the NBC student

interviewed, identity, or "being oneself," became important because she wanted to

express herself differently than she would have in an onground church setting. This is

illustrated in part of my email interview with Ally:

> Q: Did you feel like you were really taking communion? Was there any way in
> which the venue, or manner in which it was done contributed to the quality of the
> experience of the Lord's Supper?
>
> A: I did feel like I was really taking communion, and it actually felt deeply
> personal, because I was before the Lord alone. Although, I was in the midst of
> my classmates, I had the freedom of completely breaking before the Lord and not
> being "embarrassed." As a woman, sometimes I hold back tears at church
> because I do not want my makeup to smear and look like a raccoon. I know this
> sounds terribly vain and I recognize that, but I do not always hold back, just
> sometimes. Being in my living room, alone *and* in the company of believers,
> gave me the best of both worlds, so to speak. I was able to kneel before the Lord
> and sob at His feet, with no reservations.
>
> Q: Theologically, do you think that the electronic venue deviates from fulfilling
> the church's intention in observing this tradition? Why or why not?
>
> A: I do not think the electronic venue deviates from fulfilling the church's
> intention in observing this tradition. We are still meeting with other believers and
> encouraging each other to run the race, and fight the good fight. This technology
> was not available in Biblical times, so I dare not put words in the mouths of Jesus
> and the disciples, rather [sic] they would embrace it or not, but the intent of the

ritual remains intact through the use of electronics. The meaning of communion is to build a relationship with God and with other believers, either as an individual or as a church. It is a time of sharing intimate thoughts and feelings; whether between God and man, or brethren and brethren. I do not see communion as being reserved for a church setting only. I believe that it is in order to show reverence to God no matter the location or the venue. [321]

This is an illustration of the individuality of the agent who, in expressing this level of independence, raises concern. For example, cultural critic of cyberspace, Zygmunt Bauman (quoted by David Bell), writes that cyberspace contains what he calls "peg communities" where people can "hang" their interests, obsessions, enthusiasms, and passions, around which they try to build a collective, useful, yet ephemeral and elective existence, hanging their identities like hats or coats. Bauman deems these "superficial and perfunctory, as well as transient" bonds with neither consequences nor responsibilities toward others.[322] In response, David Bell offers a different take on the "peg" concept. After critiquing the obvious nostalgia concerning community amongst Bauman et al., Bell drives home the point that if mobility defines the world in which we live (which it does), membership in a virtual community can be as just as durable, if not more so, because it is sustainable not only in spite of mobility, but because of it.[323] Bell also cites Smith and Kollack, who argue:

> While individual membership and active participation may be ephemeral and shifting . . .   though at the same time intense . . . there is something that's more durable, a conduit through which the ebb and flow of membership is funneled . . . an infrastructure . . . [that] includes both hardware and software, plus codes of conduct (both formal and tacit)."[324]

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[321] NBC Student, email to Janice Duce, July 15, 2011.

[322] David Bell, "Webs As Pegs," in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. David Bell and Barbara Kennedy, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 257.

[323] David Bell, "Webs As Pegs,"256.

[324] David Bell, "Webs As Pegs,"256.

Religious online practitioner and pastor Douglas Estes comments on this related to people whose avatars he encounters in virtual church, in places like *Second Life.* From his own experience, Estes notes that when he encounters avatars in the virtual church environment, they represent people who appear there looking for particular things. Still, he takes very seriously the concept that these are "real people with real questions looking for real answers."[325] Bobby Gruenewald, the "Innovation Pastor" at LifeChurch.tv, says that as a pastor in the virtual world, there are trade-offs. There are people who hide behind their avatar and say and do things they would never do onground. The positive side, however, is that "it is this same lack of inhibition that leads people to ask questions about God they would not normally feel comfortable exploring in real life."[326] This kind of transient exploration that involves wanting to embrace and explore traditional religion, is found in traditional religious rites, and illustrates what Turkle notes as a reconstruction of identities. Especially in terms of identity not being limited to physical setting or social location, Turkle notes that such reconstruction allows people in cyberspace to engage in "virtual workshops" of identities.[327] In the NBC case above, Ally not only explores a new aspect of her identity, but also her interest in expressing her Christianity in a new way to reinforce her allegiance to a traditional faith. She not only experimented with a different way of expressing her religious devotion, but also with the sense that she was a part of the church of Christ-- a spiritual bond that transcends time and space.

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[325] Douglas Estes, *SimChurch,* 90-91.

[326] Douglas Estes, *SimChurch,* 91.

[327] Sherry Turkle, *Life on The Screen,* 177.

As to identity related to the body and embodiment, I contend that neither Ally nor her NBC classmates show any desire to be separated from their bodies. They only chose to express their identities in different ways in a virtual world. But they also chose to appropriate and shape ritual according to their desire to retain their religious identities. In this ritual, the indispensable aspect of enactment served this latter desire in what they experienced in the Eucharist. This is what makes a ritual unique. Hayles helps here, taking what was explored in Chapter 2 further to apply the construction of identity in the posthuman user to rituals. Hayles begins by using the concept of "habitus," as developed by Bourdieu. She relates that the habitus is "learned, perpetuated, and changed through embodied practices . . . a series of dispositions and inclinations that are both subject to circumstances and durable enough to pass down to generations."[328] Further, Hayles applies this concept to ritual, quoting Paul Connerton. Connerton links embodiment with memory, which is connected with rituals, commemorative ceremonies, and other bodily practices that have a performative aspect. Also, "like performative language, performative rituals must be enacted to take place" and to serve their purpose. Connerton applies this to liturgy, such that "if there is no performance there is no ritual."[329] The choice that the NBC online class made as active agents to express their religious identity in ritual solidified their identities as individuals and as members of a specific religious community.

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[328] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Post-Human,* 202-203.

[329] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Post-Human,* 203-4.

Conclusion

I have proposed the terms of negotiation and analyzed them from the standpoint of NBC in their decision to celebrate the Eucharist online. The terms are all about understanding that ritual in cyberspace has the character of *networked communication media characterized by the agency of the user in carrying out religious praxis*. This is qualified by the unique ways in which rituals such as the Eucharist can be translated to cyberspace without losing its unique character. This was accomplished mainly through a commitment to community, out of which the Eucharist made sense, and also, in turn, strengthened the sense of community. This was also aided by an aesthetic that takes into account a functional, holistic, and broader view of religious ritual. The active agents also experimented, yet sealed and solidified their identities through the enactment of Eucharist in cyberspace as members of a particular religious group. The NBC class and professor were interested in retaining their theological commitment to their understanding of the essential meaning of the Eucharist. Analysis of the transcript, reflections from the professor and at least one student, show that the experience was not only legitimate, but also resulted in a delightful new discovery: that the purposes for sharing the Lord's Supper were not realized in spite of being online, but precisely because they were online.

In the next chapter, I look at reactions from a group of Nazarene and Wesleyan listserv who came to a very different conclusion when they heard about what NBC had performed in cyberspace. As recounted at the beginning of this chapter, on June 12, 2008, in an official online publication of The Church of the Nazarene, called the *Nazarene Communications Network*, an article appeared entitled: "Breaking Bread-

Breaking Ground: NBC Students Share Communion Online."[330] It was submitted by an

administrator of NBC who was among those who received the email from the facilitating

professor describing the online Eucharist. The tone of the article was positive, celebrating

the creativity and innovation of the NBC online program. However, the reception by a

group of Nazarene and Wesleyan scholars was just the opposite. What this further entails

for a process of negotiation where there is strong opposition to using new media within a

religious community is further explored in the next chapter.

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[330] Nazarene New Network, "Breaking Bread-Breaking Ground: NBC Students Share Communion Online," http://www.ncnnews.com/nphweb/html/ncn/article (accessed September 11, 2010).

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF REFLECTIONS OF TWO LISTSERVS REGARDING THE EUCHARIST IN CYBERSPACE

The last chapter presented the terms of negotiation for the NBC practice of the

Eucharist from the standpoint of the user community, one that believed they were

adapting their tradition as they creatively implemented the Eucharist in cyberspace. What

occurred in response to the enthusiastic news release to Nazarene constituency was a

reaction from two listservs connected with the Wesleyan/holiness scholarly community.

The scenario is an example of what Campbell has observed when religious communities

are challenged by the fact that "the technology is significantly new in its form, or in the

social condition that it creates, so that it raises new challenges for the community."[331]

The first narrative below is the reaction of a listserv discussion, lasting from June

18, 2008 until June 25, 2008.[332] The discussion had twenty-six different participants. I

received permission to use responses from ten of these participants, whose views

represent the major issues raised by the listserv discussion.[333] Responses were all

impromptu and relatively short in length. It is important to note that *not one* of the

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[331] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media,* 61.

[332] In compliance with the IRB of the University of Denver, and honoring the request of the moderator of this listserv, the name of the listserv and any other identifying information of the participants will be kept anonymous.

[333] I did not become a member of this listserv, with access to its discussion until September 23, 2009, well after the time of this email discussion. Upon becoming a member, the listserv archivist provided me with the conversation. It was sent to me as an attachment in which the *Microsoft* program, *OneNote* has been used to capture the email threads of the conversation. I worked from a 223 page printed hard copy of the digital conversation produced by *OneNote.*

original twenty-six participants gave their unqualified approval of what NBC did. Few were really interested in the details of what actually occurred, or the perspectives of those involved. The focus of discussion was centered on the practice of online/virtual[334] communion in general, with the NBC event as a starting point. There was a spectrum of opinions regarding this sacrament being practiced online/virtually with positions ranging from absolute disapproval to a carefully qualified endorsement.

The second listserv narrative below is the result of the conversation above coming to the attention of the NBC administration. When they learned that an academic community of scholars had raised concern they wanted to make sure that allowing online Eucharist was not theologically remiss. In Campbell's study of examples of religious communities negotiating innovative practice with new media, she notes that such communities are often concerned about determining if "there is room for members to suggest innovations in use or design of technology." She also suggests that key to understanding what happens in situations such as these is determining what "authority roles and structures" can "indicate who has the right to govern media decision-making and be involved in innovation."[335]

In late July of 2008, I was contacted by the Vice President of Online Education, along with others, to participate in the second listserv, an ad hoc email discussion set up by Nazarene Bible College, to evaluate the practice of Eucharist in cyberspace, and make

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[334] I clarified my use of the terms "online" and "virtual" in chapter 1. The distinctions that a few of the Scholars in this listserv discussion made are retained in order to show an example of the ways in which these terms are understood influence an understanding of Eucharist in cyberspace.

[335] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media,* 61.

a recommendation to the administration of NBC.[336] The college invited the professor

who created and led the online Eucharist in the spring of 2008 in his Spiritual Formation

class, other NBC faculty members, and Nazarene educators from other church-associated

educational institutions. I was invited to participate because of the position I held as a

full-time resident member of the faculty at Nazarene Bible College in Colorado Springs.

Six other faculty members at the school were listed on the email invitation. Of the latter,

only four posted responses. The professor, whose online class had done the online

Eucharist, did not post any responses, and one other scholar who was invited to be part of

the discussion did not post a response. Discussion on this NBC listserv occurred between

August 1st and August 4th, 2008. My analysis is from emails saved from this

conversation.[337] In an email report by the moderator of the second listserv to the NBC

administration, his conclusion is that he is "not sure NBC would want to take an official

position on this either way." [338]

Campbell writes of three different styles of negotiation strategies, or "choices,"

that religious communities make in interacting with computer technology. These are: (1)

to accept and appropriate; (2) to reject and resist certain aspects of the technology; or (3)

to reconfigure and innovate so the technology conforms to the "values of the

community."[339] Contributors to the discussions in both listservs leaned toward "resist and

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[336] The extent to which both rumors and leakage of the discussion in the first listserv affected this request of the NBC's administration for further discussion is not known.

[337] Permission to use the content of the emails was obtained in compliance with the IRB of the University of Denver.

[338] Scholar D, email to David M. Phillips, Don E. Stelting, September 18, 2008.

[339] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, 113.

reject;" however, there were hints of negotiation that can be labeled as "reconfigure and innovate."

My contention is that once major objections of reject and resist are explored and significantly refuted, a way can be made toward a full reconfiguration and innovation of cyberspace for religious praxis. An effective way of formulating a useful negotiation of Eucharist in cyberspace is to explore how the model of Eucharist in cyberspace as *networked communication media characterized by the agency of the user in carrying out religious praxis*, provides a theoretical framework to classify objections and offer a way forward, toward reconfiguration and innovation.

As I proceed with the narrative and analysis below, I designate which listserv I refer to in each section. Each of the ten participants in the first listserv, whose perspectives and comments are analyzed, is numerically designated. [340] The four Scholars who posted an opinion on the second listserv, sponsored by NBC, are each assigned an alphabetical letter.[341]

The Eucharist in Networked Community in Cyberspace

The backlash of the first listserv and the discomfort of some in the second listserv regarding Eucharist, stems from a concern that adapting Eucharist to the Internet compromises Eucharist as a communal practice for the church.[342] In the two subsections below I will look at the responses of each listserv separately regarding issues related to

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[340] Permission was granted by these 10 and their anonymity will be protected in compliance with the IRB of the University of Denver.

[341] Permission was granted by these 4 and their anonymity will be protected in compliance with the IRB of the University of Denver.

[342] It is only in this limited sense that it is connected to ecclesiology.

community and Eucharist. Then there will be a third subsection in which I will propose a

way forward in the negotiation of Eucharist in cyberspace.

<div align="center">Observation of Reflections in First Listserv</div>

In this subsection I make observations on the ways this listserv demonstrated a

"resist and reject" strategy of dealing with Eucharist in cyberspace. Those who resist fit

Campbell's description of "strict communal boundaries and codes of practice regarding

engagement with mainstream society."[343] The first set of concerns is that ritual in

cyberspace is a problematic accommodation to a greatly attenuated version community

and the Eucharist. The second set is others who consider how "media appropriation

complements . . . existing structure, authorities or beliefs"[344] because the NBC class

engaged in meaningful interaction. A third group of opinions focuses on how Eucharist

in cyberspace is in line with their belief in the value that the religious community should

place on "taking care of their own" by providing access to the Eucharist. The last set of

opinions indicates a view that the use of technology shows the unacceptable situation of

poor Eucharistic practice in The Church of the Nazarene.

 Emails written by participants came in response to the discussion started by

Scholar #1. He begins with a strong "reject and resist" viewpoint because he thinks that

that ritual in cyberspace is a problematic accommodation to a greatly attenuated version

community and the Eucharist. On June 18, 2008, he wrote to the first listserv:

> During the summer slump period of _____,[345] I would like to raise a
> question. In last week's online Nazarene News Summary, there was an article

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[343] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media,* 117.

[344] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media,* 122.

[345]He names the listserv to whom he is writing. I do not have the permission of the listserv moderator to use the name of this listserv.

about a professor at Nazarene Bible College in Colorado Springs leading his online class in a Communion service. It seems that at the appointed time online students participated in a virtual Eucharist. The "passing" of the bread and cup happened from one person to the next. After a person has been served, ate, and drank, she/he type in words to the next person, offering the emblems. What do you _____ers think of this? Personally, I am appalled at such a "cheapening" of the holy sacrament. How can there by [sic] meaningful communion where there is only the computer screen to meet with face to face.[346]

As this Scholar continues, he articulates his belief that this practice represents a low ecclesiology,[347] and makes his convictions known by using sarcasm. He writes:

> As I think of it, maybe they have something there . . . instead of wasting gas . . . everyone could stay home and attend church online . . . taking up the offering is not insurmountable . . . there is great potential here for church growth-if one is satisfied with growth in breadth rather than in depth.[348]

Later, he adds that the weaker one's ecclesiology, the more likely it is she/he will favor online Eucharist, which is nothing but pure pragmatism, an accommodation to culture, and a concession to the consumerism of the age.[349] In other words, online Eucharist violates much valued communal boundaries and codes of practice regarding the church and the proper way to observe the Eucharist.

Scholar #2 notes, in response to Scholar #1's, that he, too, is concerned about the implications for the quality of community online, because he sees it as "individualizing

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[346] Scholar #1, email to private listserv, June 18, 2008.

[347] The use of this term in this section of this discussion has to do with the church as a community, observing Eucharist as a communal rite. When the term is used by various scholars in this conversation, it is used in a manner in which it seems to be a synonym for no ecclesiology or connoting a non-orthodox position. However, generally, in theological circles the following distinction is made. Low ecclesiology is in contrast to high ecclesiology, or between "low church" and "high church." In speaking of the modes of Eucharist celebration, Thorsen applies the distinction this way: "So-called *high-church* worship practices include more rites and rituals, liturgy, and formal procedures pertaining to communion. So called *low-church* worship practices exercise greater simplicity and freedom, characterized by greater degrees of informality with regard to how communion takes place." Don Thorsen, *An Exploration of Christian Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 2008), 365.

[348] Scholar #1, email to private listserv, June 18, 2008.

[349] Scholar #1, email to private listserv, June 20, 2008.

and privatizing Eucharist."[350] He uses the listserv as an opportunity to express additional concern that opening the door to normalizing online practice carries a "general danger." He states that he is open to looking at how community might be preserved with some central "base" of operations, with some technological creativity being used for people at various locations. This does not solve his central concern that the practice would become a mere "broadcast" over the Internet without a personal touch in some way from clergy, which makes the "church of Christ into a cult of personality," "transforming the sacramental minister" into "an idol of consumer preference."[351] He works from a "resist and reject" orientation that Campbell summarizes as trying to decide "whether or not use of a particular media is worth the risk."[352]

A second group of opinions had to do with considering how media appropriation complements the value that observance of the Eucharist should place on community. The point they make is to notice that the NBC class engaged in meaningful interaction. Some participants in the first listserv wondered how high the quality of interaction could be for a communally patterned practice that is the Eucharist. Scholar #3 points out that NBC's practice involved persons serving each other,[353] and comments on the interactive nature of the Eucharist in any venue, noting that "many people report a significant increase in the meaningfulness of the celebration when they receive from fellow members and then

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[350] Scholar #2, email to private listserv, June 18, 2008.

[351] Scholar #2, email to private listserv, June 18, 2008.

[352] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media,* 117.

[353] He is quick to indicate that he is in an exploratory mode, and not condoning this "democratic approach."

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past [sic] the elements to other members."[354] Echoing the point made in chapter 3, that religious online classes display many communal qualities that lend themselves to meaningful ritual observances like the Eucharist, Scholar #8 weighs in based on his experience with online class communities. He states, emphatically, "I am convinced not only from experience, but from research that online education is a valid form of education, and in many ways superior to the traditional face to face medium." He also points out that the conversation of this first listserv itself is "virtual" and with "a strong sense of community."[355]

A third group of opinions focuses on how Eucharist in cyberspace is in line with their belief that a true community is going to place value on including as many people in the celebration of Eucharist as they can. The closest anyone in this listserv comes to reconfiguring, in terms of what Campbell suggests as "altered in some way so that use and performance come more in line with the social needs and boundaries of the community,"[356] has to do with access. These persons want to look at the possibilities that online Eucharist affords in providing a way for people to be a part of a worshipping community from a distance, especially when they are hindered from being in the same physical space. Scholar #9 is among those interested in finding evidence in the practices of the church--past and present--in which there might be "rubrics that guided the distribution of the host to shut-ins and prisoners that might raise insight in this matter."[357]

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[354] Scholar #3, email to private listserv, June 19, 2008.

[355] Scholar #8, email to private listserv, June 18, 2008.

[356] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, 122.

[357] Scholar #9, email to private listserv, June 18, 2008.

Similarly, Scholar #8 wonders about historical precedent when geographical distances made it necessary for a "different 'mediated' form of Eucharist participation" to be provided."[358] Scholar #3 weighs in heavily on this aspect, arguing for what he calls a "gradation model." [359] He maintains that there are preferred ways to celebrate the Eucharist, such as "face-to-face more than face-to-the-back-someone's-bald head; real bread instead of 'plastic' wafers; etc." He argues that "given difficult circumstances," some modes of celebration, such as "computer-based" celebration, "are preferable to none at all." Thus, he suggests that the Eucharist can be observed online based on a gradation of value. [360] That is, Nazarenes will opt for a less preferable mode of Eucharist observance, especially when doing so preserves something valued. He does not go into detail what all he means by this, but says he definitely cannot go as far as others, whom he quotes[361] as saying that online Eucharist is "essentially valueless, gnostic [sic], meaningless, or stupid (to use _____'s word)."

Scholar #3 reminds the group that "other accepted means of grace rely upon communication forms of various types." [362] Scholar # 1 writes to Scholar #3 that he has lowered his ecclesiology "a notch or two" when he says that "to experience the Eucharist online is better than not to experience it at all."[363] Scholar #3 replies that he not only challenges the notion of using "high" versus "low" to distinguish between "orthodox"

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[358] Scholar #8, email to private listserv, June 18, 2008.

[359] Scholar #3, email to private listserv, June 19, 2008.

[360] Scholar #3, email to private listserv, June 19, 2008.

[361] Scholar #3, email to private listserv, June 19, 2008.

[362] Scholar #3, email to private listserv, June 19, 2008.

[363] Scholar #1. email to private listserv, June 20, 2008.

and "unorthodox," but also writes: "I don't buy the argument . . . . that offering the eucharist [sic] online to those who have no access to it is necessarily evidence of a diminished ecclesiology." He then argues that refusing to make the sacrament available to those with no access is itself a diminished ecclesiology, as ". . . the view that a person is better off alone that with a less-than-ideal communal celebration strikes me as closer to heresy."[364]

The fourth set of opinions indicates a view that the use of technology shows the unacceptable situation of poor Eucharistic practice in The Church of the Nazarene. It is with this basic conviction that even with some hope of reconfiguration and innovation, Scholar #3 and others pull back from acknowledging that online Eucharist could ever qualify as a normative practice. Such hesitation falls under Campbell's description of religious communities for whom "reject and resist" does not always mean a "full-out rejection of technology," but more so a rejection of "certain uses or aspects of technology."[365] Scholar #3 acknowledges the need to determine "whether participation in a computer community ever warrants the celebration of the eucharist [sic] AS THAT computer community." He answers: "I honestly don't know about that. But the participants in the NBC experience apparently reported a deep sense of God's presence in their virtual eucharistic [sic] experience. That ought to count for something--exactly what, I'm not sure."[366] Scholar #8, along the same lines, says:

> I also hope that I was not misunderstood in my posts. I do not support a virtual
> Eucharist as suggested by NBC. I do, however, believe that a virtual form of the

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[364] Scholar #3, email to private listserv, June 20, 2008.

[365] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media,* 122.

[366] Scholar #3, email to private listserv, June 20, 2008.

Eucharist, which should not be called Eucharist, does provide a means of grace. I think people can experience the presence of Christ through these mediated forms of practice.[367]

Some, who could be classified as falling under the fourth set of opinions above about poor Eucharistic practice, is less ambivalent than others. This group of responses suggests that experimenting with an online communal experience for the Eucharist is definitely and simply a type of "wake up call" of weak areas still prevalent regarding Eucharist, ecclesiology and real community. The rejection in this case is not fully a rejection of technology but resistance because it only makes an unacceptable situation of poor Eucharistic practice even worse. For example, Scholar #9 writes:

> If a free-church[368] tradition like the Church of the Nazarene (which will be the example since NBC belongs to that tradition) thinks we 'do' Eucharist well then perhaps our consternation over the NBC action actually reflects our own relative meager attempts to foster a sacramental world in our worship . . . now lest other folk[369] feel a bit smug I think I could assert that . . . even liturgical traditions are not always that savvy. [370]

After more elaboration on this point, he concludes: "While I am disturbed by virtual Eucharist . . . perhaps we can accept the gift that does come with this virtual event, the reminder that none of us 'do' communion well, we all need grace in our practice."[371]

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[367] Scholar #8, email to private listserv, June 25, 2008.

[368] Theologian Roger Olson uses this term, "free church model" to describe one of the four major models of the church in evangelical theology. He characterizes "free church" as that which "focuses ecclesiological reflection on the voluntary nature of church membership and participation and on the priesthood of believers within the Christian community . . . [and] consistent with the postmodern emphasis on individual identity forged in community." Roger E. Olson, "Church," in *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology,* ed. Roger E. Olson (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 159-160.

[369] Not everyone in the listserv who gave opinions was Nazarene. But all who are a part of the listserv consider themselves Wesleyan. There is a mixture of both high church and low church leanings.

[370] Scholar #9, email to private listserv, June 19, 2008.

[371] Scholar #9, email to private listserv, June 19, 2008.

This is similar to Scholar #4, who draws attention to Hebrews 10:24-25,[372] writing, "Before we denigrate virtual attempts" and choose between "bodily assemblies and virtual gatherings," the group should look at the real issue of whether or not any so-called churches are actually being the church "when we are together."[373]

Observation of Reflections in Second Listserv

In this listserv the approaches fall into the following categories. One type of opinion focuses on how Eucharist in cyberspace could be of value because the religious community should provide access to the Eucharist when there is no other way. And yet they back away from full endorsement of cyberspace Eucharist lest it lead to normative practice. The second opinion is mine, in which I represent the viewpoint that technology can be reconfigured for use for the Eucharist in terms of authentic community. I also say that I wonder how the practice fits Nazarene Eucharist theology. The third opinion sees potential in the use of technology as a valuable tool but contends that the use of technology shows the unacceptable situation of poor Eucharistic practice in the Church of the Nazarene.

The second listserv begins with Scholar A, who is interested in noting the value of a community providing online access to those who are not able to be part of a gathered onground community. But he is adamant that doing so as a normative practice violates the manner in which the communal aspects of Eucharist serves a sound ecclesiology.[374]

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[372] Hebrews 10:24-25 says:"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging on another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (New International Version, 1983).

[373] Scholar #4, email to private listserv, June 18, 2008.

[374] As in the previous listserv he is not trying to work out an ecclesiology. He is using the term loosely to describe community and the fact that the church practices Eucharist as a communal-oriented sacrament.

He states that he is open to carefully considering issues surrounding new technologies, and is neither suspicious nor giving unqualified approval of the transformation of church practice by technology. As he looks at the issues, his comments could be placed in the category of resist and reject. Scholar A's discomfort with online Eucharist is because of his discomfort with the online church, which uses "online/virtual modes of relation." He asks, rhetorically: "Would we affirm virtual congregations as an authentic embodiment of the Church? Do we really need to gather bodily and live and minister together? Could we establish a church in a sim-world?"[375] He is concerned about extenuating circumstances, writing that extreme or emergency circumstances, such as a "remote missionary that has no present community," online Eucharist would most likely be acceptable. What he cannot find acceptable is any attempt to "formalize--and endorse--a routine practice of virtual Eucharist," because it would "redefine" its character in unacceptable ways.[376]

The second opinion is mine, in which I am open to understanding how Eucharist in cyberspace can be configured in a way that reflects authentic community. In my response as Scholar B, I start out talking about the downside of the whole experience of online community, according to my extensive experience in teaching online. But I am quick to point out that in training for online education, learning as a community is emphasized, and that intentional engagement can be a superior form of engagement. I continue to make the point that since NBC's mission is to train Nazarene clergy, knowing how it should fit with Nazarene Eucharist theology is crucial. So, I suggest that observers of what the NBC class did, need to understand what the professor and class

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[375] Scholar A ,email to NBC listserv, August 1, 2008.

[376] Scholar A, email to NBC listserv, August 1 2008.

members understood about the sacrament in light of whether or not they have a "high" or "low" orientation of church and sacrament. This response was based on my experience in that I knew the Church of the Nazarene is in a quandary regarding its view of this sacrament.[377]

In my attempt at reconfiguration and innovation, I wanted to explore putting together criteria for community experience that is compatible with a Nazarene understanding of Eucharistic theology. Campbell writes that reconfiguration and innovation in negotiation seek to either "alter the technology in some way so that the use and performance are in line with the social needs and boundaries of the community," or innovate technology so that the "technology itself is more compatible with the community's practices and needs or its design provides a clear directive" as to its use.[378]

Scholar C begins where I did in inquiring about the implications of the fact that that this practice emerged from the experience of an online class. Scholar C comes, however, from an orientation of resistance, restating his position from the previous discussion[379] that Nazarenes are able to revert to online practice, accepting a virtual and unreal world, because "we are functionally incoherent in our 'community' practice of the Lord's Supper in our tradition as it now stands."[380]

The above sentiment is reflected in the report of the moderator, Scholar D, to the NBC administration after the second listserv discussion, where he states that a "fair

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[377] Scholar B, email to NBC listserv, August 1, 2008.

[378] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, 122.

[379] This Scholar is unique in that he contributed substantially to both listservs. In the first listserv, he is Scholar #9.

[380] Scholar C, email to NBC listserv, August 4, 2008.

percentage" of the educators represented in this list still "struggle" with online education as a concept making it all the more "difficult" to accept that something they highly value--such as the Eucharist--be practiced online.[381] He also reminds administrators in these circles, "something of a sacramental renewal is taking place," part of which greatly values the celebration of the sacrament in an assembled body so that anything less is regarded as casual, cheap, and superficial.[382]

Toward Reconfiguration And Innovation of The Eucharist For A Networked Community in Cyberspace

There are three main issues that emerge from the above conversations that need to be negotiated for reconfiguration and innovation to be possible. The first issue is to recognize the charge that Eucharist in cyberspace is an unacceptable use of media. Thus Eucharist in cyberspace should be either greatly limited or rejected outright because this use of media makes it an inauthentic observance. I will give a brief summary to show that historical precedence in the Church of the Nazarene's response to media aligns with this fear. The second issue is that there is some ambiguity about Nazarene Eucharist theology and worship practice reflected in the history of the Nazarene church. I will give a brief summary to show that such ambiguity is recognized by historians as a problem as well. The third issue is whether or not Eucharist in cyberspace can fulfill it communal requirements so that it is meaningful for the communicants. The problem of access is a part of this third issue because there is the question of whether or not access is part of inclusive the mission of the church or a cheap consumerist privatization that cares little

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[381] He is referring to the general response of strong resistance mainly in the first listserv, but he is careful to not name it directly, as the conversation was supposed to be private. He also has in mind the discussion in the second listserv, focusing on those who were uncomfortable with the practice in this comment.

[382] Scholar D, email to David M. Phillips, Don E. Stelting, September 18, 2008.

about community. I will briefly recap the points I have made in chapters 2 and 3, but add in this subsection two examples of Wesleyans who have grappled with the issues of Eucharist fulfilling communal requirements with commitment to access, reflected in their reconfiguring and innovation strategies.

The first issue noted above is uses of cyberspace for communal practice should be limited or eliminated because it cheapens the importance of substantive community for the church, as it uses media in a compromising fashion. A summary of the history of technology and media use in the Church of the Nazarene is important, as Campbell suggests that precedence of decisions made about media prior to present circumstances "often serve as a sort of template for future negotiation."[383] There are two attitudes reflected in historic documentation of The Church of the Nazarene.

One attitude is with regard to the use of media and technology indicating that acceptance and adaptation of media is only acceptable if it clearly advances the values of the church regarding "new ways of reaching out," without interfering with other values, in this case authentic community. The official centennial history of the denomination states, that like "other evangelicals, Nazarenes used technology to advance the gospel." A history of the church beginning in the 1930's and onward, into the latter part of the twentieth century, states that Nazarenes made significant use of radio, television, and film.[384] As to the Internet, the Nazarene Communications Network is an example of use of the web by Nazarenes. As its succinct mission statement indicates, the web "assists the

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[383] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, 60.

[384] Stan Ingersol, Harold E. Raser, and David P. Whitlaw, *Our Watchword and Song: The Centennial History of the Church of the Nazarene,* ed. Floyd Cunningham (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2009), 386-387.

International Church of the Nazarene by sharing stories of faith in action, thus keeping the church interconnected with one another."[385] Such celebration of media when it promotes the interests of the denomination is reflected in the fact that the initial communiqué posted to the Nazarene Communication Network about what NBC did, was very positive.

But the other attitude is that Eucharist in cyberspace is an unacceptable use of media because of the harm it might cause. The official *Manual* of the church mentions the Internet as one of the "entertainments that are subversive of the Christian ethic." It states,

> Because we are living in a day of great moral confusion in which we face the potential encroachment of the evils of the day into the sacred precincts of our homes through various avenues such as current literature, radio, television, personal computers, and the Internet, it is essential that the most rigid safeguards be observed to keep our homes from becoming secularized and worldly.[386]

In the first listserv expressions of consternation had to do with accommodation that appears to be similar to the ethical statement above, although it applies to a different and specific use of the Internet.

The second issue is that there is some ambiguity about Nazarene Eucharist theology and worship practice reflected in the history of the Nazarene church that does not carefully enough guard against the misuse of the sacrament or is not clear enough as to whether or not it can be appropriately adapted to cyberspace. Campbell notes that there can be "divergent histories and cultural influences" within one tradition, generating more

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[385] David J. Felter, ed., "General Secretary/GMC Operations," Corporate Report Edition, *Holiness Today,* July/August 2009, 9.

[386] *Manual/2009-2013 Church of the Nazarene: History, Constitution, Government, Ritual* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 2009), 48.

than one interpretation within even a particular Protestant Christian denomination regarding practice.[387] In the centennial history tension over worship practice, including the Eucharist is noted. For example, Tracy and Ingersol, in their portrait of the church, indicate that for Nazarenes, "our worship style, like our practice of the sacraments, leaves much to the liberty of conscience;" thus, no "prescribed Nazarene liturgy exists." They describe the "wide range of worship styles," from "low-church liturgical to very free and spontaneous worship."[388] It is significant to observe that liberty of conscience in the practice was not a valid consideration in discussion either of the listservs analyzed in this dissertation. Instead, the assumption prevails that there is a need to impose a "correct" doctrine of Eucharist, with little regard for the viewpoint of either the celebrant or the communicants. The listserv reflects a statement also made in the centennial Nazarene history. The authors describe what they call "re-traditioning worship," in which the contemporary church is called to "reconsider the riches of the church's traditions and its balanced worship of Word-Table-Spirit." This is further described as the "re-Wesleyanization of the denomination." It is significant to notice that the history specifically states that part of this involves "a reappraisal of the importance of the sacraments." In tandem with identifying this reappraisal is a quote from a leading scholar and General Superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene, William M. Greathouse, who "warned of a 'market mentality' seeping into Nazarene worship." The historians note that such a sentiment is dominant among those who support reappraising the import of the sacraments. The latter also decries the encroachment of entertainment in the church's

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[387] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, 16.

[388] Wes Tracy and Stan Ingersol, *Here We Stand: Where Nazarenes Fit in The Religious Marketplace* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1999), 32.

worship, which represents "'an invasion of the church by the spirit of the age.'"[389] The

centennial history also notes that the depth of liturgy, with its meaning and beauty within

the context of a participating congregation, takes center stage, and has resulted for some,

in a "rediscovered Methodist and Anglican liturgy," creating "in a few places, a Nazarene

'high church.'"[390]

The third issue is whether or not Eucharist in cyberspace can fulfill it communal

requirements so that it is meaningful for the communicants. The problem of access is a

part of such concern about community because it is part of the question of whether or not

access is part of the mission of the church community to be inclusive, or simply a conduit

of a cheap, consumerist, privatization of religion that cares little about community.

In Chapter 2, I established that a networked community can experience all of the

essential communal characteristics for a substantial connection. I think that those who

descry the loss of true community in the practice of Eucharist in cyberspace and deny that

a connection with the church is valid through the Internet, may operate under a nostalgic

view of community and cling to an ideal that has rarely existed in any venue of

Eucharistic observance. This is confirmed by the experience of another online advocate

and pastor, Doug Estes, who writes that "most opponents of the virtual church emphasize

the ideal church rather than the fallible church."[391]

As I continued exploring the characteristics of religious communities in

cyberspace in Chapter 3, I observed that community can either give rise to meaningful

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[389] Stan Ingersol, Harold E. Raser, and David P. Whitlaw, *Our Watchword and Song*, 600.

[390] Stan Ingersol, Harold E. Raser, and David P. Whitlaw, *Our Watchword and Song*, 600.

[391] Douglas Estes, *SimChurch,* 231n20.

ritual, or meaningful ritual can be a large part of what creates a uniquely religious community. In this present Chapter I explore two examples of reconfiguration and innovation from the Wesleyan theological tradition by those connected to the United Methodist denomination. In both cases the practitioners design an online Eucharist experience that is at once very interested in providing an experience of being part of a localized celebration that is also connected with the universal church. Both believe that they are fulfilling a Wesleyan understanding of mission and community when they are inclusive in providing the access to Eucharist that cyberspace affords.

United Methodist Thomas Madron experiments with putting communion services online in constructing an interactive communion website.[392] Madron believes that his reconfiguration and innovation captures the Wesleyan spirit of providing broad and easy access to Eucharist as a means of God's grace, in light of the fact that Wesley and the United Methodist church view it as "both a confirming and a converting rite."[393] Madron's sense of the need to offer Eucharist[394] in cyberspace begins with the stance of "open communion," advocated by Methodists of the twenty-first century, as offering Holy Communion to "anyone who 'comes to the door' seeking God's grace."[395] Thus, the first term of negotiation for Madron is that the innovation of providing access on the

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[392] Thomas Wm. Madron, A Celebration of Holy Communion on the Web, revised June 12, 2011, http://holycommunionontheweb.org (accessed April 26, 2012).

[393] Thomas Wm. Madron, "Can We Provide Holy Communion Over The Web?"

[394] He calls it "Holy Communion. " I use the term "Eucharist" in order to maintain continuity of theological discourse, as explained in Chapter 1.

[395] Thomas Wm. Madron, "Can We Provide Holy Communion Over The Web?"

Internet should be available to many in order to "make Holy Communion available in the most inclusive way possible."[396]

Madron's next item of negotiation has to do with whether or not "the communal aspects of the Eucharist can be preserved in any sense."[397] He first works from his tradition to ask in what sense this would be, and then looks at how this translates to the Internet. He makes the point that Eucharist is "primarily communal with an individual component," and points out that, for Wesley, the "'communion' part of 'Holy Communion' largely meant 'communion with Christ,' rather than interaction with other people." Madron does not neglect to point out that for Wesley being a part of the church of Christ, often means communing physically in church "as we are able." [398] Yet, in spite of the latter being true, Madron believes that he should make Eucharist available online because in the spirit of Wesley, the primary value of online Eucharist is inclusion of people who cannot attend a church service, or who have experienced a failed communal connection at a church onground. For the latter situation, Madron invokes the doctrine of "the Communion of Saints." This is the "union of all 'saints'--all of the church on Earth and in heaven." Madron also believes this is compatible with the *Apostle's Creed,* and thus the traditional church universal,[399] which constitutes the minimum community requirement for Eucharist compatible with Internet usage.

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[396] Thomas Wm. Madron, "Can We Provide Holy Communion Over The Web?"

[397] Thomas Wm. Madron, "Can We Provide Holy Communion Over The Web?"

[398] Thomas Wm. Madron, "Can We Provide Holy Communion Over The Web?"

[399] Thomas Wm. Madron, "Can We Provide Holy Communion Over The Web?"

Madron argues that "while the communal character of Holy Communion is important, it need not be such a limiting factor that we are precluded from new ways of observing the Lord's Supper."[400] I affirm that assumptions about what community should be should not limit the practice of Eucharist in any venue. Yet, I would also argue that Madron should not downplay the networked community that can connect people in this ritual. The minimum could be an individual user participating online by logging into Madron's website, with the idea that they are connecting with the universal communion of the saints, while acknowledging that it is better for a user to seek real-time observance with a virtual user community, such as the NBC example.

Gregory S. Neal is another United Methodist minister who similarly advocates a negotiating strategy that all about reconfiguration and innovation. At the website explaining his take on Eucharist in cyberspace, he regards Eucharist as a means of grace that should be made available in a way similar to another means of grace: his preaching. A "means of grace" is from Wesley himself who wrote:

> By 'means of grace' I understand outward signs, words, or actions ordained by God, and appointed to this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.[401]

In light of this, Neal refuses to be caught in the quandary that advocating religious practice in cyberspace means a choice is made against onground practices. He states, "Do I consider it immeasurably better for one to partake of the Means of Grace--and, most especially, Holy Communion--within a physically localized community of

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[400] Thomas Wm. Madron, "Can We Provide Holy Communion Over The Web?"

[401] John Wesley, "The Means of Grace" in *The Works of John Wesley,* 3rd ed., vol.5, Sermons 1 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, repr., Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979), 187.

believers? *Absolutely*."[402] For Neal, essential to observing Eucharist is that it offers

believers "the nourishing, life transforming Real presence of Jesus," and to be "brought

together within the mystical Body of Christ" so that the communicant is then

"empowered for mission and ministry through our Lord's sanctifying grace."[403]

Anticipating that he might be accused of embracing the Eucharist as merely an individual

experience and, denying the necessity of community, he writes:

> While perhaps being somewhat unconventional, I certainly do not have a 'very
> individualistic' approach to the Sacraments nor to worship. While one can
> worship God 'by oneself," as I have done many times during morning and
> evening prayer, one is *never really* alone in the worship of God. "Where two or
> three are gathered together," is, truly a powerful promise of our Lord's Real
> presence, but it is not in any way a *limitation* on the ability of Jesus to be present;
> in other words, there is no physical 'quorum' required for Christians to worship or
> for the Means of Grace to be true and effective in all their marvelous
> manifestations.[404]

Neal maintains that Holy Communion online is best characterized as that which is done

to "*supplement* and *amplify*" normative experience of the means of grace that one is

"already receiving within their localized community of faith."[405]

The Eucharist And Materiality in Mediated Communication in Cyberspace

In this section I discuss the fact that both listservs were concerned that a

significant aspect of what the Eucharist stands for in terms of materiality would be

inimical to observing the ritual in cyberspace. I will again use Campbell's categories of

"resist and reject" and "reconfigure and innovate." I will categorize in two subsections

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[402] Gregory S. Neal, "Online Holy Communion: Theological Reflection Regarding The Internet and The Means of Grace," 2, http://www.revneal.org/Writings/onlinecommunionremarks.html (accessed March 9, 2012).

[403] Gregory S. Neal, "Online Holy Communion," 1.

[404] Gregory S. Neal, "Online Holy Communion," 1-2.

[405] Gregory S. Neal, "Online Holy Communion," 2.

responses from each listserv separately, noting the ways that various participants approached the question of the use of the Internet with regard to materiality. Then in the final subsection, I will propose a way forward in the negotiation of the Eucharist in a final subsection in which materiality is dealt with vis-à-vis the Internet as a communication medium. I will then show how the use of the term "Gnostic" to describe the mode of virtuality in cyberspace is deeply problematic and not helpful. I will also show examples of reconfiguration and innovation in the negotiations of the manner in which Madron and Neal deal with materiality for Eucharist in cyberspace.

Observation of Reflections in First Listserv

The overwhelming majority of opinions in this listserv handled the loss of materiality in a communication medium in terms of rejection and resistance of cyberspace Eucharist. There was only one who considered some innovation if online and offline were somehow blended. The group's overall resistance concerning materiality falls along the lines of what Campbell identifies as the notion that "the use of a particular media is not worth the risk," and "resistance to certain uses or aspects of technology."[406] One type of objection was that material, physical bodies need to be in one material space at the same time because of the incarnational nature of the Christian faith that applies to all Christian practice, especially the Eucharist. The next type of objection focused on the physical/material in terms of the need for clergy to be physically present to be able to bless material elements with others. A third privileged materiality, yet wanted to look more closely at virtuality. In this vein one gave up and conformed to resisting when he was shut down immediately by his peers. Another would not entertain the possibility of

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[406] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media,* 117, 122.

reconfiguration or innovation because even when looking at examples of virtuality

because he could not bridge the theoretical gap between what he considered the "virtual"

and the "real."

The objection that material, physical bodies need to be in one material space at

the same time for Eucharist because of the incarnational nature of the Christian faith was

Scholar #7 who writes: "Yikes. . . I just think that Christian teaching regarding the

incarnation of the Word demands that we keep Christian faith/practice as bodily (and thus

as local, sacramental and physical) as we can." That is, there needs to be "real (i.e.

bodily/physical) interaction" that is "too crucial to the very heart of Christian faith to be

so easily sloughed off."[407] Later in the discussion, Scholar #7 adds,

> I really think it comes down to the question of how deeply/profoundly/seriously/
> we take John 1:14, or Romans 12 . . . "Virtual world" language sounds docetic[408]
> to me . . . recall that 1 John begins with a strong insistence upon the Word as that
> which "we have seen" and "heard" and "our hands have handled."[409]

He contends that it is all the more important to see "how John re-aligns that focus onto

'one another'--loving one another . . . and the ready illustration is sharing material goods

with brothers and sisters . . . loving the brother or sister whom one *can* [sic] see and

touch." He states emphatically, "Christianity is incarnational."[410] He also writes that

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[407] Scholar # 7, email to private listserv, June 18, 2008. He is thinking of a church setting and he is also
thinking of a community of students who are studying for Christian ministry.

[408] Harvey defines the use "docetic" in theological discourse in this way: "A term derived from the Greek
word meaning "to seem" and applied to those Christological theories of the early part of the 3rd century in
which the humanity and suffering of Jesus Christ were regarded as only apparent (seeming) and not real.
Van A. Harvey, "Docetism," in *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1992),
71-72.

[409] Scholar #7, email to private listserv, June 18, 2008.

[410] Scholar #7, email to private listserv, June 18, 2008.

Eucharistic "prayers /theology (e.g. Paul, John, Irenaeus, The Didache, Ignatius) point in this inescapably incarnational direction."[411]

A second set of objections is stated by Scholar #2, who writes that he is concerned that online Eucharist bypasses "the authority of the ordained ministry" with regard to clergy being present to bless and distribute material elements.[412] He explores what a church would look like that uses the Internet for the Eucharist in a way that community and clerical authority could be preserved while combining an internet-based and onground organization in "base ecclesial communities or house churches." His suggestion represents a hint toward a strategy of "reconfigure and innovate," in which technology is flexible, and can be "transformed based on user needs and desires."[413] He suggests that the "sacramental minister could consecrate elements earlier in the week," which would later be physically distributed, and then the observance would be shared by "webcast" between various locations.[414]

But most are resistant along ecclesiastical lines, such as Scholars # 5 and #6, who are clearly not interested in exploring alternative options. Scholar #5 argues that the practice is not legitimate because students supplied their own elements and observed Eucharist without clergy present.[415] More strongly adamant that Eucharist online

[411] Scholar #7, email to private listserv, June 23, 2008.

[412] Scholar #2, email to private listserv, June 18, 2008.

[413] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media,* 122.

[414] Scholar #2, email to private listserv, June 18, 2008.

[415] Scholar #5, email to private listserv, June 19, 2008.

completely compromises ecclesiology[416] is Scholar #6, who identifies attempts at this practice on the Internet as exposing "a poor ecclesiology," insisting that this is "another confusing layer of ill informed liturgical and sacramental practice." For this scholar, ecclesiastically sound practices of the sacrament must always have a priestly ministry "physically present."[417] He also argues for the importance of "right worship," that the Eucharist must be ritually performed correctly to function as it should within the church. He says, "Orthodoxy is primarily about 'right worship' (glory) and not about right belief (orthopistis). So in a great sense a virtual eucharist [sic] is unorthodox (It is poor worship practice)."[418] He laments, "But sadly this is just another layer exposing our true 'Zwinglian'[419] theology which really dismisses Christ's Eucharistic presence, let alone another critical importance of the offertory which is the invitation whereby our sacrifice is joined to Christ's sacrifice."[420] The latter statement brings rejection of the ritual itself in cyberspace, as it cannot fulfill its religious purpose through an online medium.

A third set that privileged materiality, still were interested in looking more closely at the nature of virtuality itself. Scholar #8 writes: "I echo the support of a virtual Eucharist as suggested by _____, _____, _____, and others. I agree that the virtual form of presence, in many if not most cases are far more 'real' than the physical

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[416] For this participant and others, sound ecclesiology has to do with proper liturgical order.

[417] Scholar #6, email to private listserv, June 20, 2008.

[418] Scholar #6, email to private listserv, June 20, 2008.

[419] He is referring to the Reformer Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), and his comment reflects a common bias against Zwingli.

[420] Scholar #6, email to private listserv, June 20, 2008.

presence."[421] Scholar #8 is immediately challenged by others protesting that they did not

support what occurred, at which time Scholar #8 backs down, but not without suggesting

ways to reconcile the old and the new.   He agrees with another that mediate forms of

communication "are not equal to 'body' aspects," although he will say that there is "a

mediated form of presence that is real and attainable." He also writes in this regard about

embodiment: "I am probably going out on a limb here, but how do we define the

physical? Is it possible that a mediated form of the physical is possible in a virtual world?

(Beam me up, Scotty!)." [422]

Similar to # 8, Scholar #9 looks at wondering about the practices of the church

regarding mediated forms, that in my view, also has much to do with the nature of

virtuality. He asserts that although he agrees with holding a line on the material, and

would never compromise his appreciation for face to face interaction, the group should

not forget "how we live 'between' mediated forms." He makes the point that the first

"distance teaching" came in the form of letters that the church eventually canonized. His

attempt to draw attention to the implications for using the medium is chastised by others

who jump in to say that the Eucharist is unique enough that it needs to be considered on

its own merit. [423]

Scholar #10, weighs in, waving a flag about the problematic concept of virtuality

versus the "real." He comments, "I think the line between what is virtual and what is real

is about to go the way of the do-do, if it has not already. There are virtual forms of

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[421] Scholar #8, email to private listserv, June 18, 2008.

[422] Scholar #8 email to private listserv, June 18, 2008.

[423] Scholar #9, email to private listserv, June 18, 2008.

presence that are far more 'real' than physical presences, are there not?"[424] He critiques the listserv discussion thread for its lack of distinction between the terms and uses of "virtual" and "online."[425] He writes that "virtual" is a "contested word," and is "mixed up with all sorts of alterations associated with living in a world not only where reality is simulated in places like Las Vegas or Disneyland," but also in things like prosthetics and computer simulated voices. About the issue at hand, he writes that he is not a fan of online Eucharist, and yet states, "But I am not ready just yet to polarize the terms 'real' and 'virtual' as quickly as others may have on this thread."[426]

He also notes that it is important to understand that there are "philosophical discussions of the word 'virtual' (Deleuze, Denis Berthier, etc.)" that continue to illustrate "how contested the term virtual itself is."[427] A few days later, Scholar #10 writes two emails, continuing to press how problematic the line is becoming between the "virtual" and the "real." He asks the group to consider, for example, advances in holographic technology and to think about virtual Eucharist accordingly. He characterizes these holographic examples, available at links he provides in his email, as similar to "holograms of the persons attending the Jedi Council meetings" in the *Star Wars* films.[428] In another email to the listserv, he is sure that all understand: "I do not

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[424] Scholar #10, email to private listserv, June 18, 2008.

[425] I made distinctions regarding these terms and others relative to this discussion in Chapter 1.

[426] Scholar #10, email to private listserv, June 22, 2008.

[427] Scholar #10, email to private listserv, June 22, 2008.

[428] Scholar #10, email to private listserv, June 25, 2008. See Sky News, "World Future Energy Summit: Prince Charles Hologram, "http://www.eyeline3d.com/ prince_charles_hologram_his_royal_holographic.html (accessed September 22, 2011).

support either holographic eucharist or online eucharist [sic]." [429] He grapples to find a way to fill the theoretical gap between yet unchartered waters about the meaning of real in relationship to virtuality.

<div align="center">Observation of Reflections of the Second Listserv</div>

In this listserv there were two major sets of opinions. The first was an objection similar to the first listserv: that material, physical bodies need to be in one onground space at the same time for the Eucharist to be complete because of the incarnational nature of the Christian faith that applies to all Christian practice. However, he adds that the Eucharist in cyberspace is "Gnostic" because it compromises materiality. However, he carries this objection only if online Eucharist is endorsed as a normative practice. Thus, remembering Campbell, he is not about a "full-out rejection," only rejecting some problematic aspects of it. [430] Another was also along the lines of the Eucharist being non-material and lacking physicality, backing away from any other considerations because he too can't bridge the theoretical gap between materiality and virtual. The second major opinion is open to reconfiguration and innovation but at that time backed away for lack of theoretical underpinnings to consider seriously any other way of viewing what the NBC class had done.

The first set of opinions that indicates rejection because of lack of materiality in a cyberspace location is Scholar A who states that he is "uncomfortable with the notion of virtual Eucharist. It risks becoming a gnostic [sic] sacrament."[431] The reason is because

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[429] Scholar #10, email to private listserv, June 25, 2008.

[430] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media,* 122.

[431] Scholar A, email to to NBC listserv, August 1, 2008. He means this in terms of his understanding of a philosophical and religious notion thought by some to be a heretical movement, a threat to orthodox

the "essential" or "substantial" nature of the Eucharist requires an embodied celebration. Similar to those noted above in the first listserv, his main concern is that there "are significant Christological implications to a non-embodied celebration" of the sacrament, because "virtual presence is, at best, a docetic form of presence." He cites John 1:14, and 1 John 1:1-4, as Scriptural evidence that "clearly suggests the critical connection of embodied presence and revelation/relationship with God and each other." [432]

I want to open the question of materiality to other considerations, leaning toward innovation. As Scholar B, I make the point that the degree of "how real is real" is crucial to those committed to material and embodied experience of the Eucharist in cyberspace. I further state that in light of what Scholar A called "emerging technological realities," those who want to think Wesleyan with an eye toward spiritual presence and a concern for what I call "materiality," should consider "the possibility of a new kind of theological anthropology."[433] I also write: "In light of this, engagement in virtual community is a kind of embodiment, presence is possible and material. Therefore, concern about Docetism might be irrelevant." I propose that "embodiment and materiality are neither ignored nor rejected, only redefined!"[434]

Scholar A replies, "I don't think the issues of embodied presence can be dismissed so lightly." He says that "Gnosticism" affirms a "reality of spiritual presence," but that the "critical distinction" between it and orthodoxy is that, for the latter,

Christianity in the early centuries of the church. This "group" of heretics supposedly had distain for the physical body and the material world as being inferior, evil, and a hindrance to spiritual life and existence.

[432] Scholar A, email to NBC listserv, August 1, 2008.

[433] Scholar B, email to NBC listserv, August 1, 2008.

[434] Scholar B, email to NBC listserv, August 1, 2008.

"materially embodied presence for which the bodily presence was not only allowable but essential to the incarnation and the celebration of the sacrament."[435]

As the moderator of the second listserv summarized this discussion, he sides with those who have problems with Eucharist in cyberspace because it lacks physicality and materiality. He characterized the "primary objection" in both listservs[436] to the NBC administration as a theological one centered on "embodied physical presence," which means that the "institution of this sacrament (biblically, traditionally, experientially)" must be among a physically gathered group of people. In his mind, this is so central that it should not be set aside for another mode, even in light of the fact that God's grace exceeds all boundaries. He also heightens the importance of people gathered physically as God's affirmation of the goodness of His creation, the incarnation of His Son, the resurrection of the physical body, and the "re-creation (spiritually and physically) of all things in the last times."[437] His final comment was noted in an earlier section regarding community, and he applies that same to the issue of materiality; that he isn't sure which way he would recommend NBC go in allowing Eucharist in cyberspace.

Toward A Reconfiguration And Innovation of The Eucharist For Communication Media in Cyberspace

There are three main issues that emerge from the above conversations that need to be negotiated for reconfiguration and innovation to be possible. First is negotiating with a notion strongly committed to contending that physical/material bodies need to be in one material onground space at the same time for Eucharist observance because of the

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[435] Scholar A, email to NBC listserv, August 4, 2008.

[436] The moderator had had access to the first listserv discussion.

[437] Scholar D, email to David M. Phillips, Don E. Stelting, September 18, 2008.

incarnational nature of the Christian faith. Included with this consideration is negotiating

along the lines of the need for a physical/material presence of clergy blessing materially

present elements with onground communicants. Tied to this first item of negotiation is

reckoning with concerns about Gnosticism. Second is dealing with the theoretical gap

between the material and the virtual. Below I will point the way forward in terms of

media appropriation and the reconfiguration/innovation of Eucharist in cyberspace by

building on the practices of Madron and Neal. I will also include the perspective of

online and onground pastor, Douglas Estes' views about the body in worship in

cyberspace. I will show how they reflect strategies that deal with the idea of the need for

the Eucharist to affirm materiality in this newer form of communication media, along

with briefly pointing toward theoretical considerations from previous chapters.

With regard to present and physically active involvement of the user, Madron

recommends overcoming the "absurdity" of "prerecorded consecration" by having the

communicant participate in the consecration through repeating the words of the celebrant

in a guided and interactive manner.[438] In contrast, Neal is more concerned about the

blessing of actual elements, arguing that since it is not possible to "beam" the bread and

wine to communicants via the web, "critics of 'Holy Communion on the Web' have

focused upon this deficiency, asserting that it seriously—if not completely—undermines

the ability of the Eucharist to function through the virtual media."[439] He grapples with

how the "Real presence (i.e. the Grace) of Jesus is conveyed" by consecrated bread and

wine. He believes that the "prayerful liturgical act" of the "epicletical prayer" with

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[438] Thomas Wm. Madron, "Can We Provide Communion Over The Web?"

[439] Gregory S. Neal, "Online Holy Communion," 3.

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"symbolic acts, such as hand motions," and the "formal breaking of the bread" in the

hands of the celebrant blesses the elements wherever they are in the hands of the

communicant. This happens through live streaming over the Internet or through a pre-

recorded celebration. Neal bolsters this with the concept of the spiritual omnipresence of

God.[440]

As to dealing with ecclesiastical objections about clergy being physically present

to bless the elements, Madron writes that the need for an ordained person to be present to

physically bless and provide communion" is "somewhat spotty."[441] He writes that the

user or user communities interested in accommodating their tradition to the Internet need

to figure this out.[442] Neal answers it directly for Methodists, as he places importance on

the role of the celebrant in setting up the experience, connecting the communicant with

meaningful liturgy, and connecting the distant person's partaking of physical elements

with what he, as celebrant, blesses on his end. This setup is similar to what the ordained

deacon who facilitated NBC's experience performed, as noted in Chapter 3. Neal writes:

> Every celebration of the Eucharist which has ever occurred or will ever occur, has
> taken place at the exact same moment for God . . . in God's eternal 'now.'
> Likewise, every celebration of the Eucharist, held anywhere in the universe,
> occurs at the exact same place for God . . . in God's omnipresence. Hence it
> doesn't matter if the bread and the cup are not in close physical or temporal
> proximity to the celebrant—God is present, and God knows the intent and the
> faith of the communicant, even if they are receiving through the Internet and with
> elements that are on their own side of the connection. If the intent is to receive
> the Body and Blood of our Lord, and if their faith is focused on Christ Jesus while

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[440] Gregory s. Neal, "Online Holy Communion," 4.

[441] Thomas Wm. Madron, "Can We Provide Communion Over The Web?"

[442] Any further relevance will be discussed in Chapter 5. Madron tries to establish whether or not
consecration can happen on the Internet according to answering the question of whether or not the celebrant
has to be ordained. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to answer this specific question.

partaking, then what we have is certainly a Means of Grace and, I am convinced, a true expression and experience of the Sacrament of Holy Communion.[443]

It should be clear that Neal emphasizes both the spiritual and the material. He simply believes that there are innovative ways to include material aspects in the Eucharist that do not disavow the importance of the material.

An important part of negotiation is to deal constructively and thoughtfully with the term "Gnostic," which is used to emphasize an understanding of a lack of material physical, bodily presence in online encounters. This term has been used to point out the basic philosophical and theological nature of virtual engagement as holding either promise or peril. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to engage the extensive work that is being done on determining who and what constituted "Gnostics" in the early centuries of the church or to determine the extent to which the use of the term is credible in present theological discourse. The way I approach the use of the term is to examine its use as a label for critique. It has been used as a label among theologians who carry the assumption that it means a dislike of the material world, privileging to a harmful degree the spiritual world. Both theologians and Internet pundits have also used it as a cultural label for libertine and non-materialist assumptions about life in cyberspace.

In the second listserv, the term "Gnostic" and the label "docetic" are used to reject virtual Eucharist because of a belief that it represents another "Gnostic" encroachment in current Christianity. Issues of power and control notwithstanding, scholars within this Wesleyan/holiness circle are concerned about the "threat" of "Gnosticism" simply because they do not believe that emphasizing the spiritual over the material reflects what should be an important aspect of Christian faith.

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[443] Gregory S. Neal, "Online Holy Communion," 4.

Affirmations they believe will quell such peril include reaffirming creation, resurrection of the body, Christ's and our incarnational ministry, and a reaffirming a robust ecclesiology, one reinforced by Eucharistic practice. For example, Nazarene theologian, William Greathouse lauds the work of Rob L. Staples, who emphasizes the need to reaffirm the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist along these lines. Greathouse writes that "although the ancient heresy of Gnosticism was repudiated in the early centuries of church history, it continues to lurk in the Christian subconsciousness." He contends that a predominant way in which Gnosticism needs to be continually defeated is in making sure people do not live under the "unspoken assumption that true 'spirituality' is something achieved apart from such physical acts as being baptized and eating the bread and drinking the cup of the Eucharist." Reinforcing this point, he also says that "Christ and the apostles show no Gnostic suspicion of the physical and the material."[444] Thus, it is not hard to see that this perception of a need for a sturdy, embodied, materially based ritual as an antidote, evokes a strong reaction against Eucharist in cyberspace.

"Gnostic" can be used as a term connoting the libertarian possibilities of cyberspace. For example, Patrick Maxwell uses the term "Gnostic" as an adjective to describe "technomystics" or "bright-eyed radicals who genuinely believe that it will soon be possible to put aside our fleshly bodies in favour of inheriting a shining/shimmering electronic immortality." He further comments that the technomystic view goes "hand in

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[444] William Greathouse, "Forward," in *Outward Sign And Inward Grace: The Place of The Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality,* by Rob T. Staples (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1991), 11.

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hand with a Gnostic tendency to significantly devalue the body," regarding "'meatspace'"

as a "bondage" to be transcended.[445]

Others, such as Erik Davis, not only associate this spirit with the kind of liberation

identified by Maxwell, but also liberation from what he identifies as traditional and

oppressive orthodoxy. He refers to the discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts of 1945 as

the advent of "the gnostic [sic] infonaut."[446] He elaborates that even though there is an

"incalculable historical, cultural, and spiritual divide" between these ancients and the

"cultures and concepts" of modern technology, from a "hermetic perspective"[447] that

"reads images and synchronicities at least as deeply as facts," the "mythic structures and

psychology" of Gnosticism is "strangely resonant with the digital zeitgeist and its

paradigm of information." The resonance comes in areas of the "dreams" of cyberspace

cowboys in their "libertarian drive toward freedom and self-divinization" and their

"dualistic rejection of matter for the incorporeal possibilities of mind."[448] More

profoundly, Davis' assumptions about Gnosticism drive him to invoke Gnostic thought to

"understand the often unconscious metaphysics of information" by looking through the

"archetypal lens of religious and mystic myth."[449] The upshot for Davis is the tendency

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[445] Patrick Maxwell, "Virtual Religion in Context," 347.

[446] Erik Davis, *Techgnosis,* 92.

[447] Davis characterizes information technology as a culture of "techgnosis." The Hermetic character of techgnosis is after the "young upstart god," Hermes, who challenged the "aristocratic lord Apollo." Hermes represents what new technology is. It is "intelligence that moves forward on its crafty toes, ever opening into a world that is messy, unpredictable, and far from equilibrium." Erik Davis, *Techgnosis,* 21.

[448] Erik Davis, *Techgnosis,* 97.

[449] Erik Davis, *Techgnosis,* 97-98.

for such liberation to problematize the confines of orthodox Christianity with a new liberating knowledge of who we really are.[450]

Davis is also concerned about the perils of this attitude of liberation. Because the future is uncertain as to what all this might mean, he is not completely positively disposed in his judgment on this "Gnostic" technology. In this regard, he draws together various mythic parallels he believes provide him with an analytical lens holding a technologically deterministic outlook.[451] He concludes that there might be impending doom with the advent of the Internet. He writes that whatever "social, ecological, or spiritual renewal" might be anticipated in light of technology, we need to be aware of communication technologies "that already gird the earth with intelligence and virtual light." He further comments that just as "Prometheus"[452] is "hell-bent in the cockpit," "Hermes has snuck into Mission Control, and the matrix is ablaze with entangling tongues."[453]

I propose that as the Internet as a communication medium is considered (rather than evaluated by ancient, archetypical constructs such as the Gnosticism); negotiation regarding this new way of practicing Eucharist is on a more firm and relevant footing. An old "framework's entanglement" is what the term "Gnostic" has come to represent.[454]

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[450] Erik Davis, *Techgnosis*, 113-14.

[451] Allusion to McLuhan and his ideas abound in this book.

[452] Davis uses the image of this Greek god who gave humankind fire, and therefore the learning of "many crafts" Erik Davis, *Techgnosis,* 18.

[453] Erik Davis, *Techgnosis*, 395.

[454] Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 218. King is addressing Gnosticism per se, but I am making the connection to the way that the Internet is assessed by some as a communication medium that is "Gnostic" in nature, because it is thought to be a location promoting a disembodied existence.

Adherence to a critique based on Gnosticism, as well as accompanying terms like

Docetism, truncates constructive engagement with issues raised by the Internet as a

communication medium. Thus, although I don't completely deny some concerns of some

Internet pundits such as Davis, and theologians such as Greathouse et al., I believe that

using "Gnostic" as a label is more harmful than helpful.

Part of what happens when the "virtual vs. real" game begins is that a dichotomy

of "either" or "both" between the virtual and the material/physical arises, dominating the

discussion.   When discussion is shifted toward a use of the Internet by religious

communities, those such as Estes below show that there is a way forward past

preoccupation with the quandary of "Which is real?" Estes notes in his experiences in

virtual churches that "every iteration of the church has different strengths and

weaknesses." In his onground church, he says that people engage their bodies in

speaking, singing, dancing, etc.; his challenge is to make sure they are "engaging in

worship with their hearts and minds." As to the virtual church, he writes that, "anecdotal

evidence suggests that, on average, they are at least as connected in mind and heart as in

a typical real-world church;" yet, he does not stop there, noting 1 Corinthians 6:20, ". . .

honor God with your body,"[455] writing that churches in the virtual world need to design

ways to engage people's bodies. [456] Along these lines, cyberspace participant and theorist,

Jennifer Cobb, who is aware of the tension between cyberspace and non-cyberspace, sees

the blurring of boundaries as pointing in a new direction to consider concerns of dualism

between the material, the embodied, and the spiritual. She writes:

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[455] New International Version, 1983.

[456] Douglas Estes, *SimChurch*, 85.

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> Viewed through windows, menus, and icons, cyberspace seems the perfect bedfellow for our disembodied reveries. But this interpretation reflects our reality, not the reality of cyberspace itself. If we approach cyberspace from the perspective of a splintered self, we will recreate this dualism in cyberspace. If, however, we see cyberspace as a part of a larger, integrated, sacred experience of the world, the picture begins to change quite dramatically.[457]

Intentionally not rejecting material and embodied experiences by thinking of ways to involve the body and the senses in online experiences comes down to the commitment of the user and the user community to embodiment and to a holistic anthropology.[458]

The Eucharist and the Agency of the User in Cyberspace

In this last section I will look to the second listserv in the subsections below in which there was some discussion about what the practice of the Eucharist in cyberspace may reflect about the meaning of being human and Christian. Campbell's categories of resistance or reconfiguration will be considered in light of her concept of "culturing a technology" which means that negotiation occurs so that technology preserves rather than subverts the unique culture of a church tradition.[459] I will summarize the relevant responses from the second listserv. Then in the final subsection, I will introduce briefly the argument that a Wesleyan holistic anthropology is compatible with the idea of the agency of users who engage in culturing a technology. I will use an example of how this was done in Eucharist in cyberspace based on a qualitative study by Ally Ostrowski, showing that culturing a technology works.

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[457] Jennifer Cobb, *Cybergrace: The Search For God in The Digital World* (New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1998), 188.

[458] The development of the ideas of a holistic anthropology awaits in Chapter 5.

[459] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media,* 56.

The specific issues fell along three areas. The first was resistance based upon the fact that the practice of Eucharist in cyberspace might not be worth the risk because it might redefine the meaning of what it means to be human and Christian in some unacceptable ways. The second issue was along the lines of innovation, contending that maybe it is time to reexamine our theological anthropology and the Eucharist in cyberspace. The third issue was resistance to empowerment of the user. The scholar arguing for this cautions that it might mean that Nazarene ministerial students, such as the ones at NBC, will become too subjective in their practice while naively not recognizing the limits of the Internet for practices like the Eucharist.

Scholar A, says that he does not wish to "demean the usefulness or value of online interaction except to question its adequacy to fully express and engage what it means to be human and Christian."[460] As Scholar B, I respond that the important issues to be considered are what kinds of understandings about the nature of the Eucharist informs the user community's decision to do it in cyberspace, and what kinds of understandings of the nature of the Internet affect decisions to use it in this way. [461]

In Scholar A's response, he writes that "emerging technologies raise new issues about redefinition of what it means to be human. This is arguably the most significant issue of postmodernity." He thinks it would be a mistake to "simply assimilate" any new

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[460] Scholar A, email to NBC listserv, August 4, 2008.

[461] I didn't use the terms "norms and expectations" at the time I wrote this. I am presently using these terms which I borrow from Scholar #4 in the private listserv discussed earlier.

understanding called for by technology, and adds that there was "a reason Jesus came in the flesh that wasn't simply lack of technological resources." [462]

Also in the second listserv, Scholar C opinion expresses concern for user empowerment, writing that if educational institutions (Nazarene) are to "model an appropriate use of the Internet," they need to convey to students an understanding of the limits of the medium in general. One of his main points is that the use of technology should "encourage human 'production' rather than passive 'consumption' which invites "empowerment through practice." But in spite of this, he opines that he is not sure that "we can assure that online Eucharistic practice can resist students' viewing this type of practice as a personal subjective experience decontextualized and commodified."[463]

Toward A Reconfiguration And Innovation of The Eucharist in Terms of The Agency of The User

In this section, I argue that agency of the user is a way to understand religious practice in cyberspace as that which does not compromise what is human and Christian, as its focus is on the empowerment of the human person as agent. In connection to this idea, I argue that the Christian engaging in this Sacrament, is one restored to the freedom experienced in being a Christian free agent. As such, I concur with Campbell that the religious user community can "culture a technology" so that it continues to broaden and expand practice within cyberspace such as the Eucharist to increase its use and effectiveness for new avenues of technology and Christian faith.

In the second listserv the concerns regarding the implications of how users could choose to engage in online Eucharist *without* compromising the meaning of being human

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[462] Scholar A, email to NBC listserv, August 4, 2008.

[463] Scholar C, email to NBC listserv, August 4, 2008.

and being Christian can be affirmed in terms of human agency. I find it ironic that any Wesleyan theologian would fall prey to technological determinism[464] when, in other areas of their theological anthropology, they emphasize the optimism of grace in the life of a Christian, encouraging freedom and moral agency.[465] The agency of the user describes the way participants in Chapter 3 engaged in Eucharist in cyberspace. It also describes the way that listserv participants in this chapter gave their opinions about online Eucharist, understanding their role in determining what they could legitimately experience in Eucharist in cyberspace.

The agency of the user and culturing of technology plays a role in a study by Ostrowski, in which she looked at how the Eucharist was used in the U.-K.-- based *Church of Fools* as a catalyst to focus on the degree to which participants felt that a "virtual Christian church" provided satisfying religious experience, or whether they would still look to "physical churches" to participate in the sacrament.[466] Ostrowski utilized a quantitative and ethnographic approach. The former allowed for sound statistical analysis of responses, but the ethnographic was effective in developing "native terms from a population, discerning recurring themes," and explored "the phenomenon from the perspective of the participant."[467] The discussion of the findings notes that for some people, certain rituals (such as the Eucharist) "does not require a physical presence." The study found that for all involved in the study, for both those favorable

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[464] See discussion on technological determinism in Chapter 2.

[465] I will develop this in the next chapter.

[466] Ally Ostrowski, "Cybercommunion: Finding God in The Little Box," *Journal of Religion & Society* 8 (2006) http://moses.creighton.edu/JRS/pdf/2006-10.pdf (accessed April 9, 2010), 1.

[467] Ally Ostrowski, "Cybercommunion," 3.

and not favorable, the "crucial ingredient" had to do with his or her attitude in using the Internet and "the role online interactions play in their personal, spiritual, and religious lives."[468] They found that they could "culture" the Internet, by making it into a venue that satisfied what they were looking for in a church and the Eucharist.

Conclusion

In this chapter I analyzed reactions of two listservs after an online class of Nazarene Bible College engaged in Eucharist in cyberspace. I utilized Campbell's identification of three choices that can inform negotiation regarding the use of the Internet. They were: to accept and appropriate; to reject and resist certain aspects of the technology; or to reconfigure and innovate so that it conforms to the values of the community. I chose to use and contrast the last two, reject/resist versus reconfigure/innovate.

A question might arise as to how the controversy was resolved, or if any real negotiation took place. The discussion of the first listserv simply dwindled as the group moved on to other topics. As to the second listserv, on September 18, 2008, Scholar D, as previous noted, sends a report by email to all in the NBC listserv, to the Vice President of Online Education, and to the Vice President of Academic Affairs of Nazarene Bible College.[469] He summarized the controversy of online Eucharist regarding the publicity it received, and discussions about it in the second listserv, initiated by NBC. Speaking of the second listserv, he noted that it was "not as helpful as I would have hoped," but that the "limited" discussion confirmed "some of the conclusions that were drawn as a result

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[468] Ally Ostrowski, "Cybercommunion," 7.

[469] Scholar D, email to David M. Phillips and Don E. Stelting, September 18, 2008.

of the discussion on the _____ listserve [sic]."[470] The moderator, Scholar D, also

emphasized that the practice "raises the spector [sic] of as yet unchartered territory" so

that there are many issues unresolved. He acknowledged that there were various opinions,

and that "part of the genius of our denomination is to allow for divergences." He also

opined: "I think what most concerned me about this whole thing was how quickly we

reported this as a news item before giving it adequate and thoughtful consideration. Of

course, that is behind us and we go forward from here."[471] The controversy seems to have

ended and may still be pending in other venues in the Nazarene community.

The first major cluster of issues addressed was that Eucharist in networked

community was not sufficiently communal so that it could fulfill its proper theological

function. Yet I showed that Eucharist in cyberspace need not be a reflection of a cheap

and superficial view of it, but in fact could fulfill its theological function for the

community. The reason was not only because examples could be given as to its

meaningful communal function, but offering it connects users to the universal church and

makes it available to those who cannot attend a church or find it difficult to engage in it

onground. Such choices do not compromise a substantive Eucharist.

The second major cluster of issues looks at Eucharist in cyberspace as mediated

communication and the fact that it is not inherently material. Engagement there is not

embodied, material, or physical at it would be onground. One of the biggest objections

the scholarly community brought up was that Eucharist in cyberspace was a capitulation

to Gnosticism. I contended that the continued use of the term as a label for rejection of

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[470] He names the first listserv that was chronicled above in this chapter previous to the NBC listserv. As I noted earlier, this NBC discussion was formed in response to learning about the other discussion.

[471] Scholar D, email to David M. Phillips, Don E. Stelting, September 18, 2008.

the material in order to affirm only the spiritual as good should not be used to designate a consistent position and outlook for critique. I suggested instead that the conversation needs to move forward to understand the nature of media such as the Internet and the ways it can serve as a social construct for social praxis, including religious practice. I also argued that engagement need not be a denial of material existence or an exclusion from it, especially given the creative adaptation that intertwines online and offline interactions and experiences.

Finally, I looked at Eucharist in cyberspace from the standpoint of the agency of the user, regarding the theological understanding that it does not represent a compromised humanity. Actually, the active agent/user is empowered with the Internet, and can reconfigure and make technology innovative to best serve human ends and aspirations. The fullest development of the latter awaits complete development in the upcoming chapter, in which I continue developing a theological anthropology that is not only compatible with agency of the user, but enhances an understanding of humanity after the order of the *imago dei.* In the next chapter, I posit a theological position regarding the Eucharist in cyberspace.

CHAPTER FIVE: THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EUCHARIST IN CYBERSPACE

In the foregoing I have shown that the nature of the Internet, as *networked communication media characterized by the agency of the user in carrying out religious praxis*, means that observing the Eucharist can have practical and theoretical legitimacy. I have shown that reconfiguration can take place so that the Eucharist can be practiced in cyberspace as a community of faith in both a specific community expression and as an expression of a universal community of faith that transcends time and space. I have also shown that the practice can be reconfigured in the mode of mediated communication in cyberspace that does not compromise materiality. I have shown that with regard to the meaning of being human and Christian that the agency of the user is a viable perspective because the user and user community are in control as active users. The focus of this chapter is to deal with the issue that for some Internet user communities, the manner in which the practice squares with their chosen tradition is important. The specific traditions that are relevant to this discussion are that of the Wesleyan/holiness and Calvinist traditions. It is my purpose in this chapter to posit a theologically defensible stance[472] that Eucharist in cyberspace is *networked communication medium of grace characterized by the agency of a user, who joins other participants in a sacramental*

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[472] Campbell writes that communities engage in a "discursive framing process," in which a particular religious community constructs their unique adaptation of their discourse to the new situation. I am attempting something similar in this chapter. Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media,* 134.

encounter with Christ, in light of a "redeployment" of tradition. In doing so I am following the methodology of Kathryn Tanner. Her methodology is helpful in the following three ways.

First, she pinpoints the acute problem that too often "appeals to tradition in Christian theology,"[473] tends to "hide the way that contestable theological judgments are part and parcel" of these very appeals. Most of the scholars noted in the previous chapter approached the problem of online Eucharist as if the appeal to one undisputed use of tradition would clear up issues about the appropriate way to practice the Eucharist in light of its essential theological attributes and function for a faith community. Taking my cues from Tanner, I appeal to tradition, but I do not claim that my proposals are without need for further dialogue.

Second, Tanner shows that tradition is no longer simply a process of transmission of a unified body of materials but "a process of argument, among upholders of different Christian viewpoints, whether in the past or present . . . [or] one might say, what is now transmitted is the practice of argument itself."[474] She writes that it no longer makes sense to talk about constraint on the novel based merely on continuity with tradition. Instead, the theologian understands that what has been passed along is the continuity of the process of argument itself. The conversation needs to be about giving "shape to the cultural materials of Christianity before they can work as a constraint on novelty; the creativity of theological argument is necessary to establish the very continuity at issue,"

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[473] Kathryn Tanner, "Tradition and Theological Judgment in Light of Postmodern Cultural Criticism," in *Tradition and Tradition Theories: An International Discussion,* ed. Thorsten Larbig and Siegfried Wiedenhofer (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 229.

[474] Kathryn Tanner, "Tradition and Theological Judgment in Light of Postmodern Cultural Criticism,"245.

organizing materials from tradition "in a way that makes clear what else might have a place within them."[475] I think that this points to the fact that the conversation should be about how the practice of online Eucharist interfaces with the nature of the technology and the degree to which tradition may or may not be reconfigured.

Third, beyond continuing controversy is a way forward from which I will begin and upon which I will build in this chapter. Tanner suggests in her work in which she engages Christian tradition, that she is committed to "show the fruitfulness of a kind of internalization of the history of Christian thought for its *creative redeployment"* [emphasis mine].[476] The hope that she expresses is similar to my hope in this chapter. Her hope is that the readers of her new book, rather than finding her an "'eclectic compiler'" with "'a syncretistic concoction of pre-existing givens,'" will extend to her "the courtesy now afforded someone like Gregory of Nyssa," in which "looking back towards the sources and the basic elements' does not 'replace a looking forward that endeavors to grasp the synthesis that has been effected, the irreducible novelty that has been attained.'"[477]

In this chapter, I would like to engage in a "redeployment" of Wesleyan/holiness tradition using a tripartite argument based on Eucharist in cyberspace as *networked communication medium of grace characterized by the agency of the user, who joins other participants in a sacramental encounter with Christ*.   In the subsection dealing with the

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[475] Kathryn Tanner, "Tradition and Theological Judgment in Light of Postmodern Cultural Criticism,"243-244.

[476] She further explains that internalizing "the history of Christ thought," means doing things such as "repeated direct reading, liturgical recitation, and theological commentary" such as Anselm, in whose meditations there is found both a "prayerful" and "analytically rigorous form." Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), ix.

[477] Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key,* ix. Tanner is quoting Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Eucharist in cyberspace communication medium of grace in a sacramental encounter with Christ, I will redeploy Calvin's views with regard to Christ's presence in the Eucharist. My purpose is to look at what the theological ramifications are for a creative redeployment from both of these traditions. I will do the theological analysis in three sections.

The first is a redeployment of Wesleyan/holiness tradition and networked communities for the Eucharist in cyberspace. In this section below, I focus on networked communities in communication in ritual observance I will suggest theologically that networks in cyberspace go along with the idea that Eucharist unites a Christian community in a local communal sense and a universal sense as a part of the greater Christian community. I will also show that in Wesleyan/holiness theology of Eucharist there is theological warrant to suggest that the Eucharist both creates and reflects authentic community in cyberspace.

The second section below is a redeployment of Wesleyan/holiness tradition nuanced by Calvin regarding Eucharist as mediated communication in cyberspace. I will give attention to the Internet as a communication medium by showing how Calvin and the Wesleyan/holiness tradition can be redeployed so that ritual can be translated to a communication venue. I suggest that it can be done in such as way that the presence of Christ can be experienced in cyberspace by as user/user community. The concept of spiritual presence as Real presence, most clearly articulated by Calvin's view bolsters this contention for the Wesleyan/holiness tradition. However, in addition, a Wesleyan/holiness understanding of a theological aesthetic for the Eucharist ties together

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a cyberspace observance with the endorsement of a materialized use of symbols in this venue.

Finally I will engage in a redeployment of Wesleyan/holiness theology and the agency of the user for Eucharist in cyberspace. I will suggest that placing the user/user community in control is theologically compatible with a creative redeployment of a Wesleyan/holiness view of free moral agency and a holistic theological anthropology that fully expressed the *imago dei* of a user.

A Redeployment of Wesleyan/holiness Theology And Networked Communities For The Eucharist in Cyberspace

In this section I will pursue a course that unpacks my contention that the Wesleyan/holiness tradition has regarded the Eucharist as an essential part of the connection of the church both locally, and universally as a community of faith. I will show evidence that theologically, the Eucharist in cyberspace can be a local and universal communal practice because of the nature of networks as community on the Internet. I indicate below that the importance that the tradition places on the church as a networked gathering of worshipping people evokes the desire for the Eucharist, and in turn the community is perpetuated and strengthened by the ritual. My survey below will then look at the connectedness that was a hallmark from early Methodism and Wesley, to his early legacy in America, and then to the Church of the Nazarene. I will present evidence indicating that the desire to be connected by a common faith often lead to innovative practice on the part of the early Methodism. I will also show how Nazarenes continue to affirm the local and universal nature of the church as unifying believers everywhere. They are therefore concerned about providing access to those who cannot attend an onground church.

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The Wesleyan/holiness tradition contends that the Eucharist cannot be separated from the context of the church, therefore speaking to its essential nature as a communal activity. The church is characterized as a community first and foremost by Nazarene theologian H. Orton Wiley, who writes that it is "a new order of spiritual life on earth," and was "created by the advent of Christ, and is preserved by the perpetual indwelling of the Holy Spirit." As such he further qualifies this as entailing, "the *ecclesia,* or assembly of called out ones," made up of "adopted sons [sic] of God," and "the *Body of Christ*, as constituting a mystical extension of the nature of Christ."[478] Among the aspects which distinguish this community are the sacraments, such as the Eucharist. John Wesley in his work "Of The Church," quotes from the Anglican Articles of Religion, that the "visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men [sic], in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the sacraments . . . duly administered."[479] Thus the sacrament of the Eucharist is a key aspect of what is constitutive of the church as a community of faith.

What is important for my purposes here is not the definition of the church per se, but to make the point that there is theological warrant to understand the Eucharist in cyberspace as both a reflection of the coming together of a network as a community, as well as serving to perpetuate this community. As Nazarene theologian Brent Peterson writes, "The sacraments continually renew and remake the Church as the body of Christ."[480] This section's exclusive focus is networked communication, showing that the

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[478] H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1943), 3:103.

[479] John Wesley, "Of The Church," in *John Wesley,* ed. Albert Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 312.

[480] Brent David Peterson, "The Science of the Sacraments: The Being and Becoming of Persons in Community," CD-ROM, *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 44, no.1 (Spring, 2009): 199.

communal aspect related to the Eucharist, important to those of the Wesleyan/holiness

tradition, can be innovatively retained in cyberspace. I find that the Wesleyan/holiness

tradition has some insights to offer that show that Eucharist in cyberspace can be done in

a manner that will clearly express its function and meaning for the faith community. For

Wesleyan/Nazarenes in the Eucharist this involves unity with the body of Christ

primarily as a local fellowship as well as an occasion to affirm unity with the body of

Christ universally. Cyberspace affords both either separately, or merged together.

Wesleyan scholar Paul Wesley Chilcote identifies the "rich concept" of

community "being rediscovered in our time" as reflective of the "connectedness" that

"was one of the hallmarks of early Methodism."[481] In his fourth discourse on the Sermon

on the Mount, Wesley writes of some who in their religious experience soar "upon the

wings of love," and then wonder if it would not "suffice to worship God, who is a Spirit,

with the spirit of our minds, without encumbering ourselves with outward things, or even

thinking of them." Wesley states that "our Lord" has guarded Christians against this

"pleasing delusion" by contending for an "active, patient religion," which is a "social

religion."[482] Contrary to the mere solitude of inward religion is the "union of the soul

with God," a root "really in the heart" that "cannot but put forth branches."[483] The root

of a personal encounter with God cannot help but put forth branches in reaching out to

others. This image suggests networks of connection as an expression of community.

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[481] Paul Wesley Chilcote, *Recapturing the Wesley's Vision: An Introduction to the Faith of John and Charles Wesley* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press Academic, 2004), 43-44.

[482] John Wesley, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount," in *The Works of John Wesley,* 3rd ed., vol.5, Sermons 1 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, repr., Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979), 295-296.

[483] John Wesley, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount," 303-304.

Connections of a networking nature was found within the community life of the Methodist societies themselves that were both "personal and social," in which "individuals move toward God and one another." Chilcote suggests for Methodism the image of a Christian circle of fellowship moving in one motion, "slowly and persistently--closer and closer to God, the point at the center" while finding the persons in the circle "moving closer and closer to each other."[484] Chilcote also writes that the early Methodist movement in England at large was a "network of 'societies'" and was "neither a 'church' nor a 'sect.'"[485] Yet Wesley states in "On Attending The Church Services," that his intention is not to separate from the Church of England, and that "every member of our society should attend the church and sacrament, unless he had been bred among Christians of any other denomination."[486]

Being rooted and grounded in the love for a tradition, and a desire to be in continuity with the primitive church as the Wesleys desired did not mean that innovation had to be squelched. The community life of the Methodists, with its networking character, contributed to its rapid expansion that both resulted from and continued to perpetuate this kind of connection. Virtual church advocate and practitioner, Doug Estes cites John Wesley as exemplifying a model in his Methodist societies that carried over to Methodism in the early American frontier. Vast numbers of people could be organized using, "a new way of doing ministry," a way that many church leaders of the day frowned

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[484] Paul Wesley Chilcote, *Recapturing the Wesley's Vision,* 52.

[485] Paul Wesley Chilcote, *Recapturing the Wesley's Vision*, 61.

[486] John Wesley, "On Attending The Church Service," in *The Works of John Wesley,* 3rd ed., vol.7, Sermons 3 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, repr., Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979), 175.

upon."[487] Estes describes these networks as "nodes of spiritual growth and discourse rather than just buildings where people meet."[488] What has occurred with the exponential growth of virtual social networking is once again this same principle in action.

The principle that a networked Christian group's unity and community necessitates Eucharist is amply illustrated in the Wesleys as well. That John Wesley found a way to provide ordained ministers to administer the sacraments in new situations outside of the Anglican Church among Methodists in American is well documented and need not be rehearsed here.[489] What is more compelling is that there are other examples in the writings and practice of the Wesleys of redeploying tradition that accommodates the Eucharist beyond the Church of England per se. Wesleyan scholar Lorna Khoo documents that Charles Wesley in 1740 held a communion service "outside Anglican church buildings (and outside homes)" and "gave the sacrament to about 80 colliers at Kingswood."[490]   Another Wesleyan scholar, Randy Maddox, writes that because tensions had developed between "several societies and local Anglican priests," Methodists were either voluntarily or otherwise excluded from Sunday worship. This resulted in a situation in which Wesley increasingly accepted "the celebrating of the Lord's Supper in society meetings (whenever he or another ordained Methodist preacher was available)."

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[487] Douglas Estes, *SimChurch,* 189.

[488] Douglas Ester, *SimChurch,* 191.

[489] Lester Ruth,"A Little Heaven Below: the Love Feast And Lord's Supper in Early American Methodism," CD-ROM, *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32, no.2 (Fall, 1997): 60.

[490] Lorna Khoo, *Wesleyan Eucharistic Spirituality: Its Nature, Sources, and Future* (Hindmarch, South Australia: ATF Press, 2005), 21.

He also notes that the Wesleys published *Hymns to The Lord's Supper* of 1745 "to resource these celebrations."[491]

The quality of communal life among Methodists in their celebrations of the Eucharist is amply illustrated in *Hymns to The Lord's Supper.* These hymns laud the communal life speaking in terms of Christ's church characterized as a community with a single purpose as foundational to their practice of Eucharist. One example is *Hymn # 129*, which affirms that "Christ and his church are one" adding, "one body and one vine" so that "all He has, or is, is ours." This hymn goes on to acknowledge both an eschatological and a missional vision that is affirmed in the mutual sacrifice of ourselves together as a body in the Lord's Supper:

> The motions of our Head
> The members all pursue,
> By His good Spirit led
> To act, and suffer too
> Whate'er [sic] He did on earth sustain,
> Till glorious all like Him we reign.[492]

Banquet and feasting imagery is used in which the idea is to join in one accord, in a feast here on earth, which will also be enjoyed when the heavenly King will be seen "without a sacramental veil."[493] The communal bond is acknowledged in the sharing of this supper in another one of these hymns: "How happy are Thy servants Lord, / Who, thus remember thee! / What tongue can tell our sweet accord, / Our perfect harmony?"[494]

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[491]Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 202-203. *HLS* will be used in this dissertation to refer to this 1745 collection of hymns.

[492] J. Ernest Rattenbury "Hymns on the Lord's Supper," no.129 in *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley,* 3rd ed. (Akron, OH: OSL Publications, 2006).

[493] J. Ernest Rattenbury, "Hymns on the Lord's Supper," no.93.

[494] J. Ernest Rattenbury, "Hymns on the Lord's Supper," no.165.

Chilcote writes from a Wesleyan perspective that intimacy and fellowship is nowhere "more fully realized," than in the "sharing in the sacrament of Holy Communion (note the word) around the table of the Lord."[495] Wesley insisted on the indispensability of the Eucharist for every Christian in his sermon "The Duty of Constant Communion." In this sermon the purpose of Eucharist to build community is not explicit, but it is assumed that the activity has always been and should always be communal. Wesley gives four reasons why it is the duty of every Christian to "receive the Lord's Supper as often as he can."[496] Here I will only summarize the two reasons Wesley gives that also speak to its communal nature. First Wesley states the simple fact that Christ commanded it, and so the "Apostles" were obliged to do as they were to "bless, break and give the bread to all that joined with them in these holy things." In light of this, Wesley stresses that he does not mean "frequent" but "constant" because as a command it requires that whenever we can do it we ought."[497] Second, Wesley points out that the Christian's example is the "first Christians with whom the Christian Sacrifice was a constant part of the Lord 's Day service." He notes as well that, "for several centuries they received it almost every day," and "those who joined the prayers of the faithful never failed to partake of the blessed sacrament."[498] In a work in which he examines the catechism of the Roman Church, he writes in a subsection called "Of The Eucharist," that the Church of Rome allows for the

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[495] Paul Wesley Chilcote, *Recapturing the Wesley's Vision*, 44.

[496] John Wesley, "The Duty of Constant Communion," in *The Works of John Wesley,* 3rd ed., vol.7, Sermons 3 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, repr., Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979), 147.

[497] John Wesley, "The Duty of Constant Communion," 147, 149-150.

[498] John Wesley, "The Duty of Constant Communion," 148.

priest to communicate alone, partly because "the people do spiritually communicate in it," and the priest is a public minister, for himself and other people. He disagrees with this practice of the priest, writing that the communion should primarily be of a group who are engaged in the action of being partakers of one bread, as 1 Corinthians 10: 16-17, indicates. Wesley approvingly quotes Cassander as saying, "It cannot properly be a communion unless many partake of it."[499]

When Methodism was transplanted to America, the Eucharist was a bonding and unifying practice for Methodism on the American frontier. As historian Lester Ruth writes, the Lord's Supper was an expression of fellowship, "which was the dominant ecclesiological concept for early American Methodists. Methodist[500] fellowship was expressed both in the manner in which the services were conducted and in the way they were commonly interpreted."[501] Methodists designated these Eucharist services as private. Privacy was in keeping with what Wesley had required in England of society meetings, bands, classes, and the love feasts, all restricted to members with limited exceptions. After the Methodist Episcopal Church was created in 1784 there was the "concomitant result of having Methodist preachers ordained to administer sacraments."[502] Although restricting access for the Lord's Supper was more "fluid" than for another private ritual known as the love feast, the manner of restriction of the Lord's Supper had

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[499] John Wesley, "A Roman Catechism, Faithfully Drawn Out of The Allowed Writings Of the Church of Rome: Of The Sacraments," in *The Works of John Wesley,* 3rd ed., vol.10, Addresses, Essays, Letters (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, repr., Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979), 121.

[500] Lester Ruth, "A Little Heaven Below," 60-61. Ruth describes the love feast practiced by the Methodist in Britain and America as private meetings that consisted of a sharing of bread, water and testimonies.

[501] Lester Ruth, "A Little Heaven Below," 59.

[502] Lester Ruth, "A Little Heaven Below," 60.

to do with the setting in which it was administered. It was more restricted if it was

attached to a love feast, and admission to the love feast also meant admission to the

sacrament and vice versa. When the Lord's Supper was administered in a preaching

service there was less restriction.[503] A full account of the level and types of restrictions

for Eucharist in this period is beyond the scope of this study. A fair summary statement

from Ruth is that accounts of the Lord's Supper, "in early Methodism indicated that some

things were usually not required" such as membership or a conversion experience.[504] He

adds,

> Serious mourners, whether or not they were members, were frequently welcomed.
> Recognizing the gracious activity of God during a sacrament, even on the
> unconverted, was commonplace in eighteenth century Methodism, which traced
> its belief that the sacrament could be a "converting ordinance" back to Wesley
> himself. Accounts sometimes describe how a mourner's justification occurred at
> the very moment of communing.[505]

Ruth further explains that in the American Methodist Quarterly meeting in which the

sacrament was served that although there was relatively "open admission to communion

when administered" often there were many "who did not commune," but could watch

others, seeing not only the symbols of commemoration of Christ's death-the bread and

wine- but also a fellowship which revealed the present beneficiaries of this act of

love."[506] The local fellowship that gave birth to becoming a church exercised this ritual

of fellowship. Cyberspace that redeploys this tradition can be configured to

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[503] Lester Ruth, "A Little Heaven Below," 65-66.

[504] Lester Ruth, "A Little Heaven Below," 68-69.

[505] Lester Ruth, "A Little Heaven Below," 69.

[506] Lester Ruth, "A Little Heaven Below," 70-71.

accommodate either an inclusive or exclusive practice, depending on how the sacrament will function for the networked community.

Wesley says that the word "church" can be taken to mean a church set apart for worship, "A congregation or body of people united together in the service of God." He makes the point that this can be "any number of people" no matter how small or great, as Matthew 18:20 affirms: "where two or three are believers are met together, there is a church." He writes that according to the epistle of Philemon, "even a Christian family may be termed a church."[507] This will be a gathering of the faithful in which the "pure Word of God is preached" and the sacraments administered.[508] Thus the activity of the group defines the group. Networked groups in cyberspace can so define themselves and as shown in earlier chapters, often do. The example of Methodism in England and America shows that sacramental sharing both defines the group and in turn establishes the group as a unified body of believers.

But there is another aspect of the church or community of faith which transcends a local fellowship. Wesley connects what the Anglican church prays in its liturgy, "Let us pray for the whole state of Christ's church militant here on earth," to the affirmation in Ephesians that the church "means the catholic or universal Church; that is, all the Christians under heaven."[509] Thus he affirms both the universal church as well as particular churches. In this affirmation Wesley is inclusive of many expressions of the

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[507] John Wesley, "Of The Church," 309.

[508] John Wesley, "Of The Church," 312.

[509] John Wesley, "Of The Church," 310. Wesley develops this theme specifically along the lines of Ephesians 4:4-6: "There is one body and one Spirit-just as you were called to one hope when you were called-one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." (New International Version, 1983).

church. He writes, "Whoever they are that have 'one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one faith, one God and Father of all,' I can easily bear with their holding wrong opinions, yea, and superstitious modes of worship."[510] It is to this purpose that the Internet is uniquely carrying forth this vision of the church universal. The sense that there is a universal fellowship affirmed in the Eucharist that transcends time and space is served in an unprecedented way in an online observance of Eucharist.

When it comes to the Church of the Nazarene, Nazarene scholars vary as to the extent to which they directly conform to Wesley's understanding of the Eucharist. Yet most look to Wesley's writing and practice of the Eucharist as a seminal source for their understanding.[511] Theologian Kyle Tau, in his historical analysis of the Nazarene doctrinal stance on the Lord's Supper, looks to a Charles Wesley hymn in the collection of *HLS,* finding at least one major instance that he identifies as showing that the Eucharist is "the basis for the formation of the ecclesial body." Further, Tau writes that the "participation of the saints in the life of Christ through the 'Living Bread' creates the possibility for them to live as one body in 'perfect harmony.'"[512] Tau looks at the history of the doctrine and practice of the Lord's Supper, focusing on the ecclesial role implied in the Nazarene founder Phineas F. Bresee. He examines the ritual in the earliest *Manuals* of the new denomination, and other aspects such as fencing from partaking of "The

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[510] John Wesley, "Of The Church," 314.

[511] The following is representative: See H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology,* 3:156; J. Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology,* 507, 510; H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith And Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988), 550, 565; See also Rob T. Staples, *Outward Sign And Inward Grace* and Brent David Peterson, "A post-Wesleyan Eucharistic ecclesiology." The latter two place Wesley at the center of their Eucharist theology.

[512] Kyle Tau, "A Wesleyan Analysis of The Nazarene Doctrinal Stance on The Lord's Supper," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 43, no.2 (2008):116.

Lord's Supper" if one "does not demonstrate faith in Christ and love for the saints."[513]

Tau also finds ecclesial significance for Bresee in terms of frequency in celebrating

Eucharist. He practiced it once a month with his parishioners and by 1903 was

celebrating twice a month.[514] In the *Manual* of 2009-2013, it states in the roles and duties

of a pastor that one of his/her roles is the administering of the sacrament of the Lord's

Supper "at least once a quarter," being encouraged to "move toward a more frequent

celebration of this means of grace."[515] The last phrase, "move toward a more frequent

celebration. . ." indicates a recent encouragement for Nazarenes to turn back toward its

sacramental heritage in the Methodists and the Wesleys. It is not clear if a more sober

view of the importance of the Eucharist will mean a more protective and rigid approach

or the opposite, such as experimentation in venues such as cyberspace, in order to

increase access. I believe that taking it seriously as a means of grace and as a bonding

ritual for communal life calls for the latter.

The focus of most of the literature for Nazarenes in terms of its communal nature

is on its practice in the context of a local and specific community. The present *Manual* of

the Church of the Nazarene in article XIII on the Lord's Supper states in part the

following regarding the "The Lord's Supper" and community:

> It is distinctly for those who are prepared for reverent appreciation of its
> significance, and by it they show forth the Lord's death till He comes again. It
> being the Communion feast, only those who have faith in Christ and love for the
> saints should be called to participate therein.[516]

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[513] Kyle Tau, "A Wesleyan Analysis of The Nazarene Doctrinal Stance on The Lord's Supper,"116.

[514] Kyle Tau, "A Wesleyan Analysis of The Nazarene Doctrinal Stance on The Lord's Supper,"117.

[515] *Manual/2009-2013,* 190.

[516] *Manual /2009-2013,* 36.

Nazarene theologian H. Ray Dunning comments on a statement in the ritual

section of the Nazarene *Manual*: "we are one, at one table with the Lord." Dunning

emphasizes that communion with Christ is the essential part of this sacrament, and that

this must also involve a "communion among members" who participate together. He

notes that although each individual receives elements for themselves that it "does not

signify an isolating individualism."[517] He quotes Aulen who writes that fellowship with

Christ as well as Christian fellowship and unity, "involves at the same time the most

compelling obligation on the church to manifest this unity in its life."[518] He maintains

this emphasis in light of pointing out that for Wesley the term "communion" goes beyond

a "mystical sense of fellowship" to an "active sense of communicate" with each other and

with Christ.[519]

In addition to the *Manual,* Nazarenes have *The Church Rituals Handbook* that

offers a pastor and congregation a newer alternative, more directly in line with a

Wesleyan/Anglican type of ritual. Dubbed a "Service of Word and Table," it is described

as a "more detailed order of service" that may be "utilized when desired." It includes a

"collect for purity" from the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Anglican Church.[520] In

explaining more thoroughly the way in which rituals of the Christian faith, which include

the Lord's Supper, function for the community of faith, denominational official Dan

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[517] H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith And Holiness,* 560.

[518] H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith And Holiness,* 561.

[519] H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith And Holiness,* 559.

[520] Jesse Middendorf, *The Church Rituals Handbook,* 2nd ed. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2009), 49.

Copp writes in the introduction that "leading a congregation in church rituals is one of the cherished privileges of being a pastor." This is a "wondrous calling to lead a community of faith in those profound times," which he lists as rituals such as baptism, marriage, funerals and worship services for special seasons of the year. The "gathering at the Lord's Table" is also specifically mentioned.[521]

The notion of the significance for the universal unity of Christians proclaimed in the Eucharist is also a part the observance. The affirmation that the Eucharist is for the local fellowship and the uniting of all Christians is merged in this example. Copp explains that "properly observed, rituals contribute to our being a Christian people by continuing to identify us with the historical Christian faith, and connect us with church and Christians through the ages." But then the other ways that Eucharist unites can be seen in an awareness of the church's universality as well as in the intimate fellowship of a particular community. He maintains that since disciples of Christ live between two worlds, rituals are needed "to remind of us of who we are."[522] Copp writes of Nazarenes being a people who live "in the midst of the raging currents of today's ever present fallenness," as "missional exiles." He quotes affirmatively Walter Brueggemann, who has written that rituals are a part of a ministry that engages "exiles" in the "cadences of home."[523] He notes, however, that sometimes Nazarenes might be hesitant to engage in these rituals of identity because in a public service not everyone present is a disciple. But, he contends that these may too be "exiles" who are being drawn by God's

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[521] Dan Copp, introduction to *The Church Rituals Handbook,* 2nd ed. by Jesse Middendorf (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2009), 11.

[522] Dan Copp, introduction to *The Church Rituals Handbook,* 11.

[523] Dan Copp, introduction to *The Church Rituals Handbook,* 12.

"prevenient grace," and yet don't recognize the "cadences of home." Copp says that

"rituals offer a winsome opportunity to listen in on the cadences of a covenant people, to

appropriate grace and to respond to God's invitation to enter into a new covenant." This

he writes is in keeping with John Wesley, who always maintained that the "end of

ecclesiastical order," is to "bring souls from the power of Satan to God to build them up

in His fear and love."[524]

Communal life is gathered, but it also involves extending the Supper to grant

access to those who cannot attend Eucharist in a specific physical location. The *Manual*,

states that "consideration should be given for extending the Lord's Supper to homebound

persons, under supervision of the pastor."[525] *The Church Rituals Handbook* has a special

service to offer the Lord's Supper to those who because of health and extenuating

circumstances are unable to participate "with the congregation."[526] The rationale to

provide a special service is not in the service of mere pragmatism, or a compromise with

individualism, but in order to make sure that the communicant clearly understands

themselves as an extension of a community.

This survey has shown overwhelming evidence that for the Wesleyan/holiness

tradition, that the essential nature of Eucharist is an observance that happens in such a

way that it functions as a reflection of community and creator of community among

believers. Such is the essential nature and theological warrant for the universal and local

church expressions to practice Eucharist in cyberspace. All of the theological criteria

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[524] Dan Copp, introduction to *The Church Rituals Handbook,* 13.

[525] *Manual /2009-2013,* 190.

[526] Jesse Middendorf, *The Church Rituals Handbook,* 57.

related to community such as connectedness in joining together for a sacramental

encounter with Christ can be found in practicing the Eucharist in cyberspace.

A Redeployment of Wesleyan/holiness And Calvinist Theology For The Eucharist As Mediated Communication in Cyberspace

The nature of the Internet as transmission and ritual communication media affirms

all the essential aspects of the practice, including materiality. A redeployment of both

Calvin and the Wesleyan/holiness tradition will work under the assumption that the

sacrament of the Eucharist is itself a medium of grace. In order for it to fulfill its

function of communicating Christ in an encounter of grace, its mode of practice for a

community redeploying tradition will need to retain its essential mediating function.

Thus, the networked community will invoke Christ's presence through the Holy Spirit

with the symbols as divine instruments. For Calvin, and Wesleyan/holiness traditions,

mediation occurs through handling material symbols that have been prayerfully blessed

by clergy. Accommodation to cyberspace should include these essentials without falling

prey to an overemphasis on the material to the neglect of the Eucharist as a spiritual

encounter with Christ. In keeping with the spirit of the Reformation, the point is always

to observe communion in a manner that maximizes access to this means of grace.

In the following subsections, I will argue that theologically, the sacrament serves

both as a transmission medium and a ritual one. I will first look at Calvin's view of the

Eucharist as a transmissional mode of communication and then as a ritual one, with an

emphasis on the way that the real presence of Christ engenders a sacramental encounter.

Such a view, I will show, is complementary, if not necessary, for the same effect for a

Wesleyan/holiness mode of the communicative nature of Eucharist after the fashion of

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the ritual view of communication. The latter ritual view is affirmed in the linkage

between the spiritual and material bolstered by a Wesleyan theological aesthetic.

Calvin's Understanding of The Eucharist As A Sacramental Encounter With Christ From A Transmission And Ritual Perspective Of Communication

Calvin emphasizes over and over the communicative nature of the sacraments in

general, and the Lord's Supper in particular. A redeployment of his views shows the

sacrament to be an effective mode of communicating Christ in the Supper. The

transmissional nature of communication as well as the ritual view is reflected in Calvin's

view of the sacrament as conveying a message. The sacraments as communication

transmission bring the distant near and make the unclear, clear. But so is the ritual of the

communicative event involving participation in such things as the handling of the

elements as symbols.

Calvin's Eucharist Theology And The Transmission View

Calvin develops what could be classified as the transmission communication

aspect, in terms of the Word as preached that provides explanatory power when added to

the physical elements in Eucharist. Calvin cites Augustine, making the point that when

the latter calls the sacrament "a visible word" that the Word preached precedes the visible

sacrament. In this way the Lord's Supper "represents God's promises as painted in a

picture and sets them before our sight." [527] In the "Catechism of the Church of Geneva:

Of The Sacraments," Calvin answers the question: "Is there no other medium as it is

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[527] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* vol. 2, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 1279,1281.

called, than the Word by which God may communicate himself to us?" The answer given is: "to the preaching of the Word he has added the Sacraments."[528]

Dawn DeVries has pointed out that the Reformed understanding of preaching to explain the Lord's Supper was a unique and dramatic departure from the Roman Catholic practice. She writes: "Calvin, like Luther before him, borrowed from Augustine the notion that sacraments were 'visible words.' While this meant that the Reformers tended to verbalize the sacraments, it also led them to 'sacramentalize' the Word."[529] Thus the "sermon takes on a liturgical significance not unlike the Eucharist itself," although Calvin could not imagine preaching without the Eucharist, and tried to convince the magistrates of Geneva of the importance of a weekly observance, having to eventually compromise by agreeing to a quarterly celebration.[530] In contrast to this is the Roman Catholic understanding, in which the Tridentine theologians did not attribute to preaching the function of a "means of grace," but merely the function of preparation for receiving the sacrament. DeVries quotes from the *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent,* that in the moment of the reception of the sacraments, one finds that "all true justice either begins, or being begun is increased, or being lost is restored."[531] Thus, for the Reformed scheme of Eucharist observance, meaningful encounter with Christ in the act of partaking

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[528] John Calvin, "Catechism of The Church of Geneva: Of The Sacraments," in *Selected Works of John Calvin,* vol. 2, Tracts, Part 2, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 83.

[529] Dawn DeVries, *Jesus Christ in The Preaching of Calvin And Schleiermacher,* Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 14. DeVries also notes that Calvin does not simply equate the words of Scripture with the Word of God. Instead the latter encompasses the Gospel as it is proclaimed in preaching and in the sacraments.

[530] Dawn DeVries, *Jesus Christ in The Preaching of Calvin And Schleiermacher,* 20.

[531] Dawn DeVries, *Jesus Christ in The Preaching of Calvin And Schleiermacher,* 20.

of Eucharist in a communication medium must transmit the promise of what is being offered with a clear explanation.

Another way in which the Reformed understanding is compatible with a transmissional perspective of communication is found in "Form of Administering The Sacraments Composed For The Use of the Church in Geneva: The Manner of Celebrating The Lord's Supper." In this Calvin says that the Sunday before the Supper is "dispensed it is intimated to the people" that they are to prepare themselves to "receive it worthily" and with reverence. He insists that young people must be well instructed and need to have professed their faith within the Church. If there are "strangers who are still rude and ignorant" they may come and present themselves for private instruction. At the time of the actual service, after a sermon, and after prayer, and "The Confession of Faith," the words of institution should be given from Christ as "narrated by St.Paul" out of 1 Cor. 11.[532] He says that the minister should state that the sacrament is a medicine for the spiritually sick. In terms of worthiness to partake, it is important for one to know oneself, and in the Supper, "seek all pleasure, joy and contentment in knowing Christ."[533] In "Short Treatise On The Lord's Supper," Calvin emphasizes that "the wretched conscience with keen anguish" can surely "taste God's goodness" and "renounce all our bygone life," with the communicants being "hungry" and open to receive.[534] He contends that the church is not to examine people, but people should examine themselves.

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[532] John Calvin, "Form of Administering The Sacraments: Composed for The Use of The Church of Geneva; The Manner of Celebrating the Lord's Supper," in *Selected Works of John Calvin,* vol. 2, Tracts, Part 2, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 119.

[533] John Calvin, "Form of Administering The Sacraments," 121.

[534] John Calvin, "Short Treatise On The Lord's Supper," in *Selected Works of John Calvin,* vol. 2, Tracts, Part 2, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 175-76.

He also urges the church as a community to pray that it "be delivered from all scandal, and admonish all to partake with the right preparation."[535]

Calvin's Eucharist Theology And The Ritual View

Beyond transmitting a clear message is a ritual understanding of communication in which meaning is experienced in the sharing of ritual elements. In this subsection I will show that Calvin's understanding is that the Real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is experienced in a spiritual sense. Then I will make the point that this must occur through individuals partaking as well as sharing material symbols that bring to bear all the aspects of the use of the material to connect the communicant to the spiritual. In this act is a true sign and seal invoking Christ's presence through the Spirit. I will also explain that for Calvin the experience of Eucharist should involve partaking of the symbols in a manner and spirit among the users so that it is a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice. The users respond with a commitment of themselves in a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. I will contend theologically that the Eucharist in cyberspace can be such an event of connection, in which people would have access to Christ himself through the Holy Spirit.

The concept of Christ's presence as spiritual has been misunderstood by at least one Internet pastor, Douglas Estes. Estes invokes John Calvin's statements about Christ's Kingdom not being bound by time and space, as an endorsement of a Kingdom "not of this world." He sees this as compatible with the nature of the Internet which is universal and adaptable, transcending all earthy limits.[536] He quotes Calvin in *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* to this effect:

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[535] John Calvin, "Short Treatise On The Lord's Supper,"181.

[536] Douglas Estes, *SimChurch,* 109.

> This Kingdom is neither bounded by location in space nor circumscribed by any limits. Thus Christ is not prevented from exerting his power wherever he pleases, in heaven and on earth. He shows his presence in power and strength, is always among his own people, and breathes his life upon them, and lives in them, sustaining them, strengthening, quickening, keeping them unharmed, as if he were present in the body.[537]

Estes further claims not only for the church in general in cyberspace, but the observance of the sacraments, that Calvin is rejecting codification of the Lord's Supper, championing instead a "lack of objective rules or limits."[538]

I agree that Calvin provides for this conversation the way that Christ is present in the Eucharist in a spiritual sense.[539] However, care should be taken to understand that Calvin was not advocating that there are no standards as to how the Eucharist is to be observed. It is important to note that while Calvin the Reformer rejected the manner in which the ecclesiastical practice of the Roman Catholic Church hindered a direct encounter with Christ, he substituted its practice with new guidelines and limits rather than endorsing "virtually" none.

Calvin teaches that Christ's presence is mediated in the Lord's Supper. The first question he sets out to address in "A Brief Admonition on the Lord's Supper" is if Christ

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[537] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* 1381.

[538] Douglas Estes, *SimChurch,* 117.

[539] Staples explains that Luther held that "Christ is present in the elements *bodily*, not merely in some 'spiritual sense." Luther was interested in showing that Christ is just as present to those who partake in Eucharist as He was to the original disciples at the original Last Supper. Luther accomplishes this in the notion of the *ubiquity* or omnipresence of Christ, so that in the observance of the Eucharist, He is "in, with, and under the bread and wine." Staples also explains that, "Zwingli, in contrast, "understood that Christ's presence was by the contemplation of faith and not in essence or reality." Calvin agreed with Luther more than with Zwingli as he was committed to understanding the Eucharist as a "communion with a present Christ who actually feeds believers with His body and blood." But Calvin differed from Luther in that he contended that Christ is bodily in heaven, but the "distance is overcome by the Holy Spirit so that the Supper is a true communion with Christ." Rob L. Staples, *Outward Sign And Inward Grace: The Place of the Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality,* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1991), 218, 226.

in the Supper is "merely giving an outward sign" or if he is "keeping his promise that we

will share in his body and blood in such as way that he becomes ours?" He continues to

qualify the question by asking if Christ is ours with all of his blessing extended to us "*by*

virtue" (emphasis mine) of that communion.[540] Gerrish explains Calvin's notion of

spiritual presence as an emphasis on *virtus,* or the "reception of the power, effects, merits,

and fruits from a purely spiritual eating of the flesh of Christ through the power of the

Holy Spirit."[541] In "A Brief Admonition on the Lord's Supper," Calvin makes that point

that the presence of Christ is spiritual, such that we receive spiritually, referring

specifically to the "miraculous work of the Holy Spirit" as communicants are eating not

in a "fleshly way," but in a spiritual way.[542]

In the *Institutes*, Calvin clearly explains the way the source of the presence of

Christ relates to the work begun with Christ. Calvin writes of Christ as the source of life,

who came to abide in the world with his followers, as the life-giving Word of God, who

"begins to abide in our flesh" and "no longer lies hidden far from us, but shows us that

we are to partake of him."[543] Further, the sense in which Christ's body is life-giving is

that although it was subject to mortality, it now is "endowed with immortality," "does not

live through itself," but is "pervaded with fullness of life to be transmitted to us." He

gives the analogy that the "flesh of Christ is like a rich and inexhaustible fountain that

pours into us the life spring forth from the Godhead" Based on Ephesians and 1

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[540] John Calvin, "A Brief Admonition on The Lord's Supper," in *Calvin's Ecclesiastical Advice,* 1st.ed., trans. Mary Beaty and Benjamin W. Farley (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 21.

[541] B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 6.

[542] John Calvin, "A Brief Admonition on The Lord's Supper," 21-22.

[543] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* 1368.

Corinthians, Calvin states that he marvels along the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:32, that

the church is the "body of Christ and the fullness of him."[544]

At this point in the *Institutes,* the fellowship of Christ's body in the Lord's Supper

through the *virtus* of the Holy Spirit is described by Calvin in this way:

> Even though it seems unbelievable that Christ's flesh, separated from us by such
> great distance, penetrates to us, so that it becomes our food, let us remember how
> far the secret power of the Holy Spirit towers above all our senses, and how
> foolish it is to wish to measure his immeasurableness by our measure. What then,
> our minds does not comprehend, let faith conceive: that the Spirit truly unites
> things separated in space.[545]

McNeill, the editor of this version of the *Institutes,* states the following in a footnote:

> The above sentences express Calvin's sense of the mystery of the sacramental
> participation in Christ's body through the activity of the Holy Spirit, despite
> distance (*locorum distantia*) and separation (*locis disiuncta*)--a thing incredible
> until we realize the transcendent hidden power (*arcane virus*) of the Holy Spirit. .
> . . For his habitual assertion of the mysterious power (*virtus*) operating in the
> sacraments, Calvin's doctrine has been called 'virtualism.'[546]

In his catechism, Calvin speaks of the manner in which the sacraments can "seal the

promise of God in our hearts," and puts this together with the Holy Spirit alone who

works "to move and affect the heart, to enlighten the mind, to render the conscience sure

and tranquil," using the sacraments as "secondary instruments."[547] In this passage, he

frequently uses the term "virtue" or terms synonymous to it, when he speaks of the Lord

"exerting his energy by his instruments" (the sacraments). The flow is that of "power and

efficacy," not contained in the outward element, but flowing "entirely" from the Spirit of

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[544] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* 1369-70.

[545] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* 1370.

[546] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* 1370 n.27.

[547] John Calvin, "Catechism of the Church of Geneva," 84.

God.[548] Thus *virtus,* the Latin root word for the same family of English words in which

can be found the word "virtual" or "virtuality," has an idea of the power of the Spirit

virtually working through a medium to bring us to Christ. The effect of the Eucharist is

defined by the Holy Spirit's agency. I find the concept *virtus* of the Spirit the most

compelling aspect of Calvin's concept of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist to

establish it as possible in cyberspace. *Virtus* emphasizes the primacy of the power and

presence of the Holy Spirit in making Eucharist online a meaningful and efficacious

event accompanying the unique ways in which the user/user community use material

symbols along with the venue.

A full understanding of spiritual presence is not possible, however, until there is a

fuller discussion of how Calvin's understands signification; the part the material

symbols[549] play as secondary instruments of the Holy Spirit. In "A Brief Admonition On

The Lord's Supper," after mentioning the "virtue of that communion," he writes:

> We feel and we teach that the representation is real and that therefore what is
> promised by a visible sign is made known effectually in the Supper. This must
> mean that the faithful when they receive the sign, are sharing in the Lord's body
> and blood; this is what it means to have the reality of the sign.[550]

Gerrish writes that Calvin's understanding of how the gift of Christ is given with the

signs of bread and wine is reflected in the contrast between Calvin's view of the nature of

the signs and that of Zwingli and Rome. Calvin's implied criticism of the two in

comparison to his brings clarity to the issue. Gerrish writes:

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[548] John Calvin, "Catechism of the Church of Geneva," 84.

[549] McNeill, in a footnote, quotes Fuhrmann, who says that Calvin's terms for sign, mark, seal, token, are
sometimes erroneously translated "symbol," a word "not often used by Calvin in relation to the sacraments.
See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* 1277n.2.

[550] John Calvin, "A Brief Admonition on The Lord's Supper," 21.

In the Roman Catholic theory of transubstantiation the sign is in effect transformed into the thing signified: the substance of the bread becomes the substance of the body. The symbolic relationship is destroyed by a failure to maintain the distinction. In the Zwinglian view, on the other hand, sign and reality are divorced, or at least their unity is not clearly affirmed, since the body of Christ is absent from the Supper. This, too, in its own way, destroys the symbolic relationship, in which the sign guarantees the presence of what is signified.[551]

In a footnote, Gerrish also writes that Calvin also finds Luther's understanding of "is" problematic, as it also destroys the relation of *signum* to *res.*[552] Gerrish further explains that Luther criticized Zwingli for departing from Augustine, for whom a sacrament is a sign of "something invisibly present." Gerrish argues that Luther himself fails to defend the Real presence with an authentically Augustinian understanding, but continues the error in contending that the Real presence "*was* the sign in the Sacrament at the Altar." Gerrish also writes that Luther's view is that "the pledge God adds to his promise is not the bread, but the presence of Christ's body in the bread."[553]

In both "Short Treatise of the Lord's Supper" and the *Institutes,* Calvin ties together the way in which the signs, in the eating and drinking of the Lord's Supper, connect us to Christ by the agency, *virtus,* of the Holy Spirit. In the Supper, Christ is given to the faithful in the taking and eating of bread and drinking of the cup, which is simultaneously "expressly spoken of [as] the body and the blood, in order that we may learn to seek there the substance of our spiritual life." In connection to this, he alludes to Matt. 3:16, in which the Spirit is said to have descended in the form of a dove. For Calvin this is an example of God using a physical sign to adapt the descending of the

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[551] B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude,* 137.

[552] B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude,* 137n.41.

[553] B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude,* 164-65.

Holy Spirit to the limited capacity of the author of the Gospel to understand the Spirit's

descent. Such is true of this sacrament, of which he states: "It is therefore figured to us

by visible signs, according as our weakness requires, in such manner, that it is not a bare

figure but is combined with the reality of the substance."[554] The fruit of this, Calvin says,

is that those who are communicants will be incited to live holy lives. In the observance,

people are admonished to recognize the blessing they have received and will continue to

receive from the Lord Jesus, in thankful daily living. But Calvin also inserts the idea of

the "virtue" or *virtus* of the Holy Spirit which is "conjoined with the sacraments when we

duly receive them" such that people have "reason to hope" that it will prove "a good

means and aid to make us grow and advance in holiness of life, and especially in

charity."[555] This concept of presence emphasizes an encounter with Christ, through the

Holy Spirit, in a ritual participation that is truly transforming for the communicants.

When the sign points clearly to the spiritual reality, the *essential* function of the symbol is

complete. This can certainly happen in an online observance.

　　With the material elements is the sharing of the body of Christ. Calvin

emphasizes the Eucharist as an encounter with Christ in the sharing of a common bond

with each other and with Christ in the common loaf. For Calvin, this is in contrast to the

Roman Catholic host in the Mass, which he says is "whiteness" without substance and is

a mockery to the fellowship Supper with Christ and with each other that it was meant to

be.[556] The bread is to be given and shared among the faithful, in contrast to being "shut

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[554] John Calvin, "Short Treatise On The Lord's Supper,"170-71.

[555] John Calvin, "Short Treatise On The Lord's Supper,"173-74.

[556] John Calvin, "Short Treatise On The Lord's Supper," 186-187.

up in a cupboard," as Roman Catholics priests do in the Mass.[557] He takes up again the image of the common loaf, and contends that the host used in transubstantiation is neither in keeping with the Scripture, nor the primitive church. A material bread must be maintained so that it "remains as a visible sign of the body" and not be transformed to something else, because it needs to be recognized as spiritual food." It must also maintain what the "similitude which Paul employs," which is "as several grains of corn are mixed together to form one bread, so must we together be one, because we partake of one bread."[558] Applied to the Internet I point out that what is fundamentally essential from Calvin's understanding of real presence in Eucharist is that there is a community united in their common faith in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit who transcends limits of time and space and meets with a community connected in this very commonality in a meal.

Calvin also speaks of the Eucharist as being a memorial of the sacrifice of Christ that impresses upon the communicants the meaning of the sacrifice and being confirmed in Christ. In "The Sinfulness of Outward Conformity to Romish Rites" he writes:

> I only say that every believer should be aware that the mere name Sacrifice (as the priests of the Mass understand it) both utterly abolishes the cross of Christ, and overturns his sacred Supper which he consecrated as a memorial of his death.[559]

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[557] John Calvin, "The Adultero-German Interim: To Which Is Added The True Method of Giving Peace to Christendom, And of Reforming The Church," in *Selected Works of John Calvin,* vol. 3, Tracts, Part 3, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983): 282.

[558] John Calvin, "Short Treatise On The Lord's Supper," 186-187.

[559] John Calvin, "The Sinfulness of Outward Conformity to Romish Rites," in *Selected Works of John Calvin,* vol. 3, Tracts, Part 3, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 383.

The idea of communicating in Eucharist by showing the death of Christ as a

remembrance can also be found in places like the "Catechism of the Church of Geneva."

He writes that since we are not heavenly beings, grasping things require "figures or

mirrors to exhibit a view of spiritual and heavenly things . . . to have all our senses

exercised in the promises of God, that they may be better confirmed to us."[560] In "Short

Treatise on the Lord's Supper," he characterizes the fruit it brings to lives, as "succor" for

troubled souls who know that they deserve judgment, because it leads people to the cross

and the resurrection as partakers of his death and passion, whereby they are accepted as

righteous. Here again he uses the image of the sacrament functioning as a "mirror" of the

passion of Christ which is an instrument of "contemplation." In this, he writes, that we

are "confirmed as his" and enjoy all that God has for us.[561]

Calvin's idea of the Eucharist as a memorial of Christ is confirmed by a twenty-

first century group of Reformed scholars. They show that in light of more recent

emphasis in ecumenical scholarship on the concept of *anamnesis* (remembering), related

to the Lord's Supper, that they "explore our own liturgies and confessional traditions in

order to deepen our understanding and practice of remembrance in the Lord's Supper."[562]

They contend that the Reformed tradition "has always had a strong sense of

remembrance" even though it "has often been understood in a minimalist way as 'mere

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[560] John Calvin, "Catechism of The Church of Geneva," 84.

[561] John Calvin, "Short Treatise On The Lord's Supper," 170.

[562] Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee, Agenda For Synod, *This Bread of Life: Report of the United States Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue On The Eucharist/Lord's Supper* (November, 2010), 452, www.crcna.org./site-uploads/resources/synodical/ThisBreadoflife.pdf. (accessed June 20, 2012).

memorial.'"[563] This group further indicates that they fully understand that anamnesis is not simply recollection but remembering "in such a way that we see our participation in the past event and see our destiny and future as bound up with it."[564] They include Calvin as among the Reformers who understood that beyond a commemoration of devoted worshippers, the remembering of the Eucharist is "grounded in the action of God . . . the work of the Holy Spirit . . . who enables us to realize 'our participation and fellowship in the sufferings of Christ.'"[565] As I reflect on this with regard to cyberspace, I offer that cyberspace observance may not be adequate unless there is a way in which the dramatic sense of remembering can be created. The experience in cyberspace needs to involve more than the user/user community's mere ability to cognitively recall the death of Christ.

Calvin's view of sacrifice is another way in which his thought about the Eucharist is compatible with a ritual view of communication in cyberspace. Calvin focuses a good portion of a chapter in the *Institutes,* to the papal mass as a "sacrilege" because it misunderstands the Eucharist as an actual Sacrifice.[566] He sets this up by arguing that Christ did not choose the apostles to celebrate the Supper as exclusive "sacrificers."[567] In his "Short Treatise on The Lord's Supper" his contention is that the understanding of sacrifice promoted in the Mass is an error. He writes that the error developed little by

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[563] *This Bread of Life,* 453.

[564] *This Bread of Life,* 453.

[565] *This Bread of Life,* 453.

[566] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1429.

[567] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1426.

little so that a ceremony with Old Testament roots went too far when the belief developed that Christ as host should be newly offered instead of the animal. He says that we are not to offer a sacrifice for sin, but take and eat what has been already "immolated" and offered for us by Christ.[568] Calvin found that this emphasis in the Roman Catholic church was not only unnecessary but became ceremonially lavish, taking people's attention away from seeking Christ in heaven by keeping him enclosed in bread.[569] In the *Institutes,* Calvin argues that the kind of sacrifice in which the church should engage "is concerned solely with magnifying and exalting God."[570] Using Scripture he finds illustrations in several texts in the Old and New Testaments in which the offering of praise uses sacrificial language.[571] This means that the office of sacrificing is for all Christians who are a royal priesthood to God, with Christ our Mediator, "by whom we offer ourselves and what is ours to God," so that Christ is our altar "upon which we lay our gifts, that whatever we venture to do, we may undertake in him."[572] There is no reason why an online observance could not also meaningfully include this kind of sacrifice of praise.

For an observance within a ritual space of mediated communication, I conclude that the body and the senses are not excluded, and I call for creative means to be used to preserve material and spiritual aspects in a complementary fashion when translated to

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[568] John Calvin, "Short Treatise On The Lord's Supper," 182-84.

[569] John Calvin, "Short Treatise On The Lord's Supper," 193.

[570] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1444.

[571] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1445. Calvin cites the following Scriptural texts: Ps 142:2; Hos 14:2; Heb 13:15.

[572] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1445.

cyberspace. The observance should not overemphasize embodiment just to make sure that the spiritual does not take over and exclude the material. The overemphasis results in insisting that the manner in which the user/user community must engage in Eucharist has to be done in a non-cyberspace venue for the material aspect to convey the meaning as it should. Calvin writes that in the sacraments the material needs to be joined with the spiritual, because humankind are material and earthly creatures, and in their weakness need assistance in comprehending a spiritual reality.[573] It is possible in the interest of preserving materiality to crowd out the spiritual aspect. In defining the word "sacrament," Calvin quotes Augustine's definition in the *Institutes:* "A visible sign of a sacred thing, or a visible form of an invisible grace."[574] Calvin writes that, "What the Latins call 'sacraments,' the Greeks call 'mysteries,'" concluding that the term, "came to be applied to those signs which reverently represented sublime and spiritual things."[575] Calvin emphasizes that sacraments are "never without a preceding promise," but are joined to the promise "as a sort of appendix" to confirm and seal this promise. He writes that one's faith is weak, "since we are creatures who always creep on the ground, cleave to the flesh, and do not think about or conceive of anything spiritual." Therefore, God condescends to a person to "lead him to himself even by these earthly elements."[576]

But regarding a need for the spiritual aspect of the Eucharist Calvin also writes that there is the risk of idolatry when people are not directed to Christ by the Spirit. In

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[573] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1278.

[574] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* 1277.

[575] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* 1278.

[576] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* 1278.

"Brief Admonition on the Lord's Supper," he suggests that people "think that they have Christ sufficiently present with them if they have his fleshly presence" and as a result they will not be concerned about exercising true faith in which they "come into Christ's presence and remain close to him." He writes that the neglect of true faith is mere "superstition" that is "idolatry."[577] Calvin explains that visible symbols of a spiritual reality correspond to spiritual truth in the "similitude" of a visible sign. If people cling to the bread and wine as itself Christ's body and blood, they begin to worship these, rather than "raising their minds to Christ."[578] The idea of idolatry points to a scenario in which the focus is not only on controlling, possessing, the body of Christ as a material substance, but results in insisting that the worshipper can only access Christ, in only one way. In contrast, for a user/user community in cyberspace, Calvin's view prompts them to raise their eyes to spiritual reality, to the present Christ in a cyberspace environment.

In my discussion of Calvin, I have shown that the Eucharist is characterized as a communication medium of grace in a sacramental encounter with Christ that is compatible with the transmissional and ritualistic communication medium of the Internet. I have shown that ritually, Calvin's view does not compromise materiality but in fact brings to bear a balance in which the material directs a communicant to the spiritual. The spiritual, in turn is not meaningful unless it is joined with the material world. A user/user community can design the Eucharist celebration in such a way that the material is affirmed, and use the symbols to provide a meaningful and efficacious sacramental

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[577] John Calvin, "A Brief Admonition on the Lord's Supper," 22.

[578] John Calvin, "The Necessity of Reforming The Church," in *Selected Works of John Calvin,* vol. 1, Tracts, Part 1, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 168.

experience. In their desire to embrace tradition, such users can understand and experience the power of Christ through the Eucharist, according to a Calvinist understanding of presence in the sacramental ritual.

Wesleyan/holiness Understanding of The Eucharist As A Sacramental Encounter With Christ From A Ritual Perspective of Communication

Wesley's view of Eucharist as a communication medium can be compatible with cyberspace if such observances can be designed in such a way that the use of material symbols point to and facilitate a spiritual encounter with Christ. With the concept of communication as ritual as a backdrop I will show in this subsection that the Eucharist from a Wesleyan perspective can legitimately be done in cyberspace. First, I argue that Calvin's view of the manner of real spiritual presence is closely enough compatible with Wesley's that it can serve to provide a strong sense of the spiritual connection for users in cyberspace. Second, I show that a Wesleyan theological aesthetic that involves the idea of theological imagination in tandem with a design of the experience that creatively uses and blesses material symbols, functions to connect the spiritual to the material in a manner that can be palatable for Wesleyans.

The way to understand Wesley's emphasis on the Lord's Supper as a ritualistic communication medium is found in Wesley's understanding of the Lord's Supper as a means of grace. Wesley, in his sermon, "The Means of Grace," defines such means as "outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed to this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace."[579] Wesley also writes that the chief of means, ordained of God, are: prayer,

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[579] John Wesley, "The Means of Grace," 187.

searching the Scriptures, and receiving the Lord's Supper.[580] Wesley makes it clear that

the means in and of themselves do not accomplish their end if they are used "as a kind of

commutation for the religion they were designed to subserve." He warns of the use of

means as substitution for authentic religion of the heart, describing inauthentic religion as

"enormous folly and wickedness of thus turning God's arms against himself; of keeping

Christianity out of the heart by those very means which were ordained for the bringing it

in."[581] In fact, Wesley acknowledges that there is no "inherent power" in these means

and that God is "equally able to work whatsoever pleases him, by any, or by none at

all."[582]

In this sermon on the means of grace, Wesley is also driven by the question of

how one can come to a certainty of faith and a sure knowledge of salvation. This is the

inward/outward aspects of faith, in which outward means serve to establish and confirm

the inner work of the Holy Spirit. Wesley asks, rhetorically, the "'cup of blessing which

we bless, is it not the communion,' or *communication*, 'of the blood of Christ? The bread

which we break is it not the communion of the body of Christ?' (1 Cor. x.16)." Wesley

explains that the outward visible means of eating and drinking is used by God to "convey

into our souls all that spiritual grace, that spiritual grace, that righteousness, and peace,

and joy in the Holy Ghost, which were purchased" by the body and bloodshed of Christ

on the cross.[583] Thus the grace is communicated when all who "desire the grace of

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[580] John Wesley, "The Means of Grace," 188.

[581] John Wesley, "The Means of Grace," 188.

[582] John Wesley, "The Means of Grace," 188-89.

[583] John Wesley, "The Means of Grace," 195.

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God,"[584] are actively engage in the ritual. Wesley's focus on the Holy Spirit as the active

agent of applying the means for the transformation of the communicants calls for a

substantial pnematological emphasis for the Eucharist whether onground or online.

The fact that Wesley had a significant degree of comfort with an emphasis on the

Real presence of Christ as a spiritual presence is found in Wesley's correspondence with

his mother Susanna Wesley in 1732. Quoted in Borgen, is her response to John's

explanation of Christ's presence in the sacrament:

> The young gentleman you mention seems to me to be in the right concerning the
> Real presence of Christ in the sacrament. I own I never understood by the "Real
> presence," more than what he has eloquently expressed, that the "divine nature of
> Christ is then eminently present, to impart, by the operation of his Holy Spirit, the
> benefits of his death to worthy receivers." And surely the divine presence of our
> Lord, thus applying the virtue and merits of the great atonement to each true
> believer, makes the consecrated bread more than a sign of Christ's body; since by
> his so doing, we receive not only the sign, but with it the thing signified, all the
> benefits of his incarnation and passion! But still, however this divine institution
> may seem to others, to me it is full of mystery. Who can account for the
> operation of God's Holy Spirit, or define the manner of his working upon the
> spirit of man, either when he enlightens the understanding, or excites and
> confirms the will, and regulates and calms the passions, without impairing man's
> liberty?[585]

 Wesley's reply regarding real presence does not seem to differ significantly from

Calvin's, with regard to mediation, nor does his solution to the problem, as he respond to

his mother,

> One consideration is enough to make me assent to his and your judgment
> concerning the holy sacrament; which is, that we cannot allow Christ's human
> nature to be present in it, without allowing either CON- or TRANS-substantiation.
> But that his divinity is so united to us then, as he never is but to worthy receivers,
> I firmly believe, though the manner of that union is utterly a mystery to me.[586]

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[584] John Wesley, "The Means of Grace," 190.

[585] Ole E. Borgen, *John Wesley on The Sacraments* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1972), 63.

[586] John Wesley, "Letters To His Mother," in *The Works of John Wesley,* 3rd ed., vol.7, Letters. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, repr., Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979), 13.

Here, the divinity of Christ as present is stated. However, the mystery is the manner of union, and not the fact of the actual spiritual union itself. Tau notes that Wesleyan scholar Jennifer Woodruff has "systematized" the similarities that have been noted "time and again" among sacramental scholars and "argues that Wesley may have found an unlikely ally in Calvin had he been more aware of his sacramental theology." Tau also mentions that three major Nazarene scholars in the twentieth century, Grider, Dunning and Staples mention the similarities between Calvin and Wesley.[587]

Although Wesley never referred to Calvin in any of his discussion on the Eucharist,[588] quite a number of Wesleyan scholars who focus on Wesley's views that Christ's body is in heaven, and Christ's spiritual presence in the Eucharist, find that Wesley can be claimed in this regard for Calvinist and Reformed camp.[589] Ole E. Borgen suggests that there are "affinities" with Cranmer's views regarding presence in a two-fold sense, figuratively in the sacrament, and "real and spiritual presence in the hearts of the believers," but he notes that Cranmer also speaks strongly against those who would "separate Christ's body and blood from his soul and divinity."[590] Those who claim some resemblance will point out at the same time some differences between Calvin and Wesley, mainly with the desire to try to carve out a unique view of the real presence for Wesley. As Wesleyan/holiness scholar Rob L. Staples points out, one of the ways in which Wesley's concept of the presence of Christ differs some from Calvin is that

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[587] Kyle Tau, "A Wesleyan Analysis of The Nazarene Doctrinal Stance on The Lord's Supper," 110.

[588] Lorna Khoo, *Wesleyan Eucharistic Spirituality,* 136.

[589] Ole E. Borgen, *John Wesley on The Sacraments,* 67.

[590] Ole E. Borgen, *John Wesley on The Sacraments,* 68.

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Wesley stresses "the presence of Christ in terms of His *divinity*" and less in terms of "'power' mediated by the Holy Spirit," so that the whole Trinity is present, "bestowing the benefits of Christ's redemptive act."[591] I also find that Wesley's writing reflects an emphasis on the work and purposive action of the three persons of the Trinity in the means of grace.[592]

Although others have proposed alternatives to ensure a uniquely Wesleyan concept of presence without having to rely on Calvin, such qualifications, although helpful and crucial to a uniquely Wesleyan understanding, does not discount the manner of Christ's presence as understood by Calvin. Qualification of a uniquely Wesleyan/holiness perspective is provided by Dean Blevins who puts the emphasis of presence on *epiclesis,* which is the emphasis of the Anglican Church, as well as the United Methodist churches, as illustrated by Gregory Neal in the last chapter. Blevins et al., writes that Wesley's view of presence is best understood in light of the *epiclesis,* and that "Wesley retained a form of virtualism (though not the same as Calvinist virtualism)." Using Hymn #150 from the Wesley's *HLS,* Blevins argues that "it appears that the epiclesis for Wesley was an innovation not only to transform the elements into Christ's body and blood but also the community of faith."[593] Rattenbury, in a chapter that precedes his published collection of the *HLS,* contends that there is *epiclesis* in the

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[591] Rob. T. Staples, *Outward Sign And Inward Grace,* 226-227.

[592] John Wesley *Means of Grace,* 189, 195. I noticed this emphasis on the Trinity throughout the sermon. There are two examples where the members of the Trinity are mentioned together yet with each of their roles/offices as members of the godhead being exercised in the means of grace.

[593] Dean Blevins, "A Wesleyan View of the Liturgical Construction of the Self," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 38, no.2 (2003): 21, CD-ROM. See also Henry Knight, "The Presence of God in the Christian Life: A Contemporary Understanding of John Wesley's Means of Grace" (PhD diss., Emory University, 1987).

Wesley hymns for the Lord's Supper, for the Holy Spirit to descend on the participants, and on the elements themselves. Such *epiclesis* Rattenbury finds illustrated in the Eucharistic hymn from Wesley, that says, "Thy power into the Means infuse, / And give them now their Sacred Use."[594] Rattenbury points out that for the Wesleys, the prayer to God, to render the instruments effective as means of grace, points out that both in the sacraments and other means of grace; it is Christ Himself whose presence is sought. He writes, in reference to Wesley understands of the words "this is my body" in an instrumental sense:

> But whether that be a true interpretation of the words or not, this is perfectly certain, that the Wesleys did believe and teach that Jesus Christ Himself kept His word, manifested Himself as He promised, to His disciples in all ages when they met together, and especially manifested Himself at the Meal where they did what Jesus bade them do. Nevertheless it would be a great mistake to suppose that the Wesley's taught that our Lord could only be found in the Sacrament. In all their fellowships they sang: "Present we know thou art, But O Thyself reveal!"[595]

Thus the Eucharist is among the many means of grace that is an instrument of spiritual connection used by the Holy Spirit to provide a sacramental encounter with Christ and the Trinity as a whole. The spiritual connection as the primary type of connection is possible in cyberspace as well as non-cyberspace.

Other helpful ways of understanding Wesley's unique way of looking at the presence of Christ in comparison to Calvin's is provided by Khoo. She characterizes Calvin's idea of the way that Christ's presence relates to the communicant in the Eucharist as a vertical, lifting by the Holy Spirit "to where Christ is in heaven."[596] In her

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[594] J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley,* 48.

[595] J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley,* 58.

[596] Lorna Khoo, *Wesleyan Eucharistic Spirituality,* 135.

view, the Wesleys, by contrast, saw in the Lord's Supper a sideways movement of the connection of the communicant to Christ and his sacrificial death in the memorial celebration of the Eucharist. The communicant sees "Christ in heaven as eternal priest and intercessor," in the event of Eucharist, and the emphasis is on seeing what Christ suffered at Calvary. She shows in the *Hymns of the Lord's Supper* that more than one of the hymns alludes to a blinding veil that is removed so that the communicant can see Calvary before them. She makes the point that the Wesleys were most concerned about the "response of the recipient," who in the *Hymns of the Lord's Supper,* are to offer themselves sacrificially back to Christ, which was to be "the primary means of grace for growing into Christian perfection."[597] Although in my reading of Calvin and Wesley, I see this subtle distinction as well, I find the two orientations of vertical "upward lifting" to Christ versus the horizontal "sideways" encounter with Christ complementary. Either or both are images that are possible in the communication medium of the Internet.

But Khoo criticizes Calvin's emphasis on the spiritual aspect of the Eucharist as lacking compared to Wesley's because it is focused on a lofty spiritual giftedness of the sacrifice and there is a "lack of physicality and a somewhat detached approach" that "could affect the communicant's attitude towards the physical world, the self and God."[598] She also writes that the "post-Cranmer Anglican theologians with their bold linking of Christ's presence to the consecrated elements" contributes to a "sense of divine immanence and warmth" and to the "affirmation of the physicality of created things."[599]

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[597] Lorna Khoo, *Wesleyan Eucharistic Spirituality,* 135.

[598] Lorna Khoo, *Wesleyan Eucharistic Spirituality,* 134.

[599] Lorna Khoo, *Wesleyan Eucharistic Spirituality,* 161.

Therefore, in her view an emphasis on the lofty, spiritual presence of Christ, that a Calvinist view affords, might take the emphasis off of a warm personal presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the physical world. She suggests that the Wesleys would have reacted to a "technical Eucharistic language of Calvin" that in her view is similar to the "mechanical *ex opera operato* of the Roman Church." She writes that the Wesleys reflect a "very warm, personal and intimate understanding of Christ's eucharistic [sic] presence at the eucharistic service."[600] I see no reason to say that an emphasis on the spiritual uplifting to Christ that the real presence emphasis of Christ affords has to remove either the warmth of a personal encounter with Christ or take the emphasis off of the physical world. While Wesley's horizontal image of Christ's crucifixion and the communicant's experience may hold more appeal, it does not cancel out the other for either onground or online.

There are some Nazarene sacramental scholars who believe that an emphasis on similarity between Calvin and Wesley mutes the kind of emphasis they want to place on the materiality of the Eucharist. A recent example is Brent D. Peterson, who writes that "a few Wesley scholars suggest that an easy conflation between John Wesley and Calvin's position fails to listen carefully to Wesley."[601] Peterson establishes a Wesleyan view of Christ's presence at the Supper using the Wesleyan emphasis on memorial and sacrifice. He begins by using the United Methodist Wesleyan scholars, Rattenbury and Borgen, to problematize any notions that Wesley bought into Cranmer's receptionist

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[600] Lorna Khoo, *Wesleyan Eucharistic Spirituality,* 161.

[601] Brent David Peterson, "A post-Wesleyan Eucharistic ecclesiology: The renewal of the church as the body of Christ to be doxologically broken and spilled out for the world" (PhD diss., Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2009), 11, in Proquest Dissertations and Theses, http://0-search.proquest.com.bianca.penlib.du.edu//docview/577601598? Pdf (accessed January 17, 2012).

position, or followed a memorialist view after the fashion of either Cranmer or

Zwingli.[602] Peterson starts with the concept of Christ's presence in terms of

memorialism, but shows, using the work of Daniel Brevint, and Wesley's *Hymns of the*

Lord's Supper, that the Wesleys went beyond memorialism. Peterson maintains that a

Wesleyan perspective of the Eucharist is more than mere commemoration, but a faith

commensurate with this commemoration effecting "degrees of devotion" in which a

"believer enters vicariously into the sufferings of Christ" by use of "signs" that "move the

worshipper to worship God."[603]   Peterson cites Borgen's observation that in the

experience of the memorial celebration, "all the senses participate actively."[604] The

memorial invokes Christ's presence that heals and transforms the faith community

"through the Eucharist, by the power of the Holy Spirit."[605] Peterson is critical of the

Nazarene *Manual*, writing that the "Articles of Faith," stress the memorial aspect, yet the

meaning of "memorial" is too open-ended. The *Manual* states in part:

> We believe that the Memorial and Communion Supper instituted by our Lord and
> Savior Jesus Christ is essentially a New Testament sacrament, declarative of His
> sacrificial death, through the merits of which believers have life and salvation and
> promise of all spiritual blessings in Christ.[606]

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[602] Brent David Peterson, "A post-Wesleyan Eucharistic ecclesiology,"164-65.

[603] Brent David Peterson, "A post-Wesleyan Eucharistic ecclesiology,"165-66.

[604] Brent David Peterson, "A post-Wesleyan Eucharistic ecclesiology,"167.

[605] Brent David Peterson, "A post-Wesleyan Eucharistic ecclesiology,"169. Peterson bolsters his project of
a post-Wesleyan doctrine of Christ's Eucharist presence by putting it together with the theological concept
of *anamnesis,* as well as the work of Bruce T. Morrill, et. al. He also looks to David Ford's work on
Emmanuel Levinas. Peterson believes that the linguistic metaphor the best describes the view of the
Wesleys is in adapting Ford's idea that the primary linguistic metaphor for the Eucharist divine-human
encounter is that of a *facing event.* See 174f. in Peterson.

[606] *Manual/2009-2013,* 36.

In contrast to a weak memorialism, Peterson introduces his concept of Christ's presence, as "doxological agnosticism." This means that Christ is present within the context of the wonder and awe found in the worshipping community in the Eucharist, hence the descriptor: "doxological." The emphasis is on its profound mystery that is totally beyond knowing, hence, "agnostic."[607] Peterson sees in Wesley an expression of a kind of mysterious rapture of not knowing how Christ is present, in *Hymns of the Lord's Supper* such as Hymn #59.[608] By his own admission, Peterson's doxological agnosticism regarding presence also serves the purpose for his project of moving the question of presence beyond the constraints of metaphysical commitments.[609]

Although I am in sympathy with moving beyond metaphysical constraints, it seems that this way of doing so is fraught with problems. Moving away from some pitfalls of metaphysics and solipsism need not preclude attention to the personal and spiritual aspects of Eucharist. Conversely, I argue that attention to the personal and spiritual not only need not preclude community and the material aspects of the creation that the Eucharist affirms, that can also be affirmed by the manner in which the experience is mediated in cyberspace. These things have their meaning ultimately online or offline based on a mysterious encounter with Christ, that I believe that Calvin's view promotes, through the Holy Spirit, who uses the signs to make the grace of God

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[607] Brent David Peterson, "A post-Wesleyan Eucharistic ecclesiology," 170.

[608] Brent David Peterson, "A post-Wesleyan Eucharistic ecclesiology," 171. Peterson's approach and perspective is refreshing and helpful on many counts to an underdeveloped view of the Eucharist in the history of the young Church of the Nazarene denomination among scholars of the 20th century. He contends that the "presence of Christ can be discussed only as the church recognizes the healing Eucharistic memory as an eschatological encounter of the Last Supper that renews the church and sends it out to participate in the ongoing ministry of the Incarnation of Christ." See Peterson, 192.

[609] Brent David Peterson, "A post-Wesleyan Eucharistic ecclesiology," 11.

efficacious for a faith community in cyberspace or non-cyberspace. The work of the Holy Spirit in a mediatory role facilitates the receipt of the grace of Christ. The ritual view of communication comes into play more directly here as it did in Chapters 3 and 4. The Internet can be adapted in a creative manner to merge the sensorial with the spiritual Real presence of Christ in the communication medium of the Internet.

In order to strengthen the idea of the spiritual presence of Christ in connection with meaningful handling of blessed symbols, I invoke again the way in which theologically aesthetic creativity in the practice in cyberspace can connect the spiritual and the material. Wesleyan/holiness scholar Rob L. Staples posits the idea of a "sacramental vision." Tau notes that Staples' "sacramental magnum opus" goes beyond what he terms the "general abstractness and lack of content exhibited" in Nazarene theological writings about the Lord's Supper in the 20th century.[610] Staples writes from conviction based on his observation that the Church of the Nazarene and other churches, that are products of the American holiness movement, have gone too far in their emphasis on "spirit," religious experience, "spontaneity in worship," resulting in a disdain for "structure."[611] He also sets out a way for Nazarenes to understand that not paying serious enough attention to the sacraments in their worship practice is a detriment to a full understanding of Wesleyan spirituality, to which Nazarenes claim to ascribe. He calls for a "sacramental vision."[612]

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[610] Kyle Tau, "A Wesleyan Analysis of The Nazarene Doctrinal Stance on The Lord's Supper," 102.

[611] Rob T. Staples, *Outward Sign And Inward Grace,* 25.

[612] Rob T. Staples, *Outward Sign And Inward Grace,* 61-82.

Sacramental vision is foregrounded by theological imagination, according to Staples.[613] He suggests that imagination operates in the church's use of symbols in the Eucharist in non-online observance. I find that his concept about theological imagination in the use of symbols can apply in a virtual mode. For Staples, fundamental to sacramental theology, is the insight that "God may accomplish spiritual ends through material means."[614] Staples notes that the "thingness" of the physical as a vehicle of the spiritual has been mishandled throughout the history of the church, beginning with Roman Catholicism in the Middle Ages as the material symbols became "the things themselves."[615] He includes the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, in which it was "out with the external forms, objects, and actions that cannot save or nurture! The Protestant broom swept clean."[616] He also contends that this broom swept too clean, and that in "times more recent--and more sober," that Protestantism "has recognized that 'external objects' may have power to focus the religious imagination on the things of the Spirit."[617] He makes the point that the sacramental vision is about conveying mystery in metaphor. The church remembers the passion of its Lord in the Eucharist, with preaching as audible proclamation, and the sacraments as "visible

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[613] Staples makes the point that imagination is "the person's most pristine way of thinking and of dealing with that portion of reality that is not immediately present in experience." The sacraments perform this function through the symbols for the church. Rob T. Staples, *Outward Sign And Inward Grace,* 50-51.

[614] Rob T. Staples, *Outward Sign And Inward Grace,* 62.

[615] Staples is talking about practices of the "great mysteries of the faith for the popular mind" having to do with locating mysteries of the faith "almost entirely in external forms such as shrines, pilgrimages, sacred relics, and the sale of indulgences." Rob T. Staples, *Outward Sign And Inward Grace,* 64.

[616] Rob T. Staples, *Outward Sign And Inward Grace,* 65.

[617] Rob T. Staples, *Outward Sign And Inward Grace,* 65.

proclamation."[618] As salvation events are ritualized in the Church, "with the authority of her Lord behind her," she has also developed a way to engage in "'playacting' to mark these events.'"[619] The sacramental vision has been fulfilled when those who participate understand that God is speaking and the divine is encountered, in signs which can be "seen and touched and tasted and smelled.[620] What Staples develops here is a sacramental vision of mediation informed by a theological aesthetic that insists on the use of the sensorial.[621] The use of theological imagination as Staples explains provides a theologically sound rationale from a Wesleyan/holiness perspective that is compatible with the theological aesthetic noted in Chapter 3 above.

In this section I have shown that Calvin and Wesley's view of the Real presence of Christ in the Eucharist are complementary, although Wesley cannot be completely claimed as conforming to a Calvinist view. However the similarity is approximate enough that taken together these complementary Eucharist theological traditions can bolster an observance of an effective Eucharist in cyberspace. Theological imagination combining the material and the spiritual, along with a theological aesthetic undergirds the practice in cyberspace.

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[618] Rob T. Staples, *Outward Sign And Inward Grace,* 70.

[619] Rob T. Staples, *Outward Sign And Inward Grace,* 79.

[620] Rob T. Staples, *Outward Sign And Inward Grace,* 104.

[621] Staples develops his ideas along the lines of aesthetics of the Eucharist, relying on the work of articles written by "a teacher of English." He comments further that these articles "constitute a beautiful apologetic for the sacramental vision." Rob T. Staples, *Outward Sign And Inward Grace,* 65n.9. See Thomas Howard, "The Idea of Sacrament: An Approach," *Reformed Journal* (February, 1979), and "Imagination, Rites and Mystery: Why Did Christ Institute the Sacraments?" *Reformed Journal,* (March, 1979).

A Redeployment of Wesleyan/holiness Theology And The Agency of The User For The Eucharist in Cyberspace

In this section I will examine the way in which empowering the user/user community and recognizing a holistic anthropology each reflect a creative redeployment of Wesleyan/holiness tradition. Agency of the user/user community for the field of religion and media as developed in earlier chapters dismantles the fears of technology, the Internet, and life in cyberspace, as detrimental to the future of humanity. The application of audience reception theory and the liberating aspects of posthumanism have been the backdrop to what I have called *agency of a user*. In this chapter I want to focus on how a holistic theological anthropology points toward not only the freedom of the human person but also the summation of the whole person that reflects the meaning of the *imago dei*. As a free agent, created in the image of God, such a user at every moment in life, including the use of technology, is free, embodied, and relational, interacting in various ways and modes that includes networked communication mediums such as cyberspace.

I now turn to looking more deeply at the rich meaning of the *imago dei*, to show a picture of a concept of relatedness in cyberspace, in the use of technology in light of who the users are in Christ. God created humankind in His image, as noted in Gen.1:27 and affirmed in Ps. 8: 5-6. In light of this, LeClerc states that the "avowed" interpretation of the Wesleyan/holiness tradition begins at the point of Wesley's view that humankind is basically relational.[622] A holistic anthropology is defined by the concept of "relatedness." The networked, interactive space that is cyberspace becomes more substantive as a social

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[622] Diane LeClerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness: The Heart of Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2010), 158.

location in the concept of agency of the user, who in turn is posited by a theological

anthropology characterized by relatedness. This includes an understanding of the *imago*

dei, for the agent who is also empowered to apply their tradition to practice in other

modes.   I begin the theological discussion at the point of creation and show that social

relatedness represents the functional totality of the *imago dei*. Humankind was originally

created good, yet this goodness was damaged in the Fall. Wesleyans believe that it is

restored in humankind by grace through Jesus Christ. The full restoration represents the

affirmation of, and ability of the human person to exercise their commitment to holistic

living, including moral and ethical responsibility toward themselves, others, and God. If

relatedness is the indication of the *imago dei* in humankind, *and* the principle mode in

cyberspace, then it is curious that those who endorse a holistic theological anthropology

would find religious ritual of a relational character in cyberspace so problematic.

The ramifications of a basic Wesleyan/holiness theological anthropology begin

with the biblical narrative in Genesis.[623] Jewish and Christian understandings are "that

all that God created was good, especially human beings."[624] Wesleyan theologians have

recognized that some of Wesley's central "anthropological convictions" from Genesis

share some characteristics akin to Eastern Orthodox Christianity.[625] Thus, Orthodox

theologian Bouteneff's insight is especially important to note:

> In all of this we begin to see, among other things, a theology of matter, one which
> follows on the powerful conviction of Orthodox theology that creation, though
> fallen, is *good*. In certain moods, in certain manners of speaking, the early

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[623] Diane LeClerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness,* 156. See 156f. I am indebted to her discussion on
Wesleyan theological anthropology for the salient and significant features to be addressed in this section.

[624] Diane LeClerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness,"* 156. See Gen 1:31.

[625] Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace,* 65.

> Christian writers could lapse into Platonic language which lamented the imprisonment of the immaterial soul in the material body. Yet as a whole, and when it actually came down to elaborating a doctrine of creation, they were profoundly holistic, defending against the pagans the sanctified character of matter, the organic unity and interdependence of the human body and soul, the joy of Christ's incarnation into space, time and matter, and the eternal resurrection which is bodily.[626]

From a biblical perspective Wesleyan/holiness theologians affirm that God created us as good in all aspects of our humanity, body and spirit.[627] According to Nazarene theologian Mildred Wynkoop holistic anthropology is not an "ontological curiosity" about humankind but more about expressing in the "rich vocabulary of the Old and New Testaments, relating to man[sic]" what he "thinks and does, and [the] impulses of his heart, his attitudes and character."

Wynkoop writes that even though the New Testament borrows from the Greek language descriptions of humankind in their various aspects, "such as mind, body, soul and spirit, no case can be made for the familiar dualistic view of man which was derived from Platonism and carried somehow into Christian theology--to its hurt." She goes on to maintain that the holistic view of humankind is more clear in a Hebraic anthropology in which there is a more dynamic view of humankind which is found "not in static beingness" but in social relatedness, which is always expressed in the "totality" of the "living self."[628] The user/user community as agent can integrate in their connection with others online every significant aspect of relational engagement in various ways, and at

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[626] Peter C. Bouteneff, "Sacraments as the Mystery of Union: Elements in an Orthodox Sacramental Theology," in *Gestures of God: Exploration in Sacramentality,* ed. Geoffrey Rowell and Christine Hall (London: Continuum, 2004), 104.

[627] Diane LeClerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness,"* 157.

[628] Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1972), 121-123.

various levels, their bodies. In doing so they are not denying the God-given stewardship

of their bodies. They are never to regard themselves as being detached from their bodies,

and as such can join other participants in a sacramental encounter with Christ. I address

this as significant as I anticipate any challenge that cyberspace can only be regarded as a

disembodying experience. I believe that dualism of body and spirit need not be the

understanding of those who use cyberspace for religious practice and ritual. The creative

redeployment of tradition should involve reckoning with Platonism, here used as a term

to describe the philosophical tradition that encompasses human dualism. Here, I argue

that a robust theological anthropology that is non-dualist, and non-Platonic, can be

developed that is compatible with the Eucharist in cyberspace and the Wesleyan and

tradition.[629]

A Wesleyan perspective is not without some aspects of a theological

anthropology that has been influenced by a Greek view of humanity inherited from the

Greco Roman philosophical tradition. In allowing Wesley to speak for himself, it is

important to note that neither of them can completely have the "stain" of Platonism

expunged. Along these lines, Maddox writes:

> Overall, allowing for some dualistic influences, it seems fair to say that Wesley's
> two-dimensional anthropology did not degenerate into a strong metaphysical or
> ethical dualism. His basic anthropological convictions sought to emulate the
> holism of biblical teachings. At the same time, it must be admitted that his
> valuation of bodiliness [sic] was not as positive, and his conception of the
> interrelationship of body and soul was not as integral and dynamic, as present
> theologians might desire.[630]

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[629] In various theological concerns about dualism involving the denial of it, writers have referred to the
dualism to be avoided, in separating the spirit from the body, and privileging the spiritual over the material
in religious belief with labels such as Platonism, Gnosticism, and Docetism.

[630] Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace,* 72.

Contrary to dualism, and in light of a holistic anthropology suggested by the Wesleyan/holiness tradition, I contend that persons cannot be divided in a Platonic dualism. I argue that it is time for theological discourse within the traditions that I am dealing with to get past criticizing newer challenges presented by technology and cyberspace with the same old anthropological worries associated with Gnosticism, Platonism/neo-Platonism and or/metaphysical and ethical dualistic anthropologies as a basis for critique. In light of Wesley the innovator, I also establish that the role of the receptor/user is a key part in establishing theologically the freedom of the agent.

I have argued that media discourse that frames the conversation in terms of the "posthuman" can be helpful in raising and clarifying important issues related to the self in a virtual experience. The concept of humanity as holistic, as primarily relational and posthuman puts the emphasis on humankind as relational, which also includes the embodied active agent. An understanding of what this entails is aided by contemporary understandings of neurobiology. The helpful concept is called "nonreductive physicalism." Suggested by at least one Wesleyan/holiness scholar, it takes into consideration neurobiology in tandem with a holistic anthropological view.[631] Further, Roman Catholic theologian, Prokes, invokes it in her discussion about the self in virtual worlds. Prokes provides a clear summary of nonreductive physicalism, she takes from theologians Nancey Murphy and Warren S. Brown, editors of the book *Whatever Happened to the Human Soul*. She relates that in this collection of essays, various authors "grapple with the view of many contemporary philosophers and scientists who suppose that 'the person is but one substance-a physical body,' so that human faculties

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[631] Diane LeClerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness,* 157.

once attributed to the soul are now perceived as simply functions of the brain."[632] Murphy explains that this means the following things: (1). The use of the term "physicalism" indicates an agreement with scientists and philosophers "that it is not necessary to postulate a second metaphysical entity, the soul or mind, to account for human capacities and distinctiveness. (2). "Nonreductive" is a rejection of views which reduce the human person to "nothing but" a body. (3). Taken together, this term attempts to explain that "we *are* bodies" without "denying the 'higher' capacities that we think of as being essential for our humanness: rationality, emotion, morality, free will, and most important, the capacity to be in relationship with God."[633]

Unfortunately, Prokes uses nonreductive physicalism in service to neo-Ludditism. She fears that the notion of the posthuman, as found in Hayles, reduces the human person to that of packets of information that is heading toward a change in the meaning of being human as well as a future of being enslaved to technology. She believes that the concept of the posthuman is inherently antithetical to a Christian theological commitment to the human person as a real, living body-person created in the image of God.[634]

To the contrary, I contend that nonreductive physicalism and posthumanism encompasses and strengthens a theological anthropology of relatedness, compatible with the Wesleyan/holiness understanding of humanity. I argue that nonreductive physicalism can serve theologically to get past the problem of viewing information technology in all its manifestations as reducing humanity to mere information packets. A view of

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[632] Mary Timothy Prokes, *At The Interface: Theology and Virtual Reality* (Tucson, AZ: Fenestra Books, 2004), 48.

[633] Mary Timothy Prokes, *At The Interface,* 48-49.

[634] Mary Timothy Prokes, *At The Interface,* 39-59.

humanity defined relationally, and holistically, is the central functional meaning of the *imago dei.*

A relational view of the *imago dei* frees theologians to move on to explore how the rest of Wesleyan/holiness theology's perspectives regarding the *imago dei,* can serve to show that not only philosophically, but experientially, that a holistic agent is involved in shaping what cyberspace is becoming. In light of the perspective of the agency of the user in community, a person cannot responsibly reject themselves as whole persons online. Users need not compromise their humanity as created in the image of God, but in fact embrace it fully as they choose how to use technology to the glory of God. This includes the Eucharist.

Speaking in terms of communication, Wynkoop contends that Wesley did not understand humankind as a "passive substance" or receiver only. In a statement that goes along with what I have stated regarding the agent as active, she writes that the Wesleyan understanding is that humankind is "a dynamic being reacting and responding to life, searching, reaching out, needing fulfillment," or "a hemisphere looking for his other half."[635] She goes on to use communication language, nuanced theologically to drive home this point. She says that humankind is "basically a communication center," such that every "nerve, organ, function, thought, act, tissue is a transmitter and receiver." Human beings are therefore not "whole" unless there is another, who is "listening, understanding, responding" to him/her. She also says: "Everyone needs an audience, and *is* an audience."[636] I contend that if one takes what she says seriously, various modes in

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[635] Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love,* 140.

[636] Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love,* 141.

which people relate to each other in healthy ways fulfills this. This includes sharing the

Eucharist with others, *even virtually,* in cyberspace.

People who fear the unhealthy effects of the Internet look at examples of escapist

behaviors, perceiving cyberspace as a location epitomizing self-absorption. While not

denying these, I find that the concept of the communicative nature of humanity and the

Internet, suggests that persons who have been restored by grace and have experienced

sanctifying grace are inclined to use the Internet in ways opposite of the ways most

feared by some, including Christian theologians. H. Ray Dunning is another

Wesleyan/holiness theologian who also emphasizes the relational aspect[637] with regard to

the *imago dei.* Dunning states that although the "Wesleyan perspective says that the

imago dei was totally lost as a consequence of the Fall" a "reflection of it. . . is restored

by the activity of prevenient grace" and "it is this graciously restored aspect of the *imago*

that constitutes personhood."[638] Dunning goes on to say that regarding justification by

faith of a sinner, a Wesleyan perspective will not accept this as merely "legal fiction" but

as a gateway into the "Christian life proper" in which the work of sanctification also

begins, that means a "real change," ethical in nature, as the person is "being renewed in

the image of God."[639] Dunning emphasizes that the implications are that the ethical life is

others-oriented.[640]

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[637] H. Ray Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image: Christian Ethics in Wesleyan Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 77.

[638] H. Ray Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image,* 50-51.

[639] H. Ray Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image,* 58-60.

[640] H. Ray Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image,* 85.

There are points of contact between the concerns of internet scholar Sherry

Turkle[641] and the theological anthropology that I have outlined above. In her book, *Life*

on the Screen, she shows from her experience and the experience of others, the following

with regard to computer-mediated worlds:

> The self is multiple, fluid, and constituted in interaction with machine connections; it is made and transformed by language; [it is] sexual congress in an exchange of signifiers; and understanding flows from navigation and tinkering rather than analysis.[642]

She also writes that initially for herself and her MIT students, postmodern notions about

the self in virtuality, notions such as language and meaning, being audience constructed,

did not make sense.[643] The reason is a lack of coherence for the self because it "spins off

in all directions."[644] She also makes the point that "those burdened by post-traumatic

dissociative disorder suffer these questions" but inhabitants of virtual communities "play

with them."[645] But, she cites in the work of Robert Jay Lifton, called *The Protean Self,* a

solution to this seemingly oxymoronic idea. He suggests that the older way of thinking

about the unitary view of the self must give way to a new one, in which there is a

"healthy protean self" which is "capable, like Proteus, of fluid transformations, but is

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[641] Turkle has thoughtfully chronicled over a period from 1984 to 2010 the notion of self and identity in light of involvement with cyberspace, and other technologies of virtuality. She has written a trilogy of books: *The Second Self, Life On The Screen,* and *Alone Together,* respectively. In *The Second Self,* she "traced the subjective side of personal computers—not what computers do for us but what they do to us, and our ways of thinking about ourselves, our relationships, our sense of being human" (Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together,* 2). In her second book, *Life On The Screen,* she shifts her focus to how the computer has become more than a tool, a medium through which new identities can be explored (Sherry Turkle, *Life On The Screen*, 9-10).

[642] Sherry Turkle, *Life On The Screen,* 15.

[643] Sherry Turkle, *Life On The Screen,* 15-17.

[644] Sherry Turkle, *Life On The Screen,* 258.

[645] Sherry Turkle, *Life On The Screen,* 259.

grounded in coherence and a moral outlook" that in spite of being multiple, is an "integrated" self.[646]

A holistic theological anthropology proposed above regarding the *imago dei* is compatible with the integrated self described above by Lifton. Theologically speaking the user finds their coherence in being created in the image of God. Although galvanized by an optimistic understanding, I nonetheless take heed of the less than optimistic challenges of Turkle's third book, *Alone Together,* in which she shows how the concerns she noted in her first two books, at the time of writing in 2010, have been taken to a new level.[647]

What Turkle calls for in the end of *Alone Together,* is similar to what I have called agency of the user. She points in this direction when she writes that since the advent of technology, "we have agreed to an experiment in which we are the human subjects." And yet, she says, that we need to be reminded that we have choices because in the end "it is we who decide how to keep technology busy, we shall have better."[648] Pressing her point toward a hopeful future, I contend that the user/user community who view themselves as whole persons, defined relationally, understanding their identity in terms of the *imago dei,* can in the Wesleyan/holiness tradition, indeed, "have better."

Conclusion

The user/user community that chooses to redeploy the complementary nature of various aspects of Calvin and the Wesleyan/holiness tradition can reconfigure and

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[646] Sherry Turkle, *Life On The Screen,* 258.

[647] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together,* 2. In this book she chronicles the experiences of people (adults and children) with robots, then artificial intelligence, and then moves on to virtuality with regard to the Internet, including cell phones. As she looks at the various experiences of herself and others involved in various kinds of virtual worlds she labels the situation at this time of writing as a "tethered" existence in which people are attached to their cell phones to stay "always connected" Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together,* 155-62.

[648] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together,* 296.

innovate uses of the Internet that can yield a meaningful celebration of the Eucharist in

cyberspace. It can be a networked communication medium of grace characterized by the

agency of a user, joining other participants in a sacramental encounter with Christ, when

the following aspects are recognized and affirmed vis-à-vis the above traditions. My

intention has not been to say that these are the only traditions that can be redeployed to

do so. My intention has been to show an example of the dynamics involved in

redeploying tradition and the process involved when a user/user community enters into

dialog about change. The major issues have been community; the transmissional and

ritual views of communication; theological commitments to the manner of the presence

of Christ; a theological understanding of agency of the user as active audience, and as a

relational, holistic human being reflecting the *imago dei*, using technology.

I have argued that Eucharist in cyberspace according to a Wesleyan /holiness

redeployment of these traditions must always be a communal experience. The nature of

networks as intentional, essentially relational entities in cyberspace is not incompatible

with the Wesleyan/holiness view of the Eucharist as communal with a network ambience.

The communal network engaged in the Eucharist has both a local and a universal

dimension that is compatible with the network relations of the Internet.

I have also shown that with regard to Eucharist in cyberspace as mediated

communication that it is itself a medium of grace. It can also interface with the

communication medium of the Internet because both have characteristics of

communication as transmission and a ritual view of communication. Calvin's view

reflects the sacrament as an event of mediation that is both the transmission view of

communication and the ritual view of communication. The Wesleyan/holiness tradition
is more so with regard to the communication as ritual.

The most pronounced extent to which both the transmissional and the ritual views
of communication are helpful is in showing that Eucharist as mediated communication in
cyberspace does not have to compromise the materiality of the Eucharist. The most key
point is that Calvin's view of the spiritual presence of Christ in the Eucharist
complements Wesley's less definite view. The balanced need for both the
spiritual/material, visible/invisible, and inward/outward encounter with Christ needs to be
preserved in any celebration of the Eucharist, especially in a contested medium such as
cyberspace.

Finally, the case for Eucharist in cyberspace is strengthened when agency of the
user/user community is affirmed. For the Wesleyan/holiness tradition, agency of the user
is bolstered by concept of the active user, who in the concept of the *imago dei,* is at once
a responsible steward of creation, a free agent, and relational. Such characteristics allow
for the idea that the whole person is involved in every aspect of life, including their lives
on the Internet. Nonreductive physicalism shows that dualism is no longer a viable
concern so that the user/user community is incorrigibly a wholly spiritual and material
embodied person in any mode of relation they choose, including cyberspace.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

There is continuous proliferation and pervasiveness of the Internet and cyberspace in today's culture. Religion online or online religion is one major development eliciting various reactions. There is a wide spectrum of attitudes toward these developments ranging from euphoria to consternation. Theologians and religious scholars who wish to remain on the cutting edge of engagement with culture need to find ways to constructively dialog with these kinds of new developments in everyday life. At the very least this should include being conversant with the continuous changes that both transform and yet maintain religious community life. My hope is that this dissertation has given voice to a crucial understanding of this task.

In this dissertation the major issue has been the compatibility of the Internet with ritual such as the Eucharist. I have shown that Wesleyan/holiness and Calvinist views of the Eucharist are compatible with a meaningful practice of the ritual in cyberspace. In order to argue that cyberspace is a legitimate space for religious ritual practice, I characterized it as *networked communication media characterized by the agency of the user.* This characterization meant the following: (1) Networks are viable communities; (2) Communication media is malleable for use as a social location; (3) The latter two things are true because the user/user communities are active agents.

Further, my case study of NBC observing ritual in cyberspace indicated that the viable and legitimate nature of cyberspace was compatible with *carrying out religious*

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practice. This online community was an example of a type of religious community that was desirous of negotiating this use of new media with their tradition. Therefore the question also arose as to whether or not a Wesleyan/holiness theology of the Eucharist, nuanced by the contribution that a Calvinistic view, would be fitting to an online Wesleyan/holiness community's online observance of the Eucharist. I explored both of these traditions according to a creative redeployment of these theological traditions in terms of the Eucharist in cyberspace being a *networked communication medium of grace characterized by the agency of the user, who joins other participants in a sacramental encounter with Christ.* I analyzed what each piece looked like theologically in tandem with a cultural perspective of the Internet and religious practice in cyberspace.

Below I will summarize the argument that I developed to support my thesis, showing how each area in the tripartite development is involved in a theologically sound and creative redeployment of tradition in cyberspace for the Eucharist in cyberspace. Each section below will summarize separately the elements of community; communication media; and the agency of the user; as they were used to inform a negotiation process in chapters 2-5.

Cyberspace Can Feature The Communal Aspect of The Eucharist

The following section will summarize the ways that I argued that networked community works for virtual Eucharist. Below I show how I supported the idea in Chapters 2-4, that cyberspace can be a social location for authentic communal engagement for religious practice such as the Eucharist. Regarding Chapter 5, I will summarize the way that I developed the communal aspect theologically for the Wesleyan-holiness tradition understanding of the Eucharist in cyberspace.

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In my inquiry in Chapter 2 about community in general and then with regard to cyberspace, I found that the concept of community in cyberspace is unique yet similar to contemporary understandings of community. The most crucial point is that community in society today has become more about network connections, surrounding shared interests, than shared physical geography. However, this does not mean that a false quandary is created so that people have to choose between onground and online. More and more there is a blurring of ties created and sustained onground and/or online. The evidence shows that involvement ranging from personal connection to political activism can originate or be bolstered by ties in cyberspace. Cyberspace is not an inherently anti-communal enterprise. However, a nostalgic view of community (that has never been characteristic of the modern world) continues to promote prejudice against the kind of ties that can be legitimately forged by virtual communities. I also made the point that experience with the Internet as reflected by researchers, has found that involvement consonant with community need not abandon embodiment and personal identity, because these actually cannot be completely left behind. Thus virtual communities need not attenuate the essential aspects of an authentically engaged community.

In Chapter 3, I looked at what networked community would look like when experiences of religious communities in cyberspace are taken into consideration. Building on what I established about community on the Internet in general in Chapter 2, I looked at what things could be added based on the unique elements that religious practice affords. I added insight from the discourse of religion and media, in tandem with a qualitative case study of the experience of Eucharist in cyberspace performed by an online class of Nazarene Bible College. I pointed out that not only was the online class a

community, but the religious communal life was such that it prompted a desire to engage together in ritual. The result was that the ritual in turn bolstered and strengthened the religious communal life and experience for the participants. I found that the online NBC class was not alone in this discovery and that indeed other examples could be found in which this was true. Using Campbell and others, I showed that ritual in cyberspace, such as the Eucharist, is about a shared faith that is strengthened by the sense of the communicants that they are sharing with others who are part of a worldwide community of faith. The intensity and satisfaction of the observance of the Eucharist was determined by the effectiveness of the network connection in facilitating the desire of users to engage in authentic ritual together.

In Chapter 4, the discussion began to focus more keenly on the kinds of questions a community would raise about a ritual in cyberspace, specifically the Eucharist, in light of the negotiation of theological commitments. Using Heidi Campbell's categories of (1) accept and appropriate; (2) reject and resist; (3) reconfigure and innovate, I showed in bold relief the struggle of negotiation in the reactions of two listservs of scholars who evaluated what the NBC class did.[649]

Regarding negotiation about community, the first listserv could not see past reject and resist, with only a hint of what innovation and reconfiguration might look like. The first listserv examined whether or not the Eucharist in cyberspace compromised the communal nature the Eucharist for the church. The consensus seemed to be that the shallowness of the community online could not possibly support a meaningful Eucharist in cyberspace, neither would its practice online be substantial enough to create the kind

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[649] I actually found that only the "reject and resist" versus the "reconfigure and innovate" categories applied to this case.

of bond that the Eucharist should provide for the communal aspect of ecclesiology. It was suggested that experimenting with the Eucharist online was a manifestation of how weak theology was within the Wesleyan/holiness tradition regarding Eucharist and real community. In the second listserv, many of the same concerns about community surfaced. Both listservs has those who were positive toward the idea of practicing the Eucharist in cyberspace in special cases in which one could not access an onground church. In the second listserv there was a mixture of reject and resist *and* reconfigure and innovate.

In this dissertation I proposed that negotiation according to reconfiguration and innovation would need to take some specific things into consideration. Historical precedence in the Church of the Nazarene vis-à-vis technology and the Internet has been to innovate. But when it comes to the Eucharist, it would also depend on how high or low one's view is of the Eucharist. I argued that the NBC observance was an example of users taking very seriously the Eucharist from a Wesleyan perspective, configuring technology in ways that preserve both the universal and a type of local sense of community in the Eucharist. In observing the ritual in cyberspace they were keenly aware that they were a part of the church universal transcending time and space, as well as a "local" fellowship with others with whom they had developed a close bond.

In Chapter 5, I looked at what things should be considered to redeploy Wesleyan/holiness theology for a networked community engaging in the Eucharist in cyberspace. I laid a foundation that firmly established that a networked community can experience a sacramental encounter with Christ as the body of Christ. Not only does the example of the Wesleys and early Methodism show that the Eucharist is constitutive of

an authentic faith community, but it can be done in unconventional ways and venues. For a Wesleyan/holiness perspective, the spiritually connected community as networks promotes a universal connection with other believers as a well as an interactive experience in a social location, such as cyberspace. The latter makes for the intimacy and fellowship that is achieved in all Eucharist celebrations including cyberspace. Such core values that networked connection affords, affects an interest in making the sacrament accessible using creative means such as translation to the Internet.

Cyberspace Can Support A Substantive Observance of The Eucharist

In this section I summarize my argument that cyberspace can support a substantive observance of the Eucharist because of the nature of the Internet as a communication medium. I show how I unfolded in Chapters 2-4, the fact that communication media involves both the transmission and ritual aspects of communication. Chapter 5 will be summarized below by showing how I applied the transmissional and ritual views of communication for a Eucharist theology for the Wesleyan-holiness tradition.

In Chapter 2, I set up a basis for a creative redeployment of theological commitments for the Eucharist practice in cyberspace by showing that there were ways of understanding the Internet as a communication medium that functions as a setting, a location, according to its unique characteristics as a communication medium. I showed that this phenomenon can be further understood in light of two views of communication: transmission and ritual views. The transmissional view had to do with the tradition in communication theory that communication is about the effective and accurate carrying of information from one place to another, and from one person to another. When this

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becomes the main goal and the limiting criteria of whether or not a communication medium is doing its job, it also sets up a criterion for other modes, such as cyberspace. Such goals are never completely achieved in any kind of communications, interpersonal or mass media. The transmission view also promotes notions such as the *noosphere,* in which cyberspace is stretched to the opposite extreme of the uniting of minds. The ritual view sees communication as a place that does not disregard the reality of difference and distance, and yet sees communication as a venue of ritual and the creation of shared common life.

In light of the above two views of communication, in Chapter 2, I discussed the Internet as a medium adequate to host the Eucharist, because the rite itself is mediation. In establishing this, I drew from the discourse of communication to understand the nature of cyberspace. As I noted, cyberspace is the fusion of computer technology and telecommunications. John Durham Peters was especially helpful as his take on communication pulled back from the burden of transmissional communication, and opened the door to recognizing that the medium could promote a sound, balanced view of communication that avoided extremes and criteria of connection that no medium could achieve. Peters, in problematizing the dominance of the criterion of perfection in dialog, showed that an over-emphasis on perfecting dialog is not necessarily the goal of communication. I used his view of dissemination to make the point that the Internet can be exactly the medium that opens the door to new possibilities of empowerment through the concept of communication as dissemination. This concept affirmed otherness and the boundary of control maintained by embodiment. In his view true communication did not mean removing the barrier of bodies so that minds can be merged. Instead otherness was

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maintained and cherished according to an approach to communication media that champions otherness while seeking meaningful and authentic connection between users.

An alternative view, the ritual view of communication helped to establish that cyberspace as a communication medium is concerned with more than transmitting. The ritual view stressed the idea of communication as that of being linked to sharing, participation, fellowship, and commonality. This view thinks of communication in terms of culture, and thus communication was studied from the kind of culture it creates and sustains. I applied this idea, working from the model of viewing the cyberspace as culture. Cyberspace as culture put the emphasis on community development and sharing, shaped by the user interacting within a user community. Theoretically, the discourse of audience reception brings this full circle with regard to cyberspace.

Moving on to Chapter 3, I expanded the suggestion in Chapter 2 that cyberspace was transmissional and a ritual communication medium by building on the discourse of religion and media with regard to the NBC observance of Eucharist. I observed the ways in which the NBC ritual reflected the idea by Goethals that mediated communication was compatible with religious ritual, as the user community utilized shared symbols to make for a substantive ritual practice. I also showed that with regard to communication media, it is not a matter of choosing between conveying information or sharing. In the former, words conveyed religious information. In the latter, liturgical practice was about creating an atmosphere utilizing the senses. I saw the strength of both of these notions with the NBC class negotiating the way that it would adapt a highly valued tradition to the Internet. I then moved to thinking in terms of how a theological aesthetic could be operative in order to enhance the sharing of ritual symbols in cyberspace. When I put

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communication medium as a ritual space together with aesthetic sensitivity and noted

ways in which materiality of the symbols were maintained, a picture of cyberspace as a

location that fulfilled the need for the Eucharist to be a ritual with substantive

characteristics emerged.

I analyzed the reactions of the two listservs to what the NBC online class did

through the lens of the Internet as a communication medium in Chapter 4. Each listserv

had members who resisted and rejected the practice because they feared that it meant a

loss of affirmation of physicality and materiality when done in cyberspace. In the first

listserv, scholars warned that doing the Eucharist in cyberspace would compromise the

basic incarnational and material nature of Christianity. They believed that the Eucharist

was supposed to promote a theological commitment to the affirmation of the physical

body and creation. They strongly reacted to Eucharist in cyberspace because they

believed that it compromised the need for embodied presence, in which celebrants and

communicants are present to each other onground. Only in this way, according to their

perspective, could the communicants be present to each other. And only in this way could

the officiating clergy as celebrants with their communicants, be truly present to legitimize

the celebration of Eucharist. The second listserv shared the same concerns, and the

moderator added that Eucharist onground might be the only way in which the sacrament

does its job of affirming the goodness of creation, the incarnation, and eschatologically,

the resurrection and restoration of a redeemed creation.

In my response to these listservs in this dissertation, I proposed a negotiation

strategy of reconfiguration and innovation of the Eucharist from a communication media

standpoint. I did so by giving two examples of practitioners from the United Methodist

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tradition with similar theological commitments to the scholarly community of the Wesleyan/holiness listservs. I also formulated a response to the two most problematic assumptions that I believed the listservs held about the Eucharist in cyberspace. One was the relentless charge that Eucharist in cyberspace reflected the enduring menace of Gnosticism. The other was the manner in which they framed the "quandary" of virtuality.

The practitioners of the Eucharist in cyberspace that I used as examples did not take lightly a concern for the role of the celebrant in blessing the Eucharist emblems and providing a meaningful and sacramentally robust experience for online communicants. Both provided specific, thorough, online adaptations to accommodate what they considered to be compatible with a Wesleyan understanding of the Eucharist. This included oversight and blessing from clergy, and providing ways for the communicant to have access to the essential pieces of the liturgy. These practitioners required in their celebrations that communicants provide for themselves material emblems, with the blessing happening in a spiritual manner, as the celebrant prayed over the emblems from a distance. The examples of Madron and Neal also emphasized the universality of the church in spiritual connection, but believed that they did so without denying the importance of the material and physical world. I showed that cyberspace as culture and ritual space was supported by attention to aesthetics, with theological impetus and practical creative innovation, producing a viable and legitimate sacramental experience.

In Chapter 4, there was the charge that the Eucharist in cyberspace is a recent manifestation of "Gnosticism." Attaching such a label has been based on the assumption that such observances in cyberspace can do nothing but privilege the spiritual over a

perceived inferior material world. These scholars saw in the practice of religious ritual online a supposedly recurring ancient heresy. These scholars have understood the Eucharist as one of the best weapons that the church could marshal to root out this philosophy among the average Christian today. To them, the Eucharist in cyberspace emasculated a practice that should decisively promote the material, created world. I responded to this by pointing out that Gnosticism is not only a contested term, but that they really were using it as a way to curtail innovation and creative redeployment of Eucharist theology. I argued that evaluating the Eucharist in cyberspace was not best served by trying to squelch it with such uncertain discursive contentions. I also argued that such unhelpful arguments need to be replaced, at least with regard to cyberspace, by looking at cyberspace culturally as a ritual space informed by theological aesthetics.

I showed that communication as culture, and cyberspace as communication media, could address the central concerns about the nature of virtuality, and whether or not Eucharist in cyberspace must necessarily represent capitulation to an "unreal" world. I maintained that when a cultural view of virtuality governs discourse, messy metaphysics and technical discussions produce endless and useless quandaries about what constitutes "the real." In contrast, focusing on the "culturing of technology," as suggested by Campbell, and a ritual communication view, yielded a productive and constructive integration of online with onground life.

In light of the foregoing, when I developed Chapter 5, I believed that I was ready to move toward a creative redeployment of Eucharist theological tradition informing the NBC observance. I posited that Wesleyan/holiness and Calvinist views of Eucharist were compatible with the Eucharist in cyberspace being a *communication medium of grace*

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joining others in a sacramental encounter with Christ. Compatibility focused on the manner of the presence of Christ in Eucharist. I posited that the Eucharist, itself a medium of grace, exemplified both transmissional and ritual communication qualities, catalyzing the presence of Christ. I inferred that the essential characteristics that Calvinist and Wesleyan/holiness tradition attribute to the Eucharist as a medium of grace could be mapped onto essential characteristics of communication media.

Calvin emphasized the communicative nature of the sacraments in general, and the Lord's Supper in particular, similar to both a transmissional view and a ritual view of communication media. Calvin reflected a view of the Eucharist compatible with communication as transmission, as the event itself was a tool used to convey a message, and the action of bringing the distance God near, making truth about the cross clear to communicants. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was explained as "a visible word," such that it conveyed meaning in the action of partaking of the bread and the cup, after the preaching of the Word. Clear teaching for Calvin was always a prerequisite because the sign and the promise had to be given together. As visible words, the action of handling the symbols impress upon communicants the truth of what they have heard proclaimed. The communicants fellowshipped with Christ who had come to be among them in spiritual presence in the Supper.

I also established compatibility with a ritual understanding in which meaning was experienced in the use of the symbols and the presence of Christ conveyed by the Holy Spirit. I showed that the use of the symbols brought to bear the material to connect the communicant to a spiritual reality of fellowship with Christ through the Holy Spirit. In this, the body of Christ was not ubiquitous, but remained in heaven. The communicant

was lifted up to Christ in a way that not only facilitated fellowship with Christ, but the spiritual dimension of religious piety was catalyzed. The sharing in the body and blood of Christ was made possible by the *virtus*, or the virtual impartation of the benefits of the death of Christ by the Holy Spirit to the communicant, who by believing this is so, was convinced by eating and drinking. I argued that this kind of encounter need not be attenuated by being online, when intentional engagement was enhanced with attention given to virtual experience that highlighted the death of Christ. I also showed that the Holy Spirit conveyed this truth in the creative adaptation of engagement with symbols.

I chose to use Calvin's concept of the spiritual presence of Christ in the Eucharist as real presence because Wesley's view of the Eucharist has been considered by some to be harmonious with Calvin's view of real presence. Others think that Wesley's view should be exclusively culled from his writings and unique contributions from his Anglican background. It was beyond the scope of this dissertation to decisively draw a conclusion. What I did argue was that although, starting with Khoo, there is reason to view Wesley as unique in his "sideways" characterization of the experience the Eucharist, I see no reason to eliminate Calvin. Calvin, in contrast, was portrayed as being more about an "upward lifting" of the communicant to Christ. I discussed the fact that recent Wesleyan/holiness scholars have preferred for Wesley to speak with his own voice. I discussed that they also preferred an emphasis on the inward/outward dichotomy rather than upward/downward, spiritual/material dichotomies. They maintained that attention to Wesley's "outward sign of an inward grace," puts the emphasis on the role that material symbols played in confirming inward confirmation of the Spirit's presence. In keeping with the outward confirming the inward, an understanding of the presence of

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Christ as "doxological agnosticism" was developed by Peterson. It worked to undergird all at once the wonder of the encounter with Christ in worshipful doxological rapture, without the need to try to explain the unexplainable, especially with regard to metaphysical entanglements.

I argued that that going to such lengths to guard against such entanglements and uplifting the material created a new problem of downplaying the necessity of a spiritually present Christ. To the contrary, I contended that Calvin's concept of the real presence as spiritual presence kept intact a spiritual component of the Eucharist, without destroying Wesley's unique contribution. For my purpose in this work, I also championed recognition of the *virtus* of Christ as the user joins with other participants in a sacramental encounter with Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. I also argued that a sacramental vision that does not truncate the material engagement with symbols can also be maintained online bolstered by a theologically informed, aesthetically adduced practice in cyberspace.

Cyberspace Can Promote The Agency of The User

In this section I will review the points I made in Chapters 2-4, that cyberspace can promote the agency of the user. Below, Chapter 5 will be summarized, with the main point being that agency is compatible with a Wesleyan view of the Eucharist because of the *imago dei*.

In Chapter 2, I showed that the Internet as communication media was supported by the tradition of audience reception theory and the work of Henry Jenkins. I capitalized on Jenkins' idea that media is a place of freedom and negotiation of control by users. I utilized these theories to combat the tendency to think of media in terms of technological

determinism that tends to place technology as an unseen force of control that dehumanizes and compromises the freedom of humanity. I also argued for the blurring and mutual integration of online and onground life. I used Campbell's RSS or the religious-social shaping of technology to show that the relationship between technology and users is more complex than technology as merely a neutral tool. I acknowledged that there is a sense in which mutual shaping occurs, as all of this is taking place within a social milieu. Although it was beyond the scope of this dissertation to solve this problem completely, my goal was to problematize the dominance of technological determinism. I had found that the emphasis of the latter can obscure and truncate openness to the possibilities of productive and constructive engagements with technology because of fear that humanity is becoming less free and less human. Castells was invoked to show the complexity of communication media and virtuality, with the human agent in the middle. Most importantly, I realized that immersion in networks only changes the manner in which empowered users function within the newer reality of the world of networks; it did not necessarily take away their role to help shape this world. The concept of *agency of the user* was the most adequate way to describe what has been occurring and to evaluate the way that the Internet has become a part of everyday life and all significant activities, including religious life. I discussed what Castells heralded for the larger milieu, and what Mark Poster et al. posited for the individual self in this scenario. Various theorists have shown that the body and the self express identity and construct identity performatively in the interface of computer interaction.

I also tapped into the notion of the posthuman recognized and explicated by Katherine Hayles, vis-a-vis the concept of the human self from the tradition of liberal

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humanism. For liberal humanism the subject was capable of control and mastery, and embodiment was understood as the instantiation of the thinking subject. But I used Hayles to explain that what has moved beyond this notion of the liberal human subject, in the posthuman, was that humans have been more and more understood as information entities that live in and through their bodies as whole human beings, rather than an "essential self" contained in a body. Hayles forged a new direction so that what emerged was a partnership between an embodied self and its expression: humanity functioning as a holistic entity as cyborgs. We are cyborgs culturally, as Haraway points out, in the sense that we continue to recognize and embrace our own agency vis-a-vis technology.

In Chapter 3, I showed how agency of the user contributed to the manner in which NBC negotiated its use of the Internet. Regarding agency of the user, I showed that the Internet can involve a play of identities. In the NBC case study, one student, Ally, experimented with a new aspect of her identity, and a novel way to express her Christianity, through virtual Eucharist. I looked at the implications for embodiment in ritual enactment and found that neither Ally nor her classmates looked to the ritual as a new way to be detached from their bodies. Instead, in the use of performative ritual, in *amemnesis,* or remembering by enacting, they reinforced their identities, as active agents who wished to express their unique religious selves in the virtual mode.

In Chapter 4 I also looked at concerns in the listservs that I came to believe were best addressed by the concept of the agency of the user. Reconfiguration and innovation strategy that takes into account the agency of the user/user community involved looking at issues about the meaning of being human in light of new technology that came up in the discussions of the second listserv. In the second listserv conversation had to do with

normative practice in cyberspace contributing to compromising the meaning of being human and Christian. Such concerns of the second listserv anticipated the point I finally drove home in Chapter 5 about agency of the user and its implications for a theological anthropology. The irony I pointed out was that any Wesleyan theologian, who would emphasize free moral agency provided by grace, and the sincere performance of the means of grace, would be concerned that the exercise of freedom takes away from the meaning of being human and Christian. The only way that a user is less human and less Christian is to be dominated by fear of the inevitability of the user being duped by technology. However, once again, I showed that exercising a means of grace in newer ways could be a reflection of the exercise of what it has always meant to be essentially human and Christian.

In Chapter 5, I found that the agency of the user was the anthropological aspect that posited the presence of the user/user community as the active audience. As such, the user/user community was not passively shaped and changed by technology, but was empowered to find meaningful expression of their religious traditions in whatever medium they chose. Most poignantly, I pointed out that Wesleyan/holiness anthropology acknowledged that the user was actually reflecting the *imago dei*, as a free moral agent. I demonstrated that this anthropology also upheld the notion that humankind has always been essentially relational so that humanity expresses itself most essentially in relationship to others, as a reflection of the *imago dei*. Therefore, when the user expressed himself/herself in cyberspace, according to this most fundamental characteristic of being a created human being, it pointed to the compatibility of the

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medium to religious ritual where the person's religious commitments can find its most profound expression.

Conclusion

There were two major theoretical considerations that I dealt with to establish my thesis. The first was that the nature of the Internet demonstrates a capacity to operate as a venue for a religious ritual. The second was that the nature of the Eucharist itself is compatible with formatting the ritual for this venue so that it is possible for a faith community that is interested in combining a highly prized tradition with innovation to do so. I have done so in the interest of opening up dialog about theology and new media in fecund ways.

I believe that attention needs to be given to the fact that communication media such as the Internet should be critiqued by theology. Moreover, a cultural approach to communication media such as the Internet should critique and transform theological discourse surrounding it. I contend that too often the blindness caused by a negative bias toward change, and a refusal to be open to new frontiers of theological understandings, can cause theologians to make negative assumptions about innovations. My exploration and conclusions about the NBC observance of Eucharist in cyberspace provides insight into the nature of cyberspace religious community and practice, particularly with regard to ritual that can serve to correct theological myopia. It has been my desire to affirm the emergence of new horizons of theological and religious practice in postmodern life.

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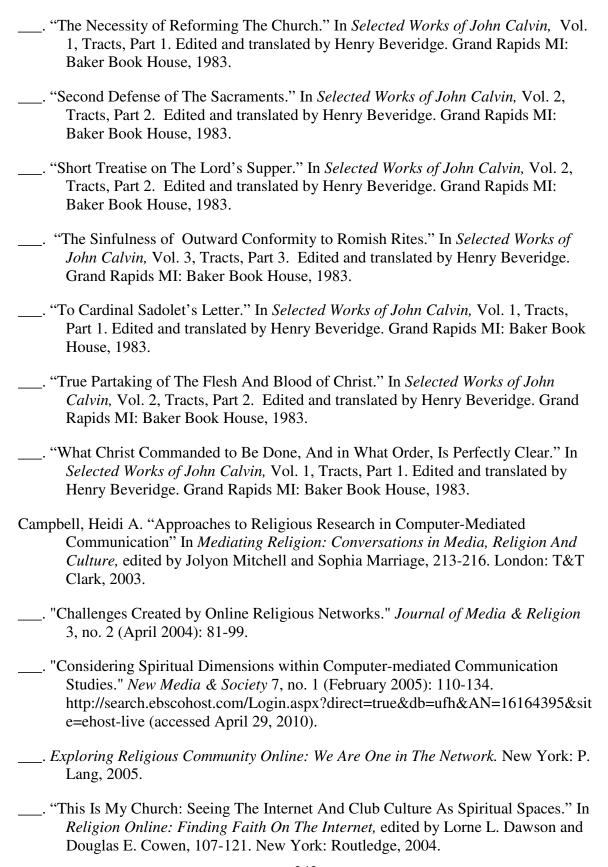
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