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MIGRATING MINISTRY:

NEW MEDIA LITERACY AND CHRISTIAN COMMUNICATION

by

FREDERICK A. COLE

Under the Direction of Elizabeth S. Lopez

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores ways evangelical Christian communicators remediate traditional ministry functions and community formation onto new media platforms. This exploration is framed by a discussion of literacy and digital composing reflecting Stuart Selber's *multiliteracy* approach to teaching digital composition. The author positions evangelical churches' approaches to texts, community, education, and communication as components of a distinct literacy that is often at odds with values, controls, and cultures found on the Internet and in new media. Discovering how church communicators use new media, how their education prepares them for effective digital communication, and how external sources, such as expert authors, aid the transition from print to new media helps us understand the gap between Selber's ideal *multiliteracy* and the reality of new media literacy for this group. This also expands our understanding of digital composition, and the role it plays in both the classroom and in all students' greater lives.

INDEX WORDS: New media, Christianity, Literacy, Multiliteracies, Media convergence, Multimodal composition, Stuart Selber

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2013

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2013

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NEW MEDIA LITERACY AND CHRISTIAN COMMUNICATION

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May 2013

DEDICATION

To my wife Theresa, my closest friend and greatest source of encouragement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am appreciative of Georgia State's Rhetoric and Composition faculty who gave me the leeway to explore Christian rhetoric within a secular setting in meaningful ways that were together respectful and challenging. Thank you all.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Composition studies reflect an awareness of the complexities of reading and composing texts that contain sounds, images, video, hypertext, and more; texts that, once created, often migrate across time, space, platforms, devices, and screens of various resolution, size, and capability. The real-world challenges multimodal texts present for teachers and students in the classroom, and for everyone participating in communicative activities within diverse cultural spheres, present rich areas for reflection and analysis. This thesis examines one such sphere, evangelical Christian churches, where communication is core to mission, and where the migration of established texts, performances, and practices to new media platforms is well underway. This thesis is interested in how a sample segment of a large and diverse community understands, employs, and produces new media in ways consistent with its mission, values, and traditions, and how new media may play a role in transforming this community and its practices. The thesis asserts there is a gap between this community's understanding of how new media affects their mission, formation, and values, and their adoption of new media technologies.

1.2 Motivations

My motivations for this study are two fold. First, as a scholar in Rhetoric and Composition studies, I feel it is important to expand the scope of our understanding into realms and groups beyond our academic sphere. In life, communication takes place in a myriad of settings and within communities with unique worldviews. Unless specifically focused upon, these communications, and the people they represent, are not part of our academic discourse. Numerous papers, studies, books, and classes are produced to give voice and insights into diverse and under-represented communities. Often these are brought about as members of this community find a voice through scholarly research and writing. As a Christian, I can offer insights that raise the level of understanding of that particular community. I recognize, for example the

distinctions between a Christian worldview as it is reflected in our books and preaching, and postmodern theories of reality and communication. I have witnessed communication technologies transform worship practices and ways of communicating within my church and in the greater evangelical community. Perhaps other scholars have recognized these in their own faith communities, but there is a scarcity of scholarship on the subject within our field, particularly when compared to scholarship surrounding gender, sexuality, race, or political affiliation.

The latest Pew *U.S Religious Landscape Survey* has 39% of the country attending religious services at least once a week, and another 33% attending at a less frequent interval. In a nation with such strong religious practices, it is likely many, if not most, of the students passing through our classrooms will bring the rhetorical understanding and technical skills taught in composition classrooms to bear on their spiritual lives. This social sphere should be seen as significant as others often cited for their importance, such as politics, commerce, and gender and racial identity. The more we learn about religious communities of all faiths, the more representative and relevant our scholarship and pedagogy will be to our students and society. Because this community is highly communicative about its values, mission, and the way it perceives the individual and community, it offers ample research opportunities.

The second motivation comes from personal observations concerning media usage in churches. I have seen repeated instances of technology adoption that is made in an uncritical and disruptive manner. One incident, in particular, made me keenly aware of a dearth of critical thinking about media in my church. A closed circuit monitor carrying our pastor's early service was added to room that had been designated for fellowship and food. I worked in that room serving breakfast to other volunteers and church members who wished to gather there before attending services. The introduction of a mediated sermon into a room full of people eating and socializing together created a dilemma. In every other instance, our Church takes a solemn approach to the preached message. In person, in the sanctuary, as a Church body,

we would never eat and talk over the pastor's message. Yet, as Church members gathered in this room, accustomed to televisions in restaurants, airports, doctors' offices and gas stations, they ignored the pastor's message, as they might ignore any other video noise. The designated space, the choice of media, and the content were at odds. In an attempt to reconcile the space, the monitor and the sanctity of preaching, I raised this concern with some the church staff to whom I reported. Several discussions were unfruitful. The assistant pastors didn't see the ignoring of the message by the people enjoying breakfast as a problem. Next, I wrote a detailed argument, in which I interrogated this specific technology, its relationship to this space, and the practice of preaching. Many of the issues I raised came as a direct result of course work and scholarship surround digital rhetoric. Once the head pastor (it is a large church) read the argument, he agreed and the monitor was disconnected. However, this episode left a lasting impression about the disruptive nature of media and how ill-equipped my community is recognize the impact of new technologies upon our practices and message. I would characterize this lack of insight as a *multi-literacy gap* that churches need to fill. Lessons learned in this thesis will aid me and other Christians interested in expanding a critical approach to technology.

1.3 A Study in Four Parts

This study requires establishing a baseline of understanding of literacy, digital composition, and the potential effect new media has on community, and then examining the interplay between these and the communicative practices of evangelical churches. Addressing the m*ulti-literacy gap* requires an understanding of what literacy is, how it relates to computer mediated communication, how it is imparted, and how it is nurtured within a specific community to advance that community's goals.

In the second section, (2.1-2.6), I present a view of literacy eschewing a reductive, narrow, skills-based approach to reading and writing and instead recognizing it as a complex web of interactions—some social, some psychological, some political and economic—all of which complicates competency. The first

challenge is to understand what literacy is, and what it isn't. While literacy is a familiar term, scholarship on the subject reveals it to be a complex set of practices and understandings with varied definitions, sources and challenges. The second is to see literacy as connected to specific interests, with specific goals.

Finally, we need to see the challenges to literacy created by digital platforms and their specific affordances, or the specific capabilities contained with particular digital communications platforms that affect compositions created and read on them. These affordances include modes of composing such as text, video, audio, and hypertext. They include ways new media connects to networks and how that impacts scope and audience. Also, affordances can reflect the devices on which digital communication is created and received and how that becomes a consideration for the composer of new media. Though these distinctions are recognized and addressed in literacy studies, Composition scholarship more precisely defines the issues with new media and offers important language to look more closely at specific ways technologies impact specific communications. This will be discussed with more detail in the third section. It remains important to any contemporary discussion of literacy because it reveals the complex environment in which people communicate, an environment requiring an equally complex view of literacy, or multiple literacies, that encompasses all of the variables, of which technology is but one.

The third section of this study moves from a broader understanding of *multiliteracy* toward a more specific. Here I draw on a wealth of Rhetoric and Composition scholarship that I see as emerging from new media theory and praxis in the writing classroom. In this section I will examine both critical approaches and proposed solutions to teaching and learning new media. These will help form the critical lens for viewing the selected documents, websites, curricula, and literature from evangelical sources that are the studied artifacts in this thesis. Importantly, the work in Composition studies reflects back on literacy in two ways. First, it underscores the challenges for both defining and creating effective literacy, both

in the classroom and beyond. Second, it raises the question of who is responsible for literacy. Is it the educator? Or is it the community in which communication takes place? This study reveals a tacit reliance on college English programs to produce "literate" candidates for seminary. Should seminaries, because they represent a post-graduate education, expect their candidates to be instructed in digital texts and digital rhetoric? As a specific community, with specific goals for communication, how responsible are seminaries for creating strategies to ensure digital literacy reflecting their distinct needs and views? What is the overlap? What does this interplay say about other fields of study like, law, business, medicine, etc. which have similar expectations for college English programs? This thesis claims higher education communities, and society at large, are reasonable to expect college students to graduate literate in today's communication technologies, much as they are in print. How to move forward is a point of particular interest.

The fourth section of the thesis examines specific effects and outcomes brought about by media convergence. Of special concern are media effects, by the Internet in particular, on how persons conceive and construct a view of the self, and also how media affects community formation. Both are core concerns for Christianity and the church. If new media fundamentally transforms these key constructions, there can be no greater critical issue for churches as they adopt new media. I draw from composition studies, communications and psychology, and include works from Walter Ong, Marshal McLuhan, Bolter and Grusin, and Stuart Hoover to get a better view of the challenges facing churches in this time of media convergence. These authors show many ways technology reinvents, reinterprets and transforms communication and by extension practices and ways at looking at life, reality and community. This is an important perspective for understanding church communications on digital platforms.

The fifth section moves beyond theory to examine three areas of Christian digital practices. First, I take a close look at how a technologically sophisticated mega church is migrating ministry and commu-

nity formation to new media. This will help determine the level of adoption of, and provide insights into levels of *multiliteracy* in church-based communication. Then, focusing on the pastorate as the locus of church communications, I look at a seminary education to understand how a pastor is equipped, educated, and supported as new media moves publishing decisions away from denominations and into the local ministries office. Seminary is the location of his/her education and preparation for ministry. Second, I review curricula and syllabi from seminaries that focus on communication. Reframing the pastor as an executive publisher for the local church, what consideration is given to new media during this preparation? Finally, I look at available books written for pastors and Christian communicators to aid them in effectively using new media. All three of these areas are critiqued from an understanding of a digital *multiliteracy* that is critical, rhetorical, and functional.

2 SOURCES OF LITERACY

2.1 Defining Literacy

Literacy is a term so ubiquitous that it is easy to assume a universal meaning. In this case, familiarity ignores the complexity found in both the concept of literacy and in what forces are important in creating, accessing, and maintaining literacy. The consensus of scholarship in Literacy and Composition studies rejects any reductive formulation that might first come to mind. Literacy scholars like, David Barton, Harvey J. Graff, Shirley Heath, Mike Rose, and others eschew the popular skills-based notion that is popular in journalistic and political discussions. Such a definition sees fundamental literacy as the ability to read and write at some elementary level, often sixth grade. A person able to interact with text at that level, it is argued, is able to function in society. This sort of definition is not limited to policy debates or journalistic treatments such as *Newsweek's* famous piece, "Why Johnny Can't Write," published December 8, 1975. To avoid confusion, and to understand its role in church communications, a precise definition of literacy is needed. This thesis sees literacy as a set of communication interactions and conventions that result from relationships people have to each other and to institutions. These literacies are not universal, and they overlap with each other as individuals' lives overlap. They exist and are maintained through a symbiotic relationship between individuals and institutions Deborah Brandt conceptualizes as a sponsorship. I see these sponsorships competing and conflicting with one another in the relationship between churches and new media.

2.2 Literacy: Discourses of Power

A good way to begin this discussion is with an explanation of how and why a simpler definition of literacy is insufficient, and then build toward an understanding of literacy capable of containing the qualities of new media situated within a particular community. A recurring thread in American public discourse bemoans the "crisis" in education. When we consider how education is at the nexus of fiscal,

political, social and cultural interests and power, it is not hard to understand why this is so. Lately, this debate has included much hand wringing around the next generation's ability to interact with the myriad texts, forms, and platforms that are the interfaces of modern, technologically-advanced society. The capacity to read, understand, and to write these texts is often called literacy. Yet, any close examination of the literacy— how it is defined, what makes one literate, how it is achieved— brings a far more complex picture into view. This requires looking at who is defining literacy and to what purpose. It also needs to consider how literacy is achieved by an individual and transmitted through education. It needs to recognize the reality of many literacies within our greater society. These are often community specific, each with its own codes, transmission strategies, and ways of maintaining itself.

Robert Arnove and Harvey Graff trace the history and development of notions of literacy from their beginnings in the Protestant Reformation to modern efforts situated in the power structures and ambitions of nation states. This work adds helpful perspective and critique to contemporary debates calling for "literacy campaigns," and true complexity of the term. Not limiting their research to wealthy Western democracies, they evaluate and compare national literacy campaigns in communist dictatorships in both the East and West, as well as in poor and developing nations. Cutting through the many lofty goals, spurious claims, and simplified concepts of literacy made by proponents of these campaigns, Arnove and Graff present a starker, more peremptory set of motivations, goals and outcomes:

> "What may be said of literacy campaigns that, both historically and comparatively, they have formed part of larger transformations in societies. These transformations have attempted to integrate individuals into more comprehensive political and/or religious communities. They have involved the mobilization of large numbers of learners and teachers by centralizing authorities, who have used elements of both compulsion and social pressure to propagate a particular doctrine" (2).

Arnove and Graff tracked similarities across contexts, goals, methods, outcomes and other criteria. The comparability between literacy campaigns in Martin Luther's Germany, a modern United States, and Communist Cuba are startling. Though espousing different and even opposing ideals, e.g. closeness to God, preservation of republican government, or "the creation of the "New Socialist Man," the aims of literacy are similar—assimilation and adoption of a specific worldview that is consistent with the prevailing power structure. A prime example of focused and limited literacy is found in Arnove and Graff's analysis of Protestant religious education that "…was intended to develop, not a generalized capacity to read, but mastery of a very limited set of prescribed texts"(18). This targeted literacy, emphasizing reading the Bible or specific doctrinal books, persists today in many churches, though the ability to read and write has been outsourced to secular education. While their governmental control was the focus of their study, lessons can be extracted and extended to other relationships between institutional power and the establishment of particular literacies. I have in mind here seminaries, and churches, control of what constitutes Bible literacy and orthodoxy, of how new media carries a more democratic ethos, and how the two may find themselves in conflict as church communication moves on to social media platforms.

Interestingly, the shift to new media puts the means of production, literacy instruction, and new media technology to people often far removed from traditional gate-keeping roles. This lessens the ability of elite institutions, be they governments, publishing houses, universities, seminaries or denominations, to control the orthodoxy of messages presented. One wonders how new media literacy campaigns of the future will engage with technology that may pose existential threats to these hegemonies. While disruption of established orders are seen as laudable outcomes by academics such as Andrew Feenberg, who in *Questioning Technology* positions technology as both an instrument of, and an obstacle to, better social, economic, and political future, these traditional sponsors of literacy campaigns have deeply vested interests in maintaining their gate-keeping positions and can be expected to resist an eroding sense of control.

2.3 Literacy: A Complex Picture

In *Literacy and Historical Development,* Graff moves beyond a critique of the relationship between literacy and power, and brings forth numerous lessons and myths about literacy that developed parallel to its historical development. Important among these are historically reinforced and stubborn conceptions of literacy; including the complexity of learning and defining literacy, and "multiple paths of learning literacy" (18-25).

The first of these is straightforward. Most of our ideas about literacy have been ingrained through centuries of institutional proclamations, warnings, and appeals to the foundational necessity of literacy. Messages of looming "crises" are often conveyed simplistically and with impassioned rhetoric (12). I see these as arguments designed to mobilize constituencies, politicians, educators and parents. Graff presents these as obstacles to reform born of historical ignorance. Often-repeated arguments become political shorthand for anyone advancing any sort of educational reform or reinvestment. They ignore a reality of literacy and language acquisition that is far more complex, uncertain, and unevenly understood.

Language acquisition is recognized to be "…quite complex physiologically, neurologically and cognitively" (18). This is reinforced by cognitive psychologists include Lev Vygotsky whose work on child development gives us insights into effects such as *scaffolding*, where adult support bolsters and encourages a child's learning ability (Barton 134). In this scheme, the role of parents in children's learning is elevated and the impact of traditional educational programs is diminished. Likewise, Vygotsky's concept of *internalization* is dependent upon prior knowledge and experience to make sense of new experience and knowledge.

A good example scaffolding, and how it complicates a reductive, largely political view of literacy is given by Richard Nisbett, a University of Michigan professor interested in the plasticity of I.Q. and

the author of *Intelligence and How to Get It,* Nisbett explains relative advantages between children of differing socio-economic/educational groups in the United States,

> "The child of professional parents, in this country, by the age of three has heard 30 million words. The child of working class parents has heard 20 million words. The child of underclass welfare blacks has heard 10 million words. So, that is just the shear quantitative aspect of it. In terms of quality, there is level of vocabulary. The vocabulary level that a three year-old child of professional parents uses when talking to his parents is higher than the level that the welfare mother uses in talking to her child. That is the degree of the difference in richness of vocabulary that kids are exposed to." (PRI 4/25/10)

During the formative years for language acquisition, children enter into the educational system with widely disparate preparation and support. This is relevant to the problem of creating definitions of literacy, even around skill sets. If educators and policy makers wish to improve outcomes, a reductive definition literacy that simply measures learned skills at a specific point via testing is both inadequate and insufficient for describing the scope and depth of the process of language acquisition. Again, the point here is not to discuss elementary literacy, but to move us toward more complex and nuanced understandings of literacy.

2.4 Toward Multiliteracies

David Barton, in his book, *Literacy an Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language,* lays out a comprehensive, "integrated" view of literacy, particularly how it relates to written language, "…from three areas of enquiry: The social, the psychological and the historical" (33). These mirror Graff's observations, though Graff's arise primarily from historical analysis. Barton abandons the notion of a single, one-size-fits-all literacy, opting instead for Heath's *literacy events*, which combined with other cultural practices become *literary practices* occurring within an *ecology of literacy*.

> "The point is that in order to understand literacy it is important to examine particular [literacy] events where reading and writing are used… An ecological approach to literacy is very cautious of the broad generalizations often associated with reading and writing. It starts out from a belief that it is necessary first to understand something within a particular situation before looking to generalities. The second term is that of literacy practices. What do people mean by practices? There are common patterns in using reading and writing in a particular situation. People bring their cultural knowledge to an activity" (36).

It is important to note that Barton's approach also cedes any unified definition of literacy for many literacies operating simultaneously within a culture, and even within the life of a particular person. This furthers our definition of literacy, because it takes into consideration the many different situations in which a person communicates, and how they recognize the distinct and appropriate language, codes, and modes of discourse for each community. A person may communicate one way at work, another in graduate school, and a third at church. Each represents a distinct literacy.

> "People have different literacies which they make use of, associated with different domains of life. These differences are increased across different cultures of historical periods. There is not one way of reading and writing. There is not one set of practices. An adult at home may be helping a child with homework, trying to understand a tax form, scanning through a local newspaper, searching the Internet. Each of these involves very different literacy practices…Where these practices cluster into groups it is very useful to talk about them as being different literacies. A literacy is a stable coherent, identifiable configuration of practice"(37-38).

These literacies can take on many forms such as musical, economic, legal, or in the case of our studied group, Biblical and digital literacy. As such, each literacy is distinct from the other, containing specific registers, vocabulary, conventions, and modes of discourse (Barton 73). These distinctions not

only help define the literacy, but also offer boundaries and controls upon the act of communicating within the community. Distinct literacies might be thought of as the defining and constraining elements of a particular discourse community (Bruffee 639). Greg Myers posits that these constraining elements interact in a positive way bringing "structure to our thought" (169). Literacies, rather the elements of a literacy, help define reality because the language and conventions shape our perspective, or view. These literacies are our windows to reality. Though they are often invisible to the participants, the defining elements represent "whole systems of ideas that people take for granted and use to make sense of the world" (Myers 171). For example, the group studied within this thesis have particular ways of defining community, and relationships to authority, and Truth that help make a shared experience possible.

Thinking in terms of literacies, as opposed to literacy, opens ways of explaining what I observed at the church breakfast room, where particular established values and practices were intruded on by new and different values and practices. Deconstructing and separating the elements may be useful, but it is difficult (Barton 36). The idea of multiple literacies raises questions that might include:

- What are the elements of a particular literacy?
- Who practices it under what circumstances?
- What are the literacy's sources/texts//vernacular/technologies?
- What approaches are privileged and what is diminished in this system?
- Where are there conflicts with other literacies?
- What strategies do practitioners use to "code shift" between literacies?

Underlying these questions are people and their relationships. Barton sees literacy practices not as abstract or arbitrary elements, but as part of "broader social arrangements." To understand literacy practices within a group, we must consider these arrangements and "the social setting of literacy events, including the ways in which social institutions support particular literacies" (40). Literacy in this sense is

not a set of practices that can be taught in a college English class because this literacy is specific to that social situation and the established conventions of that group.

Teasing out these social relationships in a world where digital communication technology has torn down barriers of space and time becomes increasingly difficult. With only a click, and at virtually the same moment, people can communicate with two or more completely different social groups. At virtually the same time, via split screens, a person can write emails for work, follow school friends on Facebook, and participate online in a church-sponsored Bible study. The New London Group sees digital communications as a complicating factor to preexisting social arrangements.

> "As people are simultaneously members of multiple lifeworlds, so their identities have multiple layers that are in complex relation to each other. No person is a member of a singular community. Rather, they are members of multiple and overlapping communities-communities of work, of interest and affiliation, of ethnicity, of sexual identity, and so on."

Navigating these lifeworlds is complex for the individual and for teaching and understanding literacy:

> "As lifeworlds become more divergent and their boundaries more blurred, the central fact of language becomes the multiplicity of meanings and their continual intersection. Just as there are multiple layers to everyone's identity, there are multiple discourses of identity and multiple discourses of recognition to be negotiated. We have to be proficient as we negotiate the many lifeworlds each of us inhabits, and the many lifeworlds we encounter in our everyday lives" (New London Group).

In order to adequately discuss any particular literacy, we must understand something about the group involved in establishing and maintaining its particular literacy practices. The New London Group identifies three distinct spheres where the lines of demarcation are being blurred, our *working lives, public lives,* and *private lives*. Two of these directly relate to this thesis, and church communities. In the third,

working lives, we see a blurring of lines between work and life in digital spaces that also may affect ways people view money and church giving. Recognizing the overlap between communities and literacy is helpful for parsing out distinctions and for identifying points of conflict, but understanding how a community might build and nurture its own literacy requires a deeper understanding of relationships between people and institutions.

2.5 Literacy and Sponsorship

In *Literacy in American Lives* Deborah Brandt uses ethnographic case studies and long format interviews to trace literacy acquisition patterns found in Americans born at different times in the twentieth century. These people come from diverse geographic, educational, socio-economic, occupational, racial, and gender experiences. For example, Dwayne Lowery's experiences in rising from public utility worker to union representative and then negotiator clearly express the sponsor/client relationship within a developing literacy (53-57). Born in 1938, Lowery grew up in a left-leaning household that he felt contributed towards his interest in union work. Taking advantage of a union grant, he took four months off from his regular job to receive training. His newly acquired literacy in union organizing and contracts led him into a full-time position with the union. He worked his way up into a position as a negotiator. Over time he saw these negotiations change by the injection of specialized lawyers into a process that was once dominated by local politicians and union representatives. As the process became more and more politicized, laws were passed that "curtailed the previously unregulated hiring and firing power of management"(55). The passage of these laws had the adverse effect, from the perspective of the worker/union representative, of putting the process out of reach of workers and into the arena of elite lawyers and lawmakers. The passers of these laws, under the auspices of helping workers, in fact created new literacies. By making themselves sponsors, these lawmakers and lawyers benefited by controlling both management and workers. Brandt shows how the introduction of increasingly sophisticated language into union contracts af-

fected Mr. Lowery, while also creating a whole new class of union representatives further removed from the workers they represent:

> "These transformations become the arenas in which new standards of literacy develop. And for Lowery— as well as many like him since the mid-1970s especially—these are the arenas in which the worth of existing literate skills becomes degraded. A consummate debater and deal-maker, Lowery saw his value to the union bureaucracy subside, as power shifted to younger, university-trained staffers whose literacy credentials better matched the specialized forms of escalating pressure coming from the other side" (55).

Lowery, and by extension the workers he represented, was pushed farther away from power, and farther away from the decisions that affect their lives. As they became adept in one literacy, that of organization and contract negotiation, the rules of the game were changed and then institutionalized. This follows Brandt's observation that "literacy takes its shape from the interests of its sponsors" (360 Graff/Brandt).

Deborah Brandt agrees with Barton's "social institutions support[ing] particular literacies," (34) as specific literacies sponsored by vested groups and with distinct clients:

> "Sponsors, as I have come to think of them, are any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, which enable, support, teach, model as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way.: (Brandt, Sponsors of Literacy 358)

Advantage[s]" sponsors might gain varies widely. They range from profiteering, to social/political control, to privileged purveyors of the knowledge, or interpreters of the Divine. Key to Brandt's understanding is her idea of profit. Sponsors control the attributes of a particular literacy, and the access, explication, education, and conventions of that literacy. The client may find the discourse person-

ally beneficial, but some amount of freedom and agency are subjugated to the literacy. This is relevant to this discussion because both church and new media platforms can be viewed as sponsors of literacy.

2.6 Competing Sponsors

Brandt's work on sponsorship and changing literacies serves as a useful framework for looking at the potential conflicts of interests between traditional church communications and new media technology. Dwayne Lowery's experience of being hemmed in by legalese, and the resulting disenfranchisement of union rank and file, is parallel to the problem facing church communication. In an environment where complex platforms require technologically skilled workers to implement effective communication, the pastor's role as chief communicator is degraded in ways similar to the union representatives. New media contains within itself visible and invisible values, goals, and outcomes. How might these values conflict with church communities? At a time of media convergence, what educational and rhetorical strategies can existing traditions, institutions, and persons, who are engaged in using the new communication technology, employ to recognize and offset that technology's disruptive potential? What should be the locus of this critical education? What are some unique approaches developed within a community or tradition? These are some of the questions that arise when considering the confluence of new media literacies with traditional church literacies.

According to Brandt's definition, both new media and churches can be seen as sponsors of literacies. Both have specific literacies, churches' literacy traditions are traced to before the printing press to encompass oral performance, with residual practices being taught in seminaries today (Ong 22), while new media has an evolving literacy. Both have goals and roles for their clients' adoption and use, and both benefit from these relationships. Though both are sponsors, the expressed and implied natures and goals of these literacies are distinct. Seeing where they intersect requires developing more understanding of each. Also, while the sponsorship/client framework is useful, the exact relationships are not easily de-

fined. For example, should a pastor be considered a client of church literacies, or a sponsor, or both? What are ways sponsors, both churches and new media platforms, benefit simultaneously from the adoption of new technologies? What are some elements of a symbiotic relationship between the sponsor and the client?

Paul Levinson, in his book *New New Media,* teases out some of these relationships and how they fold back on one another. In his section on *Wikipedia*, he highlights the challenges to reliability arising through the forces of open-source, transparency, administration and competition between "expert" editors. Levinson cites studies comparing *Wikipedia* to *Encyclopedia Britannica* that show little discrepancy between the two in terms of errors (74). However, *Wikipedia*, because it is in a constant state of flux, and open to endless, instantaneous revision, is filled with extraneous and irrelevant information. The price for more democratic approaches to information and knowledge building is the level of clarity that comes with expert authorship. While this may be preferable in certain spheres of life, it may not be optimal for religious organizations seeking to inject some certitude into the already murky and unknowable realm of faith. New media shifts power and sponsorship from traditional gatekeepers. Some shifts to the people, some to the technology. Using media capable of transforming and undermining a core mission should be done carefully and with eyes wide open.

In the next section, I consider how Composition scholars have coped with the introduction new media into the composition classroom and how their insights might impact new media communications in a church setting.

3 NEW MEDIA AND COMPOSITION

3.1 Computers and Writing

In the 1980s composition scholars recognized the need for new technological literacies as computers were changing the nature of writing, and as legislatures and school administrators wanted computers in writing programs. Cynthia and Richard Selfe's influential essay, *The Politics of the Interface,* identifies computers as far more than benign, advanced writing machines. Rather, the Selfes framed digital writing systems as containers of dominant cultural ideologies and values. Digital writing platforms contained values and controls benefiting their makers as "sponsors" of a new literacy. They wrote in response to scholarship that uncritically embraced the functionality of writing software, but ignored the invisible controls the technology contained therein:

> "An overly optimistic vision of technology is not only reductive, and, thus, inaccurate, it is also dangerous in that it renders less visible the negative contributions of technology that may work potently and effectively against critically reflective habits efforts of good teachers and students (482).

The Selfes argued that the introduction of powerful, shaping technologies demands a commensurate response by teachers. They proposed an approach that is both critical and pragmatic. Writing teachers should use computers as heuristic tools to make visible the technology's controls and limitations. This approach is particularly attractive, because it recognizes the disruptive potential of the technology without shrinking back from its use. Students develop expertise in using computers while simultaneously developing critical thinking skills empowering them to shape and use the computer according to their own values and needs.

3.2 Theories of Technology

The approach the Selfes proposed, one engaging and empowering critical users, uncovers an issue that Andrew Feenberg saw besetting existing theories of technology. He questions two distinct and unsatisfactory theoretical approaches, instrumental theory and substantive theory. Instrumental theory views technology as simply a tool of man, subject and "subservient to values established in other social spheres"(5). Instrumental theorists would view a computer in a writing classroom as neutral because it serves humanistic goals; it has no political affiliation; its rationality transcends different societies; and it is measured by the same standards as other writing instruments. This idea sees language moving across Michael Reddy's conduit, where the words/ideas are independent of the reader/hearer and exist "independently" from the audiences' reconstruction of words/ideas according to their own knowledge, experience, or other context" (Lackoff 116). The computer is a tool without power or implicit values.

Feenberg positions the minority, substantive theorists' argument as such, "technology constitutes a new cultural system that restructures the entire social world as an object of control" (7). There are no natural boundaries for technology. Its influence is pervasive, affecting every aspect of social life. The introduction of the computer into the writing classroom unleashes forces, changing the ways students write as well as what they write about and why they write. Their thinking and basic humanity are altered by the computer. The computer, not the student, becomes central to the process; the computer not the student, decides what is important and the student obliges, resulting in "a degradation of man and Being to the level of mere objects" (7).

Feenberg posits that this binary is unusable as neither system of thought provides room for the other, with the substantive approach requiring retreat from technological advancement or the abolition of humanity, and the instrumentalist approach encouraging that we embrace all such advancement simply as

a means toward desired ends. There is no middle ground whereby technology is evaluated for its effects on society, and its use is then tempered to accommodate societies' aims.

Feenberg's resulting critique recognizes "technical codes" embedded at "the intersection of ideology and technique where the two come together to control human beings and resources"(15). Technical codes are similar to Selfes' view of interfaces as "maps" (486). Why is the interface represented as a desktop? Who uses a desk? What does that say about control? What about power and wealth? Feenberg argues from a Marxist perspective that technical codes reflect hegemonic controls built into technology itself through a rationality that is self-replicating, "The "metagoal" of preserving and enlarging autonomy is gradually incorporated into the standard ways of doing things, biasing the solution to every practical problem toward certain typical responses." Feenberg shifts the argument away from the substantive theorists and back toward human institutions, in this case capitalism. No longer is the problem located in the classroom computer per se, but in society's classroom. Feenburg returns technology to familiar humanistic ground, and, in Feenberg's particular case, a project to redefine socialism in order to continue Marx's inevitable progress away from capitalistic hegemony and toward a "dictatorship of the proletariat." Agreement or disagreement with Feenberg's political outcomes is irrelevant to his insights. Feenberg has broken the logjam between two extreme positions and given us a useful approach, where humans dictate the terms of technological use. He would say, yes, the computer in the writing classroom is a tool, but not a benign tool. It contains invisible and powerful technical encoding that must be illuminated, understood and mastered if it is to be wielded by the tool's user.

Feenberg offers a model for education incorporating a theoretical approach that juxtaposes an instrumentalist/capitalist "factory" approach to learning, in which skills are taught to serve the means of production, with a democratic approach that he likens to a city:

> "The city is the place of cosmopolitan interactions and enhanced communication. Its god is not efficiency but freedom. It is not dedicated to the rigid reproduction of the same, the "one best way," but to flexible testing of possibilities and the development of the new—not hierarchical control but unplanned contacts; not simplification and standardization but variety and the growth of capacities required to live in a more complex world"(114-115).

Literacy in Feenberg's city equips individuals to move and shape their own lives. Technology is taught, but not as a set of rigid core competencies designed to fill preexisting roles, but one in which writing, with its close and unique approximation to spoken thought, is the key medium by which to approach a digital world (115). This distinction is important for church communicators, who tend to take a decidedly instrumental approach to communication technology, as we will see when we examine seminary curricula and expert texts. This view limits the ability to recognize the need to recognize human agency over technology, to make it serve the purposes of church, rather than allow the church to be molded to the invisible and visible controls of new media.

3.3 Multiliteracies

Like Feenberg, Anne Francis Wysocki appreciates the proximity the written word has to the individual and the life that individual desires to lead:

> "Writing, like all literary practices, only exists because it functions, circulates, shifts, and has its varying value and weight within complexly articulated social, cultural, political, education, religious, economic, familial, ecological, political, artistic, affective, and technological webs" (2)

Wysocki's view of literacy mirrors Feenberg's city. It is democratic and fully orbed with no aspect of life left out, nor any area of life privileged. Likewise it resembles the literacies including the multiplicity of "lifewords" set forth by the New London Group. Here, students are free to express themselves and their desires through the reading and creation of texts. These are not bound to any political or commercial en-

terprise. The task of the writing teacher dealing with new media texts is to make those texts accessible, material, and relative. Wysocki's strategies resist technical codes, not by merely calling them out, but through empowering students to replace them with codes of their own. Wysocki is as concerned with production as with illumination, as any true literacy must also be.

Combined critique and production being a hallmark of the new media writing instruction, I turn to Stuart Selber's *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age* for a fleshed-out picture of digital literacy that moves composition instruction firmly into a post-critical phase. Selber's conception is broken into three distinct, but essential, component literacies: functional, critical, and rhetorical. His three-pronged approach addresses students' need to "participate fully and meaningfully in technological activities"(24). As a result, each component of his "multiliterate" approach is dictated by its relationship to technology, to students, and to outcomes.

Functional literacy points back to instrumental theory. The computer is a tool that students must be able to use for "rewarding work" and for other practical tasks (34, 45) *Critical literacy* enables students to recognize the hidden technical codes and controls embedded in technology (74-97). Here the students are taught to interrogate the technology based on outcomes derived from the individual or social perspective. Computers are cultural artifacts related to the society they serve. *Rhetorical literacy* sees the hypertexts generated on computers as mediated communication. Texts are analyzed and created with an understanding of the unique social, communicative, and persuasive qualities contained within them (135-147).

To Selber, I might add Toby Coley's notion of an *ethical literacy* as "a general awareness of the moral implications for our (teachers, administrators, students) actions and attitudes related specifically to digital media use and the spaces that such use empowers" (Coley 101). Coley has in mind an opening, created by new media usage, to discuss ideas such as ownership, authority, fair use, and moral responsi-

bility. These concepts were more clearly articulated and agreed upon in print media, but are now in flux. Ultimately, these transformations can lead to greater discussions of perspectives and ultimately world-views. In these contexts, responsibility lays with both the instructor and the students to respect the, often divergent, worldviews represented in a college classroom.

Together these separate literacies provide a rich framework for teaching new media; one in which students' practical needs are accommodated and enhanced alongside critical thinking skills. Selber's *Multiliteracy* resists the reductive definition of literacy and provides students agency and competency over the technologies of commerce, politics, and social interactions. Student's have the skills and understanding necessary to mold new media into a tool as useful as print. Students are able to more easily recognize both the constraints and the possibilities found in digital texts and applications. While complete liberty is never possible with any language, the multiliterate individual is more able to both mitigate and exploit new media's affordances, according their own, or their community's needs.

While, Selber, Selfe, Wysocki, and others have wrought this understanding, and propose it as a model for writing classrooms, there remains a cultural and educational lag impacting those already using new media. This thesis finds such a lag in every aspect of church communications studied. Until these practices move beyond theory, and into practice in both the college and high school classroom, students are likely to struggle for agency over the new media technology they use in their work, personal, and even spiritual lives. Composition students use their education to help them live, work, and form communities. Some go on to seminary, where they learn unique aspects of Christian community formation and communication.

Imagine a pastor tasked with making decisions about church's website and whose seminary education prepared him for preaching, counseling, and spiritual nurture. How is this person equipped to accurately assess the benefits and pitfalls involved with migrating ministry to a digital platform? Many issues

arise regarding commercial sponsorship, platform bias towards visual over text, hidden digital divides within his congregation, embedded democratic and moral values contradicting the teachings of his institution, and the effectiveness of the migrated communication. These issues may not even occur to this pastor, yet a church website or social media platform could disrupt and transform the congregation he is serving.

Discovering how church communicators are using new media, how their education prepares them for effective digital communication, and how external sources, such as expert authors, aid the transition to new media, helps us understand the *multiliteracy gap* between Selber's ideal program and the reality of new media literacy as it effects this group. This knowledge has value to composition scholars and teachers interested in the role of writing, communication and new media in a student's life "webs" beyond the classroom, and for the nature of professional education for all students continuing beyond a Batchelor's degree.

4 MEDIA CONVERGENCE AND CHURCH LIFE

4.1 Christianity and Literacy

Selber's conception of *multiliteracy* is useful because of its capacity to hold a discussion of the interaction between technology, proficiency, and critical thinking, all situated within the specific rhetoric of a community. *Multiliteracy* is important because is helps make the invisible qualities of new media, and all computer mediated communication, visible to the human users so that they may increase their agency over the technology. Understanding the potential new media has for disrupting communities requires some understanding of that community and even more awareness about the effects media has on the psychology and social practices of those making meaning in mediated spaces.

In this thesis, I am looking at examples from the community evangelical churches. But, this is still too broad a distinction. Any discussion of church practices needs to begin with an acknowledgement that Christianity is not a monolith. Rather, it encompasses a diverse collection of people. It is the world's largest religion, representing one in three persons on the planet. Christianity has three major branches and thousands of sects. It is practiced, in one form or another, on every continent, in nearly every nation. Each of these has distinct practices, traditions, doctrinal preferences, people groups, and cultural distinctions. And, even this does not account for all of the various socio-economic, political, and racial, and ideological distinctions that make up any group's or individual's identity. In my neighborhood alone there are more than a dozen churches representing different denominations, traditions, and even national identities. You cannot meaningfully discuss "church media practice" without discussing the particulars of the "church" being discussed.

Even in the limited study presented here, there are huge distinctions between groups, in terms of church structure, doctrinal emphasis, and approaches to faith. For example, I only looked at curricula/syllabi from three seminaries—Candler Theological at Emory University, Reformed Theological

Seminary, and Dallas Theological Seminary. I chose them because they're all well-respected within the evangelical community for serious theological and ministerial training. A Master's of Divinity (M.Div.) from any of these schools signifies an education marked by academic rigor and comprehensive theological and Biblical training within a strong evangelical tradition. That said, the sectarian differences between the schools are significant. Each seminary emphasizes a distinct view of salvation, representative of the sponsor/supporting denomination. Each teaches its own approach to church governance. Each elevates a particular approach to Christian ministry and spiritual life. Even within a school, such as Candler, you have a range of approaches to Biblical interpretation from conservative literalism to liberal higher criticism. As this examination expands to include para-church ministries and particular congregations, the variations only multiply.

All that makes each church unique makes talking about the content of church communications difficult. Theological distinctions alone could pull this thesis into a quagmire of history, doctrine, philosophy and Biblical exegesis. Yet, conveniently lumping together these is reductive and unfaithful to the reality of these groups. To avoid these pitfalls in effort to define each player, my document examination will not look at the messages, but rather the modes of communication practiced within these groups. Church ministries can be seen as having four "central and binding functions and activities"(Horsfeild p.168). I've named these four activities: praise and worship, Christian education, pastoral care, and outreach/mission. These four traditional functions are useful categories to investigate Christian new media activities on the Internet. The goal is a view of traditional ministerial functions as they are remediated into a digital public space.

After looking at our moment of media convergence, and how this transformation is shaping our understanding of users, community and communication strategies, we will look at some potential points

of conflict with digital communication, as well as some synergistic opportunities. The result of this is a lens by which we can view new media practices and education within this community.

4.2 Media Convergence

The history of Christianity can be traced alongside important periods of transformation in human communication, giving us a window into how media convergence affects, and is reflected in, religious communication. The Christian church was born in the Roman Empire when the oral performance was the means by which what would become the Bible was communicated. The use of the codex, or bound book that supplanted scrolls, is linked with the spread of Christianity and the Bible, as is the widespread use of punctuation and the printing press. Religious teachers and preachers were some of the earliest adopters of radio and television. Christianity is a communication-based religion and it is not surprising that it has been quick to use new technologies to spread its message. Christianities adoption of technology has also meant a modification in ways of worship, and in concepts of God, self, and community. In this section some of these will be discussed along with how new media usage might change Christian practices and ideas.

Walter Ong, in his book *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History,* sets forth three "successive" stages of media development; oral-aural, script and electronic (17). Ong links the stages of development to human "sensorium" that we use to engage with the message. The first stage, "aural-oral" is the most concrete and physical. It is connected to our natural communication process, talking. The arrival of script, first with written alphabets and then printing press, moves communication toward more abstraction, and privileges seeing over talking and hearing. The final stage, the electronic signals a recombining of writing, hearing and seeing. This is an idea similar to Marshal McLuhan's notion of "retrieval" in his "tetrad of media effects," found in *Laws of Media.* Retrieval is the process by which new media, as it makes the current media obsolete, reinvents using prior ways of com-

municating. The radio replaces newspapers, using the voice and hearing. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's see this as an ongoing process where "Media are continually commenting on, reproducing and replacing each other" with a goal "to refashion or rehabilitate other media" (Remediation 55-6).

Interestingly, Ong suggests these communication technologies transform not only how we communicate, but also what we communicate. Transformed is the nature of what is communicated, and importantly how we are affected by the communication. For example, in the oral-aural tradition, sound/words have certain "powers" or media effects:

> "*Connections between sound, thought truth and time*. Sound belongs with thought not only because of its interiorizing and socializing powers but also because of its relationship to time. As has been earlier explained, sound is time-bound: it exists by moving through time. Sound can never be sensed other than as something *going on*. Joined to the forces of life, sound has a peculiar fecundity" (148).

Oral communication is ephemeral and immediate. It is, and then it is gone. It requires the hearer to lay down a marker, to engage memory, if they are to preserve the message. It is "socializing" because speaking/hearing is a shared experience between speaker and hearer and between multiple hearers. Reading is not like that. It is quiet, personal, and abstract—what Karen Welch describes as the "disembodied communication between writer and reader" (*Electric Rhetoric* 38). Unlike speech, print remains long after the writer is gone, giving it a sense of permanence and fixity. Electronic media too has affordances that seem to "rehabilitate" orality and print. For example, it is transient and yet recordable. And though desktop publishing tools and user-friendly online platforms make the means of production more affordable, usable, and democratic, as with print, new media experts are still needed to create and sustain content.

Welch goes backward towards orality and Aristotle's *konoi topoi* or "common topics" to find an "electric rhetoric" suitable to the coming, and now merging, of television and computer (and let's not leave out the telephone):

> "Electric rhetoric brings not merely a new idea. It brings a new performance, Sophistic performance, which is postmodern in its dispensing with unity (that buzzword of Aristotelian formalism), in its repetitive constructions, and in its commitment to mixing and fragmenting the images of mass and high modernist culture"(108).

Electric rhetoric is "merged" with print literacy, each having its own criteria and methodology for reading, critiquing, and producing texts. Anne Francis Wyscocki sees digital and print texts, their creation, and situation, as intertwined by their "materiality." A materiality that is not dictated by the physical properties of texts but in something more:

> "Because the webs in which our texts circulate and have effect are complex and often untease-apart-able articulations of the social, cultural, religious, economic, political, affective, intellectual, and so on" (*Writing New Media* 11).

Our words, images, and sounds are framed and defined by our communicative agency, plus the media we use. Understanding this interplay is difficult enough in a fairly stable environment, such as we have enjoyed with print for 500 years. Today media is merging and converging at a mind-bending pace. In the month or two since I began writing this thesis, one of the ministries I am studying has launched two new platforms for their Christian educational material. One is an interactive classroom for viewing on any digital screen and the second is a digital radio broadcast for streaming on a smart phone.

Paul Levinson developed an "*anthropotropic* theory of media evolution" to explain the appeal of hand-held computer devices. He noticed that as new media were created they became "increasingly hu-

man in their performance" (120). This is because we desire to access information, and carry the bits of knowledge and digital trinkets that help make up our identities with us.

Technological advance is setting the pace of change at a very high rate. For example, *Cisco Networking Index: Forecast and Methodology, 2010-2015,* projects exponential growth in hand held mobile devices and corresponding content at 26 times the rate of fixed Internet Protocol (IP) traffic. Astonishingly, they project the number of devices connected through IP networks to be three times the population of Earth by 2016 (Cisco). At the same time, and incredibly high rate, more and more media producers are coming online. Henry Jenkins catalogs this activity in *Convergence Culture.* Jenkins' interest isn't focused on the difficulty new media writers encounter as they attempt to make meaningful communication, but rather on the role they play in creating this new media environment alongside the producers and purveyors of technology. Both sides shape the media landscape:

> "The promise of this new media environment raises expectations of a freer flow of ideas and content. Inspired by those ideals, consumers are fighting for the right to participate more fully in their culture. Sometimes, corporate and grassroots convergence reinforce each other, creating closer, more rewarding relations between media producers and consumers. Sometimes, these forces are at war, and those struggles will redefine the face of American popular culture"(18).

Popular culture isn't the only area of American life subject to redefinition. Churches and church leaders who are migrating ministry to emerging new media platforms will encounter these same forces, both from outside their ranks and from within. Conflict points are easily predictable between hierarchical church governance and the democratic ethos of the web, between orthodox theology and open discussion, or between those comfortable and competent in new media and those entrenched in traditional communication techniques and community formation.

There are also potential conflicts of interest between the capitalistic enterprises creating, marketing, and monetizing new media, and ministries who use them. Often technology, particularly social media, is provided at no cost to the organization (e.g., Facebook, Google, Youtube, Vimeo, etc.) They provide their services in exchange for user-generated content, information, and the audience that uses their service. The user's activities are then monetized in various ways including targeted advertising and data mining. This raises red flags for those interested in privacy issues and those concerned with the ethics of profiteering from religious activity.

The pace of change also greatly complicates the task of the communicator and the audience. Writers ask fundamental questions critical to any communication concerning context and audience. The literate composer of new media finds this task increasingly difficult as the very nature of the self is undergoing a radical transformation through the use computer mediated communication. Even the contexts in which an audience receives her communication are undergoing rapid (sometimes unpredictable) transformations, both in terms of technological formatting and the virtual realities in which they are received. All of this change is difficult for church communicators to keep pace with, yet has influence on the decisions they make.

4.3 Shifting Audiences and Contexts

Bolter and Grusin's *Remediation* links exponential growth of the Internet, what they call "ubiquitous computing," to changing perceptions and constructions of the self. They contend the emerging self is, "remediated, hypermediated, networked and virtual" (232). They also position users of new media as being engaged in a struggle to define their "real" self through often "opaque" media, that transform their sense of personal cohesion and their relationship to communities, particularly virtual communities (236). Getting to your real self, as known by God and by others, in other words, truthfulness, integrity, and authenticity, is central to the Christian ethos. Bolter and Grusin assert that through media, new or old, we

can never present our whole selves. New media possibly accentuates this dilemma, as we are able to present crafted fractions or fictions of our true selves in virtual spaces with great ease. It is not only possible, but may also be preferable to have specific identities crafted to fit within the niches of online communities. In one space a user composes an identity and content around their concern over a social or political cause. In another space, such as LinkedIn this same user represents themselves to the business community in ways advantageous to their career. In a third, this user creates a profile for meeting a lover. Our link to these spaces is easily severable. And our connections to others often contain less accountability than found in person. The selves we construct in these spaces move along Ong's continuum toward abstractness and away from connectedness. In a Christian sense away from God and away from your brother.

There exists a split between the person you are inside and the one you present. New media complicates this through layers of distance, time, anonymity, and technological fidelity. Dishonesty is not a necessary ingredient; the discrepancies can simply be an outgrowth of the level of transparency a technology allows, the conventions of the virtual community, or the adoption/mimicry of media practices found in other genres, such as film or advertising.

Using an instrumental model to link the cause of the fragmented self to media effects is difficult and probably inaccurate because communication on new media is no longer uni-directional and is therefore more complicated than previous electronic media. Remediation of the self exists on the blurred line between creator and consumer of new media. A user of Facebook is "reading" and reflecting content at the same time they are creating new content. With new media, particularly on the internet where the choice to connect or disconnect with any content or community is as easy as a mouse click, the ability to shape one's virtual environment and resist media messaging far exceeds that of media from the electronic age.

Bolter and Grusin turn to psychologist William James for a better view of the interior self and how it relates to the social self. If new media is shifting the people's concept of themselves it is also shifting community formation. This is important for church communicators because a central component of their work is building the church community.

With the arrival of the Internet, psychologists have been studying the effects this technology has on people's concepts of themselves and how they relate to both virtual and material communities. This is important because much of the new media communications churches create is accessed through the Internet. Therefore, there is a connection to the general ethos of the Internet, the way people read information in that environment, and the way the Internet affects people's concepts of self and community.

Adam Joinson writes about a dual self-awareness, public and private, that people have, and how Internet use skews toward more private self-awareness manifesting itself in a decrease in "concern about other's impressions" and an increased "focus on your own self" (*Understanding the Psychology of Internet Behavior* 40). This change is largely attributed to anonymity, a lack of social accountability, and a lack of cues that normally moderate and mitigate our behavior. David Giles writes about the creation of alternative selves through Internet identities, creations real enough to elicit "grief" over the death of an online persona (169).

Scholars have debated the ways media leads to "pro-social or anti-social behavior" for years, and are now expanding the scope of their study to include new media, such as the Internet and gaming (Giles 31). Negative aspects of Internet behavior include Internet addiction, anti-social communications such as flaming and stereotyping, and engaging in Internet relationships that are inappropriately intimate and idealized. For Giles, the most destructive aspects of Internet use include negative psychological effects resulting from pornography use, destructive social connections and communities, and widespread deception on the Internet.

Joinson, together with Monica Whitty, further develop a rather negative perspective of life online in *Truth, Lies and Trust on the Internet.* According to them, the virtual space a remediated self negotiates is fraught with peril. First, self-disclosure on the Internet is effusive, highly self-centered, uninhibited, and likely to be deceptive as they present "possible selves" rather than true selves (26). They contend relationships built in this environment, and from this suspect material, tend to be weak and even destructive. Joinson and Whitty argue the Internet is also a place rife with unethical and even criminal activity such as fraud, spam, and cons (55). It is a site of infidelity where committed partners are unfaithful to virtual, and possibly real, lovers (85). You can be harassed virtually and "cyberstalked" (109-10). Finally, they position the Internet as a place where your privacy is not protected, but where you are under surveillance. Your data is open to exploitation by the corporations and governments building and sponsoring these technologies (119-30). While this depressing list is the result of research into the negative aspects of the Internet, much of this seems familiar enough to be understood as part of the ethos of the Internet, an ethos that serves as a backdrop for any communication conducted across its channels.

Of course, there are also positive aspects to new media compositions even if there are problems with the Internet. There are the efficiencies touted as benefits that include speed, connections over distance, increased access to information, goods, services, etc. There also benefits emanating from online community, particularly for those limited by geography, disability, or other inhibiting factors. Joinson's *Understanding the Psychology of Internet Behavior* offers a view that is a positive counterbalance to the negative effects of online use. The Internet can be a place of connection for marginalized groups (121) and a site for finding lasting romantic relationships (140). Virtual communities offer people the ability to connect around specific interests, or needs, and to find mutually beneficial support and solutions (143-60).

Composer intent and agency should not be abandoned for a more convenient, reductive, deterministic explanation of what we see in new media communications. Media studies are interested in the effects, as though communication inputs and outcomes are predictable, neat, measurable, and produce concise perspectives of reality. Psychology is concerned with pathology and health. Both of these can help explain, but offer no real guidance for those facing the challenges that come with building community and meaning using the technology of the moment.

The mediated self in many ways pulls against the fabric of togetherness and community. Derek Foster, writing about the nature of the relationship between the online self and the online community, stresses their need to actively foster "a feeling of connectedness that confers a sense of belonging," in order to resist the alienating forces of computer-mediated communication (29). Building online community must be approached proactively, not unlike other forms of community, each with their own social rules and conventions.

What is not apparent in this analysis is the connection between virtual realities and real realities; between virtual selves and flesh selves; and between virtual communities and material ones. It is not correct to think of these as mutually exclusive domains, because largely they overlap and their borders are obscured. A teenager uses Facebook to keep in touch with the same friends he sees everyday, as well as those who live far away. An English class can, over the course of a semester, meet both virtually and in person. An employee conducts business over telephone and computer most of the time, and meets with her colleagues in person once a month. This is an important distinction for our discussion because churches, and many other ministries, want to use new media to strengthen the bonds that exist materially, not replace them. They want their new media communication to augment their reach and effectiveness, not supplant the preaching of the Word, the closeness of small group studies, or in any way dislocate or alienate their community.

Yet, new media transforms communities. New media platforms and networks eliminate former restrictions, dictated by time and space. Users participate in communities who've never met, nor communicated without a computer. This poses a problem for religious organizations that have traditionally, "fulfilled norms for the construction of collective and individual identity in a society" (Linderman and Marriage 230). Church is essentially community. If computer mediated communication does indeed transform the self and community formation, they will change church, too. If that change tacks toward anti-social behavior, the affect on churches could be devastating. Linderman and Marriage place social interaction at the nexus of all community. When we gather together, we create and sustain our communities through shared language, symbols, and practices. These shared communications are how we understand our communities and our selves. In many ways, our communications are the "manifestation" of our communities; this reflects back on Barton's understandings of literacy as existing in "social arrangements."

To better understand the effect media has on religious groups, Linderman and Marriage isolated the concept of "social trust" as an important quality, or ingredient, of community. Social trust is a critical ingredient in both childhood development and the life of adults. Trust and security within a group allows one to express themselves and become a fuller person; to define and distinguish themselves as individuals; and to feel a sense of belonging, or "kinship." They studied online religious discussion groups and had mixed findings that they could not isolate to specific group make-up, subject matter, or the effects of the computer-mediated communication (235-238).

For our discussion about *multiliteracy* it is important to remember how complicated and difficult it is to write/compose meaningful communication, whether digitally or in print. In an online church community, a participant's task is the clear representation and construction of a spiritual identity. This transpires on a digital platform where the conventions and ideals of the community may be ambiguous. This is a tall order for even the most well versed in digital rhetoric. How much more might it be for the un-

initiated? When most persons engage with a church or Sunday school class, they are met with real smiles, handshakes, and hugs. They are asked questions about themselves, their families, their work, their lives, as known by others. They capture clues from the way people talk, the way they pray, the message that is preached. They are able to absorb and reflect, much more organically, the rhythm and character of the group. When this task is mediated, it becomes incredibly difficult to do well.

Communicators should glean from discussions of the "remediated self" and virtual communities more than familiarity with abstract esoterica. They should increase understanding that directly supports their communication goals. The literate new media communicator, working in a church, is wary of the dangers to the congregations' personal information before posting an online directory. She understands the potential for hurtful anti-social communication when setting up editorial protocols in an online discussion board. She is careful to use media to create access point for shut-ins in her community. Remaining aware of their need to be part of the physical community, she takes steps to ensure they are physically connected to clergy and members of the congregation. Though complicated by particulars of new media, questions about audience, context, and purpose have answers that fit personal and organizational goals. Questions such as:

- If Internet use could lead to less inhibited and less caring attitudes, how does that complicate community?
- If new media is engaged within isolation, how does that strengthen community?
- How are these two cultures, new media and the church community, pulling against each other? Supporting each other?
- What is the relationship between the "new self" and old community structures?
- Are new community structures useful and desirable; should they replace existing ones?

This is the point of *multiliteracy*, making the invisible qualities of new media and all computer-mediated communication visible to the human users so that they may increase their agency over the technology.

4.4 Implications of New Media for Religious organizations

Beyond the complications for religious adherents communicating mediated environments, new media presents external pressures on the formations and practices of religious organizations. As religion increasingly takes place in new media spaces, there will be changes to both traditional religious practices and methods of communication. Stuart Hoover offers a view where both media and religion are being transformed through the independent, self-directed activity of users. Religion is becoming "a public, commodified, therapeutic and personalized set of practices than it has been in the past." While media, of all sorts, are becoming places where people conduct, "important projects of the "self""(2). People are able to shape their media exposure and usage to realize spiritual goals free of the limits placed upon them by traditional religious institutions. This transformation affects not only individuals and the media environments they are using, but reaches backward and beyond those networks to disrupt and restructure traditional religious communities and the individuals within them. Hoover suggests thinking about disruptions as they occur upon "lines of demarcation." These lines include, but are not limited to, *public v. private*, *popular v. legitimated/elite*, *mainstream v. marginal*, and *direct v. mediated*. Each of these conflict points represents real challenges for religious organizations and pastors who want to effectively use new media, but remain unaware of the ways media shape their messages, their member's expectations, and their organizations' place within an increasingly mediated culture.

Ong suggests that our ideas about God move upon these transforming media, as do the way we construct our communities and cultures. Those practicing oral tradition might be more open to spiritual immediacy and expectant of meaningful, spiritual, enrichment, as they gather together. Those steeped in

print might place the highest value upon orthodox thought and doctrine, all of which is built upon literature, education and reflection. Religion practiced in the television age might appeal to a more passive, entertained audience that comes to expect packaged solutions to life's problems and pains. Religion in the age of new media might value large, loose, frangible networks of relationships over more stable communities. They might expect crowd-sourced definitions of God, to replace established doctrine.

Peter Horsfield builds on the ideas of Ong and others to examine the interplay between religion and media. He resists the notion of media as a social institution, like a church, or a government. In that model, media has certain effects that other institutions can use to distribute their messages, "institutions such as the church have tended to look at the media instrumentally; that is how they can use the media best to convey "our reality." Horsfield's model shifts media into control. Media form a "matrix" of culture, where people "get most of their insight, influence, values and meaning"(177). In this model, media decides the proper role and cultural situation of institutions, as they exist in this matrix. This can refer to traditional gate-keeping role of established media, but also to newer, more democratic forms such as social media. The power to define itself and its message remains outside the church in a mediated environment.

> "The media as the agents of convergence presents a significant alternative source of religious information, sentiment, ethical guidance, ritual and community, not only for the broader population, but also for those who are members of religious institutions. Religious organizations may no longer be the main source of religious information, truth, or practice, even for their own members" (178).

Horsfield identifies several important implications to this shift for churches migrating their communication to new media. The first is a shift in the public role of churches. As media, and not churches, define their messages, symbols and relative importance in public life, members experience a diminution in the "perception of faith to their everyday experience—their "real" life" (179). If the worth

in the "perception of faith to their everyday experience—their "real" life" (179). If the worth of religion is negotiated in a media matrix that is largely secular in stance, its value can be expected to drop. A simple illustration of this can be found on the dropdown menu in Facebook's profile section. Within evangelical churches Christianity is presented as Truth, and the only way to God. On Facebook Christianity is a co-equal choice among many philosophies and religions. This is a subtle shift, and a recognition of the pluralistic global community; still it represents a renegotiation of beliefs to accommodate media. Other "symbols of sacredness" are also up for negotiation in more mediated churches. Douglas Mohrmon correlates a relationship between mega churches, heavily invested in communication technologies, and an increased receptivity to "innovation" and their discontinuation of millennia old traditional Christian practices such as recital of creeds. Churches more rooted in historical and traditional practices, such as Episcopalians, are often more skeptical of new media practices (38-40). It only makes sense that the mediated church is tied more closely in practice, ethos and style to the culture of the Internet, the space more important to its existence.

The second implication for churches has to do with the media market place, or "commoditization, that commercial process whereby noncommercial human activities and services are appropriated, reformed, packaged, and then resold as commercial products or services"(179). Simply creating a Facebook page for a church and encouraging the congregation to "follow" or "friend" that page turns those connections into marketable commodities for Facebook and its merchants. By default, new media also encourages communication that is market driven. Churches wanting to get the Word out compete for a voice above the din of the marketplace. This can lead to advertising strategies that are more in step with marketplace advertising than with religious ideals and values.

The final concern for Horsfield is the media's role in "moral reformation." A mediated church faces a more complicated task as it presents its moral framework within and against the greater culture.

As participants in media, they become merely a node in "a network of interrelated centers of moral discourse" (180), and not the arbitrators of morality. New media allows for more voices, from both outside and within the church. Creating consensus within the church on controversial issues such as homosexual marriage, abortion, etc., becomes more complicated in an environment where authority is diffused and opinion proliferates.

Whereas religion's place in the public sphere was often secured by its relationship to other institutions such as government or the press (White 47), it is now having to renegotiate its position, as are government, corporations, and the press, in a networked environment that is evolving and uncertain. Over the past few years, news events have highlighted the disruptive power of the Internet. Writing for *The Atlantic,* Rebecca Rosen examined the role Facebook, Skype, and other social media played in the so-called Arab Spring. Organizers were able to exchange information, unify positions, and organize rallies on these social media platforms beyond the control of the Tunisian and Egyptian governments. Also, in 2011, *The New York Times* chronicled Bank of America's rescinding of a plan to raise its debit card fees in the face of massive public outcry led by a 22-year-old woman who gathered 300,000 signatures on an online petition. One can imagine similar efforts on smaller scales happening within community churches by disgruntled or disaffected members of that congregation or of the surrounding community. Most evangelical churches are traditionally hierarchical organizations with decision making vested in a pastor, board, or some combination thereof. This type of governance is antithetical to the open democratic ethos of the Internet, where people expect to be allowed a voice. Conflicts and controversies played out on church-sponsored media spaces will bring these cultural differences into sharp relief.

While this changing media landscape carries disruptive elements, it also carries opportunities for churches. Christian educational ministries are able to deliver materials with greater ease of access at a lower cost. Churches are able to create virtual meeting spaces to meet the needs of their congregations.

My church, for example, has a workplace ministry that connects members via Same-Time and email so they can encourage and pray for one another during the week. There is an abundance of opportunities for presenting the Gospel using media arts. New media allows walls to be torn down between other local churches so they might work together to meet community needs. Political and cultural critique and activism is also more easily organized and accomplished. These are just some ways in which new media is being employed by churches/ministries to serve traditional functions.

Christian organizations, such as many other organizations, embrace communication technologies for efficiencies, for access to expanded audiences, and to remain relevant. In doing so, they need to be aware of how these communication networks redefine communities, and how individuals think about themselves within those communities. To preserve essential values, churches and ministries may need to create strategies of resistance to technology that could include education and repurposing, and even create new technologies with different logics. For example, one could imagine closed social media networks for members of a local church based on denomination, geography, or doctrinal affirmation. It is unlikely that a strategy of foregoing new media, similar to Amish communities' prohibitive approach to photography, would be successful or even attempted on a large scale. New media is here and is being used by Christians and churches. As churches use new media to accomplish their goals it will transform, as it remediates, traditional messages, texts, and modes. The rest of this thesis examines how this remediation is already underway, and what lessons might be learned.

5 NEW MEDIA AND CHURCH PRACTICES

5.1 Multiliteracy and Church Communication

This thesis is built on the assumption that there exists a general cultural lag between the adoption of new media and what we have called *multiliteracy*. If so, then we should expect to find evidence of a *multiliteracy gap* within the evangelical community. The remainder of this work looks for evidence of that gap in three critical areas. First, this thesis examines the technologically sophisticated NorthPoint Community Church's web-based ministry for examples of traditional ministry migrating to new media platforms. Second, considering a seminary education as foundational to leadership positions in evangelical ministries, it looks at curricula and syllabi from communications classes taught in three respected seminaries to see how graduates are prepared to use new media in their ministries. Thirdly, it examines books written by experts in communications and marketed as aids for helping church communicators integrate new media into their ministries.

Each of these areas are examined for approaches to communication reflective of Selber's *multiliteracy* and while remaining sensitive to traditional church communities—in other words, approaches to new media that are functional, critical, rhetorical, and ethical, as defined earlier. Evidence gleaned from artifacts such as a church website will be far different, and more difficult to ascertain, than a class syllabus or a book, where intent is more clearly discerned. Church ministries can be seen as having four "central and binding functions and activities" (Horsfeild p.168). I've named these four activities: worship, Christian education, pastoral care, and outreach, and will use these four traditional functions as a framework to investigate Christian new media activities. The aim is to document and critique the remediation of these traditional functions into a digital public space. The following chart shows how each activity is represented in the different texts examined, and roughly approximates the approach to literacy evident in the documents.

Table 1.1 Multiliteracy by Ministerial Function

Source	Ministerial Function			
	Worship	Christian Ed.	Pastoral Care	Outreach
NorthPoint Church	Rhetorical	Rhetorical	Rhetorical	Rhetorical
	Functional	Functional	Functional	Functional
		Ethical	Ethical	Ethical
Seminary Curricula		Functional	Rhetorical	
		Rhetorical	Functional	
		Critical	Critical	
		Ethical	Ethical	
Expert Texts	Functional		Functional	Functional
	Rhetorical		Rhetorical	Rhetorical
	Critical		Critical	Critical
	Ethical		Ethical	Ethical

These documents were examined as stand-alone texts in an analytical, empirical manner that in some cases divorces them from their original contexts, various supports and augmentations, such as lecture notes. A limitation to this method is the ability to garner a clear understanding of intent without speaking to the communicator. Further exploration of this topic would benefit from in-depth interviews with the seminary professors teaching communication classes, and with the decision makers at North Point Community Church. This could provide information about the levels of understanding regarding

communication technology, as well their priorities in creating specific content and structures. It is assumed, however, that all of the works studied share an implicit common goal—the building up of the individual Christian and the church community.

5.2 Migrating Ministry: Church at NorthPoint.org

To discover some of the challenges facing church communicators it is useful to survey different ways churches are using new media. We have noted that there is a cultural lag between what we call *multiliteracy* and actual media use. People, educators, businesses, and churches are not waiting for academics to categorize, conceptualize, and create effective pedagogical methods before engaging with these digital platforms. This activity creates a lag for scholarship as well. Users of new media are becoming the sponsors of the new media literacies we need to study. By using and discarding new media applications and conventions, they are reflexively shaping technologies to serve their communication needs and community models. Churches and other ministries are establishing their own digital literacy standards, even if an underlying rationale for their decisions is not clearly stated. This is an exciting aspect of this investigation.

North Point Community Church in Atlanta's northern suburbs is a church fully invested in using technology to advance its ministry. Their website, "http://www.northpoint.org" www.northpoint.org, offers many examples of traditional church ministry moving to digital platforms. Also, they are offering new and unique approaches achievable only through computer-mediated communication. Arguably, North Point Community Church could not structurally exist without computers and the Internet.

North Point Community Church is the lead campus of North Point Ministries, a church that encompasses five different campuses across metropolitan Atlanta. It is not affiliated with any denomination, though its founding pastor, Andy Stanley, comes from the Southern Baptist tradition. According to *Outreach Magazine,* a publication written for church leaders, North Point has more than 24,000 persons in attendance every week across its five campuses. It is ranked as the second largest church in the United States. These five campuses are linked through a sophisticated communications network and communications strategy.

Each Sunday, allowing for occasional variation, worshippers gather together in each of the five campuses to watch a simultaneous broadcast, or simulcast, of Andy Stanley's weekly sermon, which is usually given live at the North Point Campus. While each campus has its own pastoral staff, the preaching function is reserved primarily for Stanley, a noted and gifted speaker. This arrangement, theoretically, could have been accomplished before the introduction new media, but only with huge production costs that would put it out of reach of any single congregation. Beyond this unique preaching arrangement, North Point Ministries links the church together using its website as a hub that includes all of the traditional church functions we are studying. Looking at North Point's total buy-in to computer-mediated communication, it is hard to imagine this church functioning before the Internet. Formed in 1995, coinciding with the rise of a functional Internet, North Point is itself a remediation of church facilitated by media convergence. Like an online classroom, it is not quite a new form, but an old made possible and changed via technology.

5.2 a. Worship: Corporate and Disconnected

The migration of church services or sermons to electronic media is not new. Often these are positioned to reach potential converts, as well as those unable to attend church due to age, disability, or other restriction. Evangelical, mainline Protestant, and Catholic clergy were some of the first to use radio and television to broadcast their services, teachings, and evangelism. The televangelist is a stock character in American culture built in part upon these early ministries. One of the seminaries examined in the next section, Dallas Theological Seminary, is both the most evangelical and most media savvy, offering a wide array of media classes. Interestingly, North Point's pastor, Andy Stanley, is a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary. His father, Charles Stanley, is a renowned teacher/preacher whose radio and television ministry has a national reach.

In this media age, it is not surprising that many pastors wish to have their sermons reach beyond the four walls of the sanctuary. By lowering the technological and economic thresholds required to create

competent video productions, computers have made this possible for even the smallest churches. Many evangelical churches have their pastor's sermons archived and available for viewing on their websites, or on host sites such as Vimeo, or YouTube. As with the self-published book, the reach, audience, and efficacy of these in-house productions is not always defined. Often, new technologies encourage owners to invent uses for the technology's affordances, whether they meet actual needs or not.

North Point's video avoids irrelevance by answering questions of audience, reach and efficacy. Video is essential to their church structure and the way they worship. Without video the church simply would not exist in its current form. Unlike most church online sermons, North Point's is not a rebroadcast of the weekly meeting. It is the weekly meeting. Even the website's streaming is synced to coincide with the simulcasts shown at the five locations, with a prominently displayed clock counting down to the "next online service" in days, hours, minutes and seconds. The primary audience is the gathered North Point congregation. The webcast extends the sermon's reach to those not in attendance. Webcasts are intended to be viewed individually or perhaps in small home groups. Syncing all of the sermon broadcasts creates a sense of immediacy for the satellite churches and for the extended church family.

Because the ability to shift viewing time is not emphasized (though, after the original is simulcast, an archive of sermons is available on the website), the arrangement logically follows the introduction of video screens into large, auditorium-like sanctuaries. In a large auditorium persons conducting the service are often too far away from those in the back of the room or architectural features may block a clear view. Many large churches place small monitors in strategic places throughout the space, and large monitors behind the dais. Many congregants watch the screen rather than the stage, even when they are in a live service. These screens also allow the sermons to include multi-media, such as Power Point, projected text, images, and video. As North Point's explosive growth would indicate, it is not essential for an audience to be in the same room with the speaker to have an enriching worship experience. The video

screen makes the geographical gap between campuses the same as between the pastor and the congregant sitting in the back of the sanctuary. The screens are showing the same video.

This arrangement does lead to some questions about the experience for audience and speaker. First, dislocation short circuits feedback loops between the speaker and the audience, and the audience to one another. At NorthPoint, Andy Stanley preaches in front of a live audience. His messages include inherent, real-time, back and forth exchanges between those present at the main campus and himself. Those watching in remote locations are necessarily passive observers to those exchanges. What does this mean for the speaker, whose performance is energized and informed by the act of preaching? What effects does this have on the live audience? Do they participate differently knowing they are part of a production? How are the corporate and individual experiences of remote viewers different than the live assembly? Each remote audience has its own corporate interplay with the message. By necessity, that exchange is more removed and independent of the original message. If so, does this interplay become a binding sense of experience for those in attendance? One that is unique in each location? What is salient about these experiences to the viewers? Conceivably, the same message is watched simultaneously by church members present with the pastor, gathered in sanctuaries, in small home groups, and alone on a smart phone. Each of these is informed by different group dynamics, surroundings, and the devices used to watch. Anticipating and effectively connecting with this varied audience requires specific rhetorical strategies by the both the preacher and the production team. This would be an interesting area for further research.

A second question considers the way congregants' other media habits influence their interaction with the message. North Point's strategy mirrors a traditional evangelical service. But it is not a traditional. It is a mediated reproduction of a service. Just such as watching a football game on television isn't the same as cheering in the crowd. In the mediated video production much of the viewer's agency is limited by the editorial choices of the producers. In the football game, the in-person fan can watch the parts

of the action they deem important. Perhaps they focus on the routes receivers run and how the defenders react, the crowd, or even the sky. In a televised game, real-time action stays with the ball and ignores the rest of the field, or it flashes to the cheerleaders. In a video mediated church service the focus is on the pastor and the points being made. Each editorial choice magnifies and emphasizes the pastor's message through close-ups of his face, PowerPoint slides, etc. This alters the experience for the audience member, who at any point may be interested in the pastor's body language, how the pastor uses the space of the podium, the architecture, or the faces of the choir. These editorial decisions try to mimic and control the audience experience but mean a lack of agency on behalf of the audience. How do these strategies work in a room where there is only a monitor? Or an audience of one? Watching a video, of a remote simulcast must contain some psychically significant difference for the viewer. Does the experience represent Bolter and Grusin's fragmentation? I see this as a unique viewing experience for each audience, each with levels of engagement, distraction, and sense of dislocation connected to proximity to the original live performance.

Christians often consider distinctions between the sacred and the profane, the profane being that which is common, earthly and mundane. How does the total migration of an important religious act to a "profane" and familiar medium alter one's perception of that acts spiritual significance? Viewers must differentiate between this and other common uses for video, such as information exchange and entertainment. They must then designate the same medium for "sacred" use.

Audiences steeped in mass media are accustomed to high production value media presentations that churches likely cannot duplicate. Video sermons such as North Point's are subject to the critical eye of their audience, even if the audience is unaware of invisible attributes that make a video "good." Do lower production values diminish the pastor's *ethos*? What strategies do church communicators employ to create viewing experiences capable of fulfilling their unique role in their congregants lives? Answering

questions such as these are critical as churches continue to move worship to new media, and to formulating their own rhetorical approach to technology that maintain specific religious values.

Based on the phenomenal growth and the obvious acceptance of new forms of worship by their congregants, North Point seems to be effectively using video to create a vibrant worship experience. How their unique approach translates to the greater evangelical community is unclear. Churches with smaller congregations and budgets may attempt to emulate the success of North Point by introducing even more video. In the section titled *Outreach,* I examine how North Point facilitates and benefits from this desire. Success aside, leaders need critical approaches to thinking about new media instead of templates to copy. Though it is heavily dependent on technology, NorthPoint is also situated in a specific community. The northern suburbs of Atlanta rank among some of the wealthiest, most educated communities in America. This congregation has near universal access to digital devices and the high-speed connectivity they require. North Point.org demonstrates a particular approach suited to their affluent and digitally sophisticated congregation. As a model they neither represent the possible, nor the ideal to the majority of churches.

5.2 b. Christian Education

North Point eschews Sunday school classes, a traditional vehicle Christian education, for what they call "Community Groups." These groups meet outside of a church setting and are organized in various ways according to age, gender, marital status, etc. According to the website, Community Groups meet at a member's home an hour or two every week for a 16 to 22 month stretch. North Point describes the groups as:

> "Community Groups are small groups of six married couples or eight individuals of the same gender that meet weekly in someone's home for fellowship, Bible study, and prayer. They are for

adults of all ages, stages of life, and spiritual maturity."

http://www.northpoint.org/faqs/community_groups

Little information is offered about what is studied or why. The overarching purpose is on the "plugging in" to share one's spiritual life with others in ways that are "intentional and fulfilling."

The community groups at North Point seem to be largely unstructured in terms of teaching, curricula, or even what books are studied. Groups decide for themselves what they want to study and can choose from offerings at North Point's store or from other resources. North Point's group solutions center does sell DVD " studies" from Andy Stanley. These are mostly topical preaching series that have accompanying study guides, which are primarily discussion questions. They also offer study guides to be read alongside the Bible," to enable small groups to discuss the Bible in the context of community." Again these are a series of questions to help guide thought and discussion, as opposed to expository teaching materials.

Deemphasizing formalized instruction and promoting connection may be particularly pronounced at a church such as North Point, which has no denominational sponsor, and therefore fewer doctrinal distinctions and traditions. It is also in keeping with current trends throughout evangelicalism. Movements such as "Emerging Church," and "Seeker Friendly" approaches are decidedly social in their approaches to both community formation and outreach. These seek to represent the Gospel in ways more palatable to particular audiences by making lifestyle connections and limiting presentations of messages that current audiences might find objectionable; such as emphasizing teachings on sin and God's judgment, or critiquing politics, culture, or other religious beliefs. These approaches are in step with the inclusive and tolerant *zeitgeist*.

An approach that diminishes the role of specific doctrine, by extension, diminishes Christian education. Interestingly, some of the Christian communication authors studied for this thesis link this to

broader cultural shifts being brought about by the "demise" of print. Hipps, Rice, and others see authority and Truth as vestiges of the printed page that will soon disappear and be replaced by truths. More likely, traditional approaches to Christianity will find their expression in new media alongside the more enthusiastic early adopters. In a world where there is greater exposure to divergent views of religion and theology, Christians may become more interested in those teachings that make Christianity unique.

5.2 c. Pastoral Care

It is difficult to imagine how one man can pastor more than twenty thousand people spread across a city the size of Atlanta. Doing so requires teams of on-site associate ministers, organization, and effective communications. North Point uses technology to leverage their assets and bring care to members of their flock. While they offer many categories of ministry, the website tends to depersonalize the "face" of pastoral care. Instead of speaking to friendly, caring ministers that are known by the members, North Point.org offers an array of links, forms, and classes. Many of these have an accompanying cost for service. The ethos seems competent, cool, and detached. This is likely a trade-off that comes with the anonymity associated with attending a mega-church.

The North Point website offers portals into various pastoral ministries under the umbrella term "Care Network." The following is a brief summary of each of the services available and accessed through NorthPoint.org:

The "Counseling Referrals" page refers individuals to, "counselors, therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists whom we [North Point] recommend [and] has been carefully screened by North Point Ministries for his or her professional expertise, quality of care and genuine Christian Values." These are professional counselors who charge for their services, not ministers on staff. There are three categories of referral, personalized, premarital counseling and marriage counseling. The premarital and marriage counseling links lead you to lists of cleared professionals. The "personal referral" link takes you to an online form.

Once the personal information is filled out the staff sends you a list of "three to five" counselors. In this section there is no mention of ministers on staff to speak with, nor is there a telephone number available.

The page titled "Hope Mentoring" defines its ministry as:

> "Hope is a mentoring ministry that pairs trained volunteer mentors with individuals that are going through a difficult season of life for support through prayer and encouragement. Through one-on-one caring relationships, those who are hurting receive love and Christ-centered care."

There are included links for those in need as well as those interested in being "Hope mentors." Those interested are trained, supervised, and receive continuing education. Again, there are no phone numbers or names, only links to information, referral forms, and generic email addresses.

The "Grief Share" page is designed to offer grief counseling for those who have lost a loved one through group sessions that last ten weeks. The classes are offered on what looks like a semester basis. Apparently this class is for someone who is not suffering from acute grief in a critical situation, as there is no immediate ministry listed, no phone contact, and only an email link. The *Grief Share* class is listed as costing $30. Charging for ministry in a church is a departure from a historical definitions of pastoral care. Yet, as we have seen, the monetization of ministry may be consistent with an Internet ethos. We will discuss this more as we look at all of the different ministries, messages, and services that North Point monetizes on its web page.

"Premarital Mentoring*"* is listed as $170 program, "designed to help prepare engaged couples for a strong, lasting marriage based on biblical principles." It is for couples six months or more away from their wedding. such as other North Point programs, it is done with a mentoring couple.

"Marriage Enrichment/2 to 1" links to an 11 week class designed to strengthen marriages. The site says it is full and you can be put on a notification list for future classes.

The “Divorce Recovery/Oasis” page is the least fleshed out of the online ministry portals. The page simply acknowledges the pain of divorce and separation and offers a list of books as well as a link to the original counseling referral page.

“Financial Mentoring/Moneywise” is a ministry offering assistance for those in financial trouble due to job loss, illness, divorce, or debt. They offer encouragement for those in trouble and financial counseling to, “understand God's principles of money management, transform the way you use money, and help you move past your challenging financial situation.” Interested people or couples are to fill out an extensive “confidential” financial questionnaire in order to receive this ministry. It gathers general personal information and asks for details about job status, attitudes on money, financial history and budgeting, etc. Interestingly, it also asks about any criminal history. Again there is no contact person or phone number, and you must fill out this form to move forward in the process. Given many privacy concerns online, this form seems invasive and troubling, particularly because individuals are asked to fill it out before speaking to anyone.

While many areas of pastoral counseling are addressed through “Care Network,” there are many that are not. For example, there is no page devoted to someone questioning their faith, nor is there a place to ask for visitation for the sick. Mostly the site offers packaged solutions, as opposed to persons, who minister. This is in keeping with what the Internet does best, dispense and process information. It is unclear if there is more traditional help available on site at each campus. Whether this is an acceptable substitution for hands on ministry by church leaders remains an interesting question worthy of more research. It is possible these types of solutions are more a product of NorthPoint being a “mega church” than one driven by new media.

5.2 d. Outreach: The Birth of a Digital Denomination?

A page on North Point Ministries website shows a map of North America with blue, red and yellow pins dotting specific locations from Canada to Florida. These represent "Strategic Partnerships" between North Point and other "autonomous" churches. These partnerships are defined as:

> "Strategic Partners are autonomous churches that share the same mission, values and organizational structure as North Point Ministries. Additionally, Strategic Partners aim to implement the North Point ministry model and corresponding strategies. This network is structured to maximize the sharing of best practices and encourage leadership development. Our partners participate in monthly conference calls with other partners and North Point staff, connect with one another through North Point hosted conferences and websites, and receive area specific training through web-based resources and onsite visits."

This business-sounding language, and the resources it represents, marks a shift in the ways churches affiliate that is made possible with the arrival of new media. North Point's website may be offering a glimpse at a proto-denomination in formation. Historically, denominations represent historical doctrinal differences, approaches to church government, ethnic backgrounds, and geographic proximity. Churches joining together with North Point band around organizational and management schemes, criteria that are not unique or new. (Presbyterian and Episcopal churches derive their names from their organizational structure rather than theological positions.) Churches also "partner" with North Point because of their web-based platforms and materials. This is new.

North Point, like any other "mother church," seeks to duplicate itself through its church plants and affiliations. Churches signing on have varied levels of participation available to them. Levels of partnership range from satellite churches, such as the five "campuses" ringing the northern suburbs of Atlanta, though geography may place limits on what constitutes a campus, to reforming existing churches,

to new church plants. Beyond their management and organizational structure, strategic partners sign on to a set of practices that include:

- Adoption of North Point's "ministry model"
- Emphasis on small group formations
- Full or partial participation (33%-90%) in North Point's video sermons
- Leadership/Elder transition team for first two or three years
- Training and continuing education in North Point leadership techniques

North Point also has an international structure it calls Global X. This ministry remodels the traditional denominational practice of missionary outreach and church plants. The language North Point uses to describe this work is interesting:

> "We strive to give international church leaders the tools to create churches for people who don't like church through the use of strategic partnerships, leadership conferences, and online training events. *Strategic Partners*: We have a relationship with a number of strategic partners around the world—international churches led by indigenous pastors who align with the North Point model. These partnerships are developed through strategic consulting, team trips, and various other resources to help them create churches that unbelievers love to attend. The long-term goal of these relationships is to help these churches become flagship models that will influence other churches within their countries to rethink the way they do church."

"Church for people who don't like church," seems more in keeping with a current American sentiment than what one necessarily finds internationally. Also the idea of using "indigenous pastors" to build models that influence other churches in that pastor's nation likely represents the aspirations of North Point's leadership far more than the far away pastor tending to his own flock.

New media appears to give North Point the reach of any large denomination. They are able to impact churches across this country and the globe. The ability to reach people so far from you may expose inherent weakness in these networks. Distance still matters. The farther away you are, the more costly it is to get people and materials to your affiliates. Also, distance likely means significant cultural differences. Without dedicated resources committed to shared values or common goals, it is doubtful these affiliations will prosper beyond the career of Andy Stanley. If North Point is offering a management plan, then once in place they are no longer needed. If they are offering a philosophy, theology, or set of practices, those will need to be developed into a cohesive set of doctrines and institutional structures, something they are not known for. Otherwise, what they have is Andy Stanley and the ability to pipe his preaching into churches via new media. While new media may be here to stay, Andy Stanley has a specific cultural perspective, and a shelf life.

5.2 e. Monetizing Ministry

An important feature of North Point's website is its approach to money and the language of fundraising. Performing ministry costs money. The traditional and widely used model for raising these funds is through requesting gifts. These are often positioned as an important aspect of one's spiritual life, such as thankfulness, generosity, and returning to God a portion of the abundance one has received. These gifts are collected under large umbrella categories, such as tithes, gifts, missions, etc., and then redistributed to perform specific ministerial functions. Often, in order to tackle extraordinary expenses such as a building fund or unique ministry opportunities, givers are able to earmark certain gifts for those projects. Some social ministry functions such as retreats, mission trips, camps, etc., apportion expenses by asking participants to pay their share of the cost. Finally, media materials such as books, CDs, and DVDs are often offered in exchange for a donation. Tax law dictates that only some portion of a gift linked to materials or services is deductible. So, much of the language reflects those legalities.

What is curious about the North Point website is the wholesale abandonment of these traditional categories and distinctions in favor of the language of merchandising. Instead of terms such as "suggested gift," "donation," or "contribution," North Point offers the generic term "cost." Here are a few examples:

- Christmas Lost and Found (for those who experience grief during the holidays). Cost $15
- MarriedLife (speaker/simulcast offering "encouragement and empowerment for your marriage"). $15 ticket
- 2to1 (premarital counseling). Cost $170

These three examples represent traditional ministry categories that have been monetized. This tracks pretty well with Peter Horsfield's concern over "commoditization, that commercial process whereby noncommercial human activities and services are appropriated, re-formed, packaged, and then resold as commercial products or services"(179).

Clearly, NorthPoint.org takes on the concepts and language common to Internet retailing as it re-defines church in this new environment. Beyond the examples like those listed above, almost every message, teaching series, book, or teaching material used by satellite churches, group leaders, and members is for sale in the site's vast bookstore. North Point takes Andy Stanley's messages and packages them in DVDs that the sell for $25 each, with discounts for volume purchases. Biblically, there are prescriptions and warnings against selling "the Word of God." Jesus himself famously drove the moneychangers and those selling sacrifices out of the temple. However, churches find ways to profit by reselling the "value-added" portion of their output. Arguments for selling ministry often cite the cost of producing the materials, the value of expanding the reach of the teaching, the material maintenance of ministers, etc. Indulgences, sermons, books, teaching materials, commercial broadcasts, all represent a long tradition of commoditizing ministry. It is not surprising for this to remediated as well. What is interesting is the way the

media influence the language and nature of the transaction. North Point.org is taking cues as much, or more, from Internet commerce culture as from evangelical church culture.

5.2 Summary

North Point Church, its satellites, and network affiliated churches is a fascinating reinterpretation of evangelicalism. Using technology, they have found new ways to "do church" in ways that remain recognizable to Christians. There are weekly sermon, children's Sunday school classes, ministries to singles, and couples, all taking place digitally or in digitally enhanced settings. North Point leverages technology to reach across barriers of geography and time in ways familiar and comfortable to tech-savvy and affluent Americans. The church also is using new media to expand its reach in ways formerly only available to large denominational organizations.

This superficial examination leaves room for inquiry into levels of personal satisfaction for participants. Though North Point is a huge and rapidly expanding church, there remain questions about the experience of worshipping via television, the depth of engagement with all of the mediated programs, teachings, and gatherings, and the personal connections between other members and leadership. Getting at these questions, along with in-depth analysis of rhetorical, organizational, and technological strategies of the leadership would provide a rich avenue of study for a Ph.D. candidate or scholar interested in the effects of new media on religious institutions.

5.3 Seminaries as Sponsors of Literacy

The pastor wears many hats in a Protestant church, including final supervisory editorial responsibility for a large array of publications. These might include bulletins, Sunday-school curriculum, marketing materials, sermons, signage, audio/visual materials and web-based communication initiatives. While the pastor may not personally create all of these materials, he/she is ultimately responsible for content and its relationship to all church ministries. In this age of increased in-house media production, the pastor can

be thought of as a publisher. With the increased importance of this role it is reasonable to expect these responsibilities to be part of that same pastor's educational preparation.

As preaching and counseling are central to the pastor's vocation, most communication training centers on these roles. Under the heading of Communications, most seminary programs pastors are taught homiletics. This study includes Biblical exegesis, theology, and sermon structure. Also, pastors usually take a counseling component, for counseling and interpersonal communication techniques. This thesis only looks at broader communication training that might equip the pastor for the publishing role. These are often taught under the term "practical theology."

These communications offerings are viewed through the lens of new media *multiliteracy*. Particularly important is whether seminaries, as sponsors of literacies peculiar to the needs of churches, recognize potential conflicts and compatibilities with embedded technological values. Also, do these seminaries teach critical and rhetorical approaches to using new media to help pastors uphold their communities' own values as they take advantage of the affordances within these new platforms?

To examine this facet of church and new media, I have acquired published materials concerning their communication training from the following seminaries, each representing a different evangelical denomination:

- Reformed Theological Seminary (Presbyterian), Orlando, Florida
- Dallas Theological Seminary (non-denominational), Dallas, Texas
- Candler School of Theology (Methodist), Atlanta, Georgia

Because the scope of this study was limited to published documents, there was no substantial contact with the professors who teach these classes. The exception was an email request for copies of relevant class syllabi sent to the ten professors. I attached a copy of the thesis proposal to explain the focus of the inquiry. Three of the ten responded, with two of those explaining they no longer taught these classes.

None of the professors sent a copy of a syllabus. Consequently, the materials examined were obtained from the seminary websites. These included detailed program and course descriptions and nine examples of class syllabi. These were all examined for books, materials, lectures, and assignments relating to *multiliteracy*. The findings are given for each seminary.

5.3 a. Candler School of Theology

Candler School of Theology (www.candler.emory.edu) is the seminary attached to Emory University and is one of 13 seminaries that serve The United Methodist church. Of the three schools studied, it is the most socially conscious and progressive. Also, being attached to Emory University, it is more scholarly in focus than the other two seminaries. This is reflected in its areas of study and scholarship, which go beyond pastor preparation and the educational background of its faculty.

Surprisingly, given the resources available to Candler, there was almost no attention given to practical or technological communication in the regular preparation for a pastor/minister. Instead, Candler offers a wide variety of courses concerning the needs of particular communities based on race, gender and ethnicity. The exception is a course titled *Technology for Ministry* that was offered one semester in 2010 under the *Formation and Witness* component. This component focuses on issues surrounding church community, outreach and missionary work. Without the syllabi it is unclear exactly what was taught in this class. However, a workshop carrying that same title is scheduled for August 2012. That workshop focuses on the practical concerns of selecting, purchasing, implementing, and maintaining computer systems in a church setting. It does not touch on any of the rhetorical issues surrounding new media literacy.

The only other class found at Candler is titled *Christian Ministry in Digital Culture* does not appear in the regular program of study. It is scheduled for two weeks in the summer 2013 session. Taught by Dr. John Weaver, the course description and readings are as follows:

> "This course is designed to develop critical and creative understandings and practices of Christian discipleship and ministry in the current and emerging digital cultures of the Internet and other computer/device applications."

- Caston, Jason. The iChurch Method: How to Advance Your Ministry Online. Caston Digital Publishing, 2012. (ISBN 9780615589640)
- Challies, Tim. The Next Story: Life and Faith after the Digital Explosion. Zondervan, 2011. (ISBN 9780310329039)
- Drescher, Elizabeth. Tweet If You ♥ Jesus: Practicing Church in the Digital Reformation. New York: Morehouse, 2011. (ISBN 9780819224231)

Based on the required readings and explanations found in his syllabus, Dr. Weaver's class is the nearest offering at any of the three seminaries to combining new media literacy with the particular concerns of Christian formation. Consider this instruction from a writing assignment,

> "The learning goal of this assignment is your comprehension of the primary cultural causes and characteristics of past and present communication media and methods, and their importance to understanding and development of your leadership and your church community."

Here, we see all three elements of Selber's "*multiliteracy*," as Weaver challenges his students to critical thinking about technology, and a rhetorical approach for making technology function for their communities. This type of class could easily be expanded and included as a requirement for future pastors.

5.3 b. Dallas Theological Seminary

Dallas Theological (DTS) is an influential evangelical seminary. It is highly regarded by Southern Baptist and non-denominational pastors and is focused on preparing preachers and evangelists. Many of their graduates have reached national recognition through Christian media. These include Hal Lindsey,

Charles Swindoll, Tony Evans, Bruce Wilkinson and Christian radio pioneer J. Vernon McGee. Andy Stanley, the pastor of North Point Church, is also a graduate of DTS.

The focus of DTS is far more evangelical, in the literal sense of the word. The school works to equip its graduates to effectively proclaim the gospel message than either Candler or Reformed Theological Seminary. Each of these schools has a unique culture, history, and doctrinal positions influencing its emphasis. Because DTS is focused on persuasive preaching, it is not surprising that it offers the widest range of communication classes, and specialty classes concentrating on using media. They even offer a M.A. in Media and Communications that includes 12 hours from the following class offerings:

- Teaching Process and Audiovisual Presentations
- Audio Visual Presentations
- Communication in Contemporary Culture
- Creative Writing in Ministry
- Creative Audio Production for Ministry
- Publishing Layout/Design for Ministry
- Video Production for Ministry

According to the DTS website, this M.A. is aimed at "worship leaders, writers, and other media practitioners," who already have trained or work in the arts. Digging deeper into the syllabi of these classes reveals two themes present in all of the classes. First, they offer critiques of media, communication, audience, and message that presume and enforce a Christian/Biblical worldview, as distinct from a scholarly perspective. Little attention seems to be given to how potential audiences approach the message. Any teaching on audience and culture in these syllabi center around how ideas such as relativism and postmodernism are conflict with the Biblical Truth claims of Christianity, are obstacles to belief, and how to speak past those worldviews. The second theme is a view of media that is decidedly instrumental and

functional. There is little consideration of how media itself might shape messages, or audience make-up and perceptions. This is evident in readings, lecture previews, or assignments found in the syllabi. Instead, students are introduced to communication technologies as tools to accomplish the preaching of the gospel.

These themes are consistent with Christian doctrine about the Gospel as the one unique, and universal message of salvation. The message itself has the supernatural power to transform the listener. This approach views communication as proclamation over conversation, and testimony over persuasion. Here media is viewed as a device that extends the reach of the message. Therefore, it is not surprising that any approach to media in a seminary emphasizing evangelizing would be weighted toward the *functional* over the *rhetorical* and *critical.*

5.3 c. Reformed Theological Seminary

Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS) emphasizes a specific doctrine and historic Christian theology more than the other two seminaries. Though not directly linked with a denomination, RTS, and reformed theology, is closely associated with Presbyterian and Lutheran denominations. These traditions are among the most demanding evangelical churches in rigorous pastoral training. The emphasis being more on theology, pastors prepared at RTS spend more time on intellectual underpinnings of Christianity, including philosophy, comparative and systematic theologies, and Biblical exegesis, than they spend on practical or cultural issues. It is the most conservative course of study of the three seminaries offering only a couple of classes in "practical theology." These are divided to cover issues about church governance, counseling, and communication.

I was able to look at three syllabi, two examples of required courses titled *Communications 1* and *Communications 2,* and one from an elective class titled *Communication in the 21st Century.* The two mandatory classes are wholly devoted to researching, writing and delivering sermons, and make no men-

tion of technology, or any of what we have referred to as a publishing role for pastors. The third class is about understanding modern culture and audience. It focuses on worldviews, in particular postmodernism. Again, none of this class' readings, assignments or lectures addresses media in any way.

The total absence of any consideration of media in RTS' course offerings is surprising, considering the power media have to shape culture, perception, and message. I would expect such a conservative organization, offering a rigorous, if doctrinaire, course of study to be concerned with how powerful phenomena such as electronic/new media might shape their teachings. This might be explained by priorities, and how much class time is allocated to other areas of study.

5.3 d. Summary

Effective communication being so important to church leadership, one would expect a thorough treatment of the topic, including a component concerned with technology. Instead, what we have found is very uneven. Only one class studied approached an understanding of *multiliteracy*. This might represent a lack of awareness, or even antipathy towards technology. However, there might be another explanation. If Selber's *multiliteracy* is an emerging equivalent to traditional reading and writing competency, is it wrong for seminaries to expect students entering their institution to be *multiliterate*? Shouldn't college graduates be ready to function in our increasingly mediated society? Seminary degrees are post-graduate degrees. Literacy—print literacy—has been a basis for higher education for centuries. Medical, law, business, and other graduate schools expect literacy for their incoming students. What has changed is the writing environment, not the demands of a specialized education. These schools and professions should expect new media literacy to be taught in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schools.

Another consideration, one that should move seminaries to adopt an approach embracing *multiliteracy*, is their role as sponsors of a unique literacy. Communication is central to Christianity. Seminaries have invested many of their resources toward empowering students for oral communication techniques

used in teaching and preaching. They already are unique sponsors of rhetorical literacies surrounding homiletics. As new media expands its role in people's lives, churches have a deeply vested interest in how media shapes their congregants, their message, and their mission. In order to preserve, defend, and propagate their unique worldview they will need to define an approach to computer-mediated communication that goes beyond functionality. Christian leaders need to develop a critique of technology's role in human life, and promote uses that enhance, rather than harm, Christian formation. This makes it an integral component of pastor preparation at the seminary level.

5.4 Expert Help for Church Communicators

The final area of inquiry examines texts, targeted toward pastors and other church communicators, claiming to offer church-friendly approaches to new media. Experts write books aimed at specific users groups, to help novice users communicate effectively. The Christian book industry places pastors among these targeted groups.

A lag in understanding the relevant issues surrounding new media is understandable in the case of pastors and seminaries. However, the bar should be very high for those calling themselves experts. These authors should offer pastors insights touching on key issues. Functional competency may be gleaned from many sources including the producers of technology, the business community, and widely available educational resources. These authors are writing to a select audience. Their books should be distinguishable from other sources through critical thinking about technology, as well as Christian-based ethical and rhetorical strategies toward writing for new media. Because they present themselves as experts, and because these books offer opportunities to convey ideas precisely, the critique in this section is sharper than with NorthPoint or the seminaries.

Some key criteria against which these authors were evaluated include:

- Does the author acknowledge the complex nature of multi-modal communication?
- Is there any mention of technological biases?
- Is there an awareness of embedded commercial interests?
- Does the author raise concerns over privacy, digital divides, access?
- Does the author point out any benefits or pitfalls for community formation?
- Does the author demonstrate an awareness of psychological effects of the media, Internet, and social media use?
- Does the author recognize the way technical expertise empowers those outside of traditional church leadership?

I chose five books to investigate based on their claims to help church communicators understand and/or better use new media. I present my findings in the form of short critiques that includes author credentials, an overview of the book, and key points, problems, and takeaways. They are arranged alphabetically according to author.

Friesen, Dwight J. *Thy Kingdom Connected: What the Church Can Learn from Facebook, the Internet, and Other Networks.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009.

Thy Kingdom Connected is stylistically the most philosophical and scholarly of the books examined. Friesen is associate professor of practical theology at the Seattle School of Theology and Psychology. He draws from sources as varied as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Proust, Jung, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, and, of course the Bible. The Seattle School is a non-denominational accredited college offering Master

of Arts degrees in Counseling Psychology, Divinity, and Theology and Culture. Authors, professors, and ministers affiliated with Seattle School, such as Brian McLaren, are sometimes considered part of the "emerging church movement" which draws from a variety of Christian traditions, and generally seeks to reconcile Christian belief and practice with postmodern society.

Thy Kingdom Connected is primarily about presenting the Christian faith, church life, and God using a fresh metaphor, that of the "scale free network." Friesen draws on his experience as a pastor and as a marketer for a dotcom startup to create a new way for readers to envision reality, themselves, society, and Christian formation. Many metaphors have been employed to explain man's relationship to God, as well as God's to the universe. King of Kings suited pre-modern man. Post-enlightenment, God was thought of as a great watchmaker, or architect. For today's Christian, Friesen offers a view of God's invisible realm that mirrors the Internet, social media, and computer networks. In his construction, the greater network is God's rule over the universe. God isn't the network, but outside it and overseeing it. Individuals are nodes in the network. Relationships between people and between institutions become network links. And churches become "common areas" to facilitate linking of nodes. In this networked church, a leader's main purpose is to increase the purposeful links in people/nodes lives by facilitating increased access to teaching, resources, etc.

While Friesen doesn't offer insights on Christian communications, he raises some of the issues we have explored. Explaining what it means to be a person within a network, he writes about the objectification that often accompanies online relationships. Instead of experiencing the more humanistic "I & You" relationship, online connections offer a counterfeit, "I & it." As an example, a "friend" on Facebook is far from a real friend, though real friends can also be Facebook friends. While acknowledging the tenuous nature of some mediated relationships, Friesen raises no red flags. According to Friesen, networked life places higher value on the quantity of weak links than on the quality of genuine strong relationships.

Close personal relationships he characterizes as "rather few and far between" and are not to be the highest relational priority (51). Instead, he emphasizes the deeper relationship is with the God of the network, and is experienced collective within the network. Christians move beyond specific conceptions of self, and others as those people relate to the self. In this network they experience a new consciousness, "the open we." Relevant to our discussion is Friesen's recognition that conceptions of the self are transformed via mediated relationships. In many ways Friesen openly embraces the remediation of both church and Christian identity. His message doesn't represent a subtle, invisible, influence by media, but a wholesale, conscious, transformation into a new media inspired paradigm.

Earlier, we noted the democratizing effects of new media and the potential for disruption. When envisioning new roles for leadership in his connected paradigm, Friesen cheers the "flattening" of the hierarchical structures marking Christian formation for two thousand years. No longer would authority be intrinsically linked with leadership position and, presumably, education and ordination. Rather, authority is gained within the network through usefulness. Friesen extends his metaphor to offer a new view of Christian leadership that parallels Google. Few go to Google.com as a final destination. Rather, Google is a useful tool serving the network. This usefulness makes it the most powerful node on the Internet. In the networked church the pastor is not granted authority by calling, or by God, but by the number of useful links he/she provides in the life of the church.

Evangelical pastors and communicators reading *Thy Kingdom Connected* will encounter interesting ideas about nature of modern mediated life. What they might find surprising is Friesen's take on large changes effecting the Christian idea of self and community formation. He openly embraces these transformations without any concern or even mention of potentially disruptive effects on individuals, and churches. This points the potential for schisms within American Christianity brought about by new media. Some communities, such as the "emergents" are more willing to theologically adapt to changes in society

and communications technology. Others remain grounded in Christian Biblical, theological, oral, and literary traditions. Schisms such as this are nothing new. We need think only of the Pentecostal movement of the 20th century, and how resistance and ridicule eventually gave way to adoption of more dynamic worship styles within mainline and evangelical churches. Early adopters, such as Friesen, may be breaking ground on approaches to church that will be accepted and used throughout the broader Christian community.

Hipps, Shane. *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009.

Flickering Pixels stood out as one of the few books on media that I found on seminary syllabi. Shane Hipps is a pastor, speaker, filmmaker, and former advertising "consumer anthropologist"(12). His interest in media stems largely from his work in advertising, a field he characterizes as a "counterfeit gospel." His job was "to hijack your imagination, brand your brain with our logo, and then feed you opinions you thought were your own"(11). His experience exposed him to the immense power media has in shaping persons and culture. His book is written to make the hidden, embedded qualities of media perceptible:

> "Flickering pixels compose the screens of our life, from television to cell phones to computers. These screens, regardless of their content, change our brains, alter our lives, and shape our faith, all without our permission or knowledge. These pixels are only one example of the technologies that shape us. There are more—many more. It is only by shifting our attention that we area able to see them, and in so doing learn to *use them* rather than be used by them." (14)

Hipps sets his argument against a traditional evangelical instrumental approach to media, an approach where he argues, media is considered just a vehicle by which the gospel is carried. Hipps resists this view, arguing instead that media not only contorts the message but also the sender and the receiver.

To help make his argument, Hipps enlists familiar voices such as Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong. Though he tackles large subjects such as linguistics, literacy, the psychology of language, history etc., all is covered only superficially with the thinnest of glosses, as this is not a scholarly book.

To uncover the effects of media, Hipps traces writing technology across three epochs; oral, print, and electronic. He begins with writing development in China and Greece to argue fundamental differences between the "holistic and concrete" character-based languages of the East and the "linear, abstract and efficient" phonetic alphabet of the West. Building on this foundation, Hipps argues that the printing press was instrumental in opening Biblical theology to wider church. This happened because Christian communication was previously limited by images found in stained glass and these images couldn't successfully carry the complex, rational constructs of Paul's letters. The arrival of print led to a rewiring of the Christian concept of God, the gospel, the individual, and society along the lines of linear reasoning.

According to Hipps, print transformed the literate church to a more individualistic form of spirituality. The Christian in an oral culture expresses her faith communally as a part of church/tribe. Through quiet time, study, and reflection, the reading Christian express a faith that is far more individualistic:

> "Community in the print age has been understood primarily as a collection of discrete individuals working concurrently on their personal relationships with Jesus…Under the influence of the print age, our experience of faith gradually moves from something that is personal to something private" (57).

Channeling McLuhan, Hipps positions the modern Christian experience as an unsatisfactory hybrid of multiple eras of communication. For Hipps, this state is a negative, rather than a unique approach a necessary complexity for a tradition with traditions spanning millennia:

> "This is the paradox of the electronic age. In this sense it retrieves and combines the characteristics of two previous media eras. If oral culture is tribal, and literate culture is individual, the elec-

tronic age is essentially a tribe of individuals. This is a confused state of being in which we are thrown together from far-off places. We desire connection and community in our increasingly nomadic existence— yet we wander around the globe, glancing off other digital nomads without ever knowing or being known" (107).

Hipps touches on many concerns familiar to digital rhetorical studies; print-based literacy goals, digital divides, digital immigrants, anti-social Internet behavior, corporate exploitation, etc., in his critique of media. *Flickering Pixels* gives readers who are unfamiliar with digital rhetoric a critical lens for viewing personal and corporate use of new media. However, he offers no real communication strategies or solutions. Instead, he uses these eye-opening observations to reinforce personal and corporate piety along familiar themes. *Flickering Pixels* touches on most of the same key questions I ask of these experts. Though Hipps' goals are not toward increasing digital media literacy per se, he does raise important critical issues for his audience.

Rice, Jesse. *The Church of Facebook: How the Hyperconnected Are Redefining Community.* Colorado Spring, CO: David Cook, 2009.

Jesse Rice presents Facebook as a sociological phenomena, a new gathering space where hundreds of millions of people have joined over the past few years and are now operating their lives according to the rules and architecture of the platform. His thesis argues that Facebook:

- Synchronizes large populations and creates a new social structure
- As a new social structure, creates its own culture, customs, and conventions
- Obliges "affected populations to adapt their behavior" to accommodate its norms

Using a wide variety of expert anecdotes and study findings, Rice explores the attraction of Facebook and online social networking. He also highlights ways a mediated environment distorts presenta-

tions of the self, relationships, time, and reality. Rice then offers strategies to help Christians adapt to this new environment in ways consistent with Biblical values.

Rice links Facebook's growth to a basic human need to connect and to be known. Connection is a fundamental requirement for human health and well-being, as basic as food and shelter. Facebook offers people an easy connection mirroring traditional networks of friends, families, and neighbors. Another attractive quality of Facebook is the individualized profile page. Rice sees a parallel between a Facebook page and a home. "Home is where we keep stuff that matters to us"(76). Rice conceives it to be a place where people can put pictures of themselves and the things they love. They can tell others about their likes and dislikes, their political, and religious beliefs. They can customize it to be their home space. It is also like a home because it is where your friends and family come to visit you. Importantly, a Facebook page is like a home because you have a sense of control over what happens there. Through privacy controls, the composer of a Facebook page decides who to let in and who to exclude. There is also agency and control in what you post or write on your Facebook page. Finally, the composer creates a homelike space where they can "just be [them]selves." Rice says the platform allows you to post whatever you want with a sense of acceptance. Facebook is a place where your connected friends and family offer near instantaneous positive and affirming feedback. These last two attributes, control and affirmation feed directly into another of Facebook's attractions, the ability to control one's image.

Interestingly, Rice compares the Facebook page composition to self-portraiture. Again the issue is control. The self-portrait allows the creator to highlight their best features and diminish their worst. The artist can choose settings, props, and backdrops that make their lives seem full of interesting details. They can create total fictions as easily as they can present honest selves. I recall looking at my teenage children's Facebook pages and noticing the posed and plastic images they posted. They didn't reflect their actual day-to-day selves, which were often sulky, disheveled, and filled with teenage angst. Instead, they

presented pages that showed them living cool, happy, carefree, and exciting lives. Rice sees Facebook pages as vehicles for controlling one's image, as well as one's audience. This control gives the user a sense of wellbeing in keeping with exercising agency over our environment. However, in the case of Facebook, much of that well-being is lost because the options are too many. A lack of focus, and an abundance of weak relational links, can create a sense of detachment.

Rather than having meaningful friendships and relationships, Facebook friendships are limited, tenuous, and shallow. Rice explains how the types of relationships prominent on Facebook lead to a lack of agency, and well-being:

> "We can think of hyperconnection as the experience of having too much control—literally, *too many choices*—in regard to our interpersonal connections. Hyperconnection is to human relations hips what information overload is to our finite mental bandwidth. It's the deluge of relational connectedness that overwhelms our relational capacities" (101).

Rice cites anthropologist Robin Dunbar, who studied the limits of human social groups and found the number to be around 150. A preponderance of Facebook friends is not a true social group, but an "imaginary audience," or "invisible entourage" for whom people perform (111). For Rice, these outcomes are troubling:

> "The problem with this, of course, is that relationships routed in status seeking and public show-casing are composed entirely different DNA than those rooted in qualities such as emotional ma-turity and respectful boundaries" (113).

Rice argues "hyperconnectivity" fundamentally reorders relationship by creating new definitions and "boundaries." New boundaries are found in expectations surrounding privacy and attitudes toward authority. Personal identity is relocated from the interior thought life and relationships to others onto a mediated space. Time is shifted and therefore wasted for the "hyperconnected." New norms for peer and

romantic relationships are also being established. For Christians, boundaries and expectations for many of these relationships are defined within the Bible, and help make up the Christian experience. With that in mind, Rice offers readers a way to think about the changes or "adaptations" the media environments require, and concrete strategies for adapting in ways consistent with Christianity (119-130).

Beginning with ethical/moral terms such as responsibility, intentionality, humility and authenticity, Rice challenges Christians to rethink their online lives. He wants them to think deeply about the way they express themselves, and the relationships they share on Facebook to see if they meet certain criteria. This last part of the book deviates from what until now was an important, but not unique, critique of Facebook, toward a handbook for action. This reflects Selber's "rhetorical" criteria for technological *multiliteracy*. Rice suggests taking personal inventory of one's Facebook habits and content, and "adopting" one or two Facebook friends for deeper interaction each month. These habits are linked to Christian spiritual and social criteria. Through examples such as this, *The Church of Facebook* offers Christian leaders and users of Facebook critical tools to regain agency over the technology.

Schraeder, Tim and Kevin D. Hendricks, Eds. *Outspoken: Conversations on Church Communication.* Los Angeles, CA: Center for Church Communication, 2011

OutSpoken is more a collection of short essays, musings, and talking points. Each brief chapter is written by a different professional communicator and covers topics surrounding contemporary church communications. Most of the book is interested in topics of general communications such as branding, leadership, storytelling, etc. These subjects are off point for this thesis. Our focus is on the section of *Outspoken* devoted to the use of new media and technology. The essays are short, around 500 words, and much of the material is redundant. Instead of summarizing each one, I will comment on sections relevant to our understanding of *multiliteracy*.

Josh Burn's "The Internet Isn't Everything" touches on two important points. First, Internet communication isn't the best approach for every congregation. Recognizing digital divides, he encourages communicators to evaluate their specific church congregations, online habits before migrating communications. Second, he encourages redundant communications using a variety of media, including email, Facebook, print, signage, etc. Appreciating the siren song of efficiency present in computer-mediated communications, he writes, "Although it would save some money to kill the bulletin, it may not be right for your context" (119).

Jeremy Shiller's "Your Website Needs to Be a Billboard," is concerned with a functional approach to new media. His advice follows principles of good design, such as clarity, focus, block messaging, action-oriented language, and interactive features. It is consistent with good technical composition, but doesn't have any distinct Christian values or concerns.

John Saddington's "The Healthy Tension Between Church and Technology," acknowledges much of what this thesis explores. He capsulizes the problem as a tension between competing forces:

> "You see, although we want to move the church forward technologically (competing force1) we also want to keep the values and richness of our history and culture intact (competing force2). If this is a problem it's a good one to have" (124)!

For the Christian communicator, caught in this tension, Saddington suggests a focus on "craftsmanship" and "motivation." Craftsmanship means doing good work. Supposedly, this means making high-quality new media communication materials. This strategy overlooks many of the problems embedded in technology. For whom is the communication good? The church budget? The purveyor of the technology? The congregant? Each may have different needs/desires/interests. Saddington says the goals of the communication, reaching people with the Gospel, is a specific enough goal to govern the use of any

applicable tool. This approach reflects the instrumental view of media we have seen before and does not sufficiently factor in the power of media to shape the message, messenger, or audience.

In "The Role of New Media in the Future of the Church," Jim Gray also views new media as merely another tool. His emphasis, however, touches on one of the key strengths of new media, which is its ability to cut across space and time. He references passages of the Bible where Paul writes about receiving news that took a long time to transverse the Roman Empire. Gray encourages ministries to take advantage of specific new media's affordances, such as video streaming, to reach previously unreachable audiences. He gives the example of God Behind Bars, a prison ministry that streams "high-quality church services from some of America's premier churches to prisons all across America" (137). This ministry also offers solutions to prisoners such as addiction recovery. Tailoring technology to remediate Christian ministry in new and innovative ways is an example of churches exercising agency over new media.

Wilson, Len, and Jason Moore. *The Wired Church 2.0.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008.

Wilson's book is an argument against those who question the use of technology in churches. In the book's first paragraph, he recounts a statement made by a pastor at one of his seminars. The pastor said that there were times when images and video were not the best approach to communicating the weekly message, and there were even Sundays when "we don't even use the screen." Wilson's response to what seems like a moderate position, is to label this pastor, and those readers who agree with him as "iconoclast," a term he defines negatively. Wilson is clearly an advocate of new media, particularly visual presentations used in worship. He, along with his writing and business partner Moore, are video producers and "owners" of a ministry/business "to aid churches in ministry and digital culture." Mr. Wilson, the

primary author, also is an adjunct professor at Northwest Nazarene University, a seminar speaker, and writer.

The Wired Church 2.0 focuses on answering objections by those resistant to using media in worship and responding with a rationale for using media. The book gives practical and technical advise for ministries adopting media. Though the book's title suggests a discussion of web-based media, the book is really about is about video production used in worship services. This functional section of the book is the most successfully reasoned, organized, and written. Church communicators wanting incorporate video media, or create a media department would benefit from Wilson and Moore's experience. This thesis is more interested in the first few chapters, which are focused on the writers' thinking about media. Sadly, this part of the book is very poorly structured and even difficult to follow. The authors offer a mishmash of truisms, overstatements, random facts, and communication catchphrases, laced with Biblical quotes and confusing contradictory assertions. These do not hold together as a cohesive argument for new media use. However, they do offer some interesting ways at looking media for the Christian communicators.

The most compelling aspect of *The Wired Church 2.0*, from the perspective of this thesis, is found in chapter three "The Shape of This Cultural Language." This chapter follows their assertion that media serves the church in four forms. Media serves as art, as information, as mission/evangelism, and as a cultural language (11-17). The authors' take on the first three categories is somewhat confusing. First, they explain the role of media in each area of church life, but then they seem to denigrate and dismiss each use as ineffectual and unimportant. They seem to do this to set up what they see as the real purpose of media in the church. It is the language of our age (18). Here they conflate film making with all other visual forms of media to advance their claim that visuals are superior to text in telling stories. They present the postmodern world as one that desires images, as opposed to print, or orality.

> "In the mass print age, storytelling took a backseat to more formal symbiotic relationships. But the twenty-first century has seen a resurgence of the metaphor as a communication tool"(19).

This statement seemingly impressive statement does not hold up to scrutiny. Clearly literature has had much to say about storytelling and metaphor for the past 500 years. While many of their arguments are unconvincing and even confusing, I think a pastor could take away a valuable lesson from some of their insights. New media, including all of its visual, aural, and connective affordances, is a rising cultural language. Its forms and conventions are growing in recognition, use, and acceptance. When a pastor uses a Facebook screenshot, or Twitter quote to augment her lesson she demonstrates an ethos of relevance and contemporariness. As these media become more and more the platforms we use to communicate, Christian ministry will need to become "fluent" in their use and appearance to avoid being considered anachronistic by their audiences. Will these "languages" push out previous forms of preaching and communicating? Not likely. However, new synthesis between older and new forms of media will become the norm. Wilson and Moore showed insight in pointing this out.

5.4 *Summary*

None of the expert's books succinctly addressed the concepts contained in *multiliteracy* as defined by this thesis. However, together they offer glimpses and critiques containing many of the issues and points. These include the remediation of the self and the community, psychological and spiritual effects of mediated relationships, and ways media impacts the Christian message. Clearly, church communicators are beginning to wrestle with new media and its impact on their content, delivery, and audience.

Expert writers make up an extremely important resource for church leaders as they implement media. Media convergence is an evolving transformation. With mobile devices expected to outstrip conventional computers as the interfaces of new media content, the conventions of this new writing environ-

ment are still shifting. As media literacy becomes more normalized and written about in education, business, journalism, and other non-religious sectors of society, these experts will be the conduits that make these conventions accessible and relevant to their audience.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Media convergence has complicated the task of effective composition inside and outside of academia. While it is easy to call for new literacy programs to address arriving technologies, careful analysis reveals literacy to be a complex construct with multiple definitions, criteria, conventions and sources. Literacy is not merely a simply defined set of skills for students to learn. It is a multi-faceted set of cultural values, psychological operations, technological adaptations and social interactions mirroring all the vicissitudes of human interaction. There is no single literacy. Rather, we see literacies at work. Economic literacy is different from cultural literacy, though they may overlap. When composing texts, multi-modality makes computers different from print, and different from orality, yet retains elements of both. Within different social groups there exist different sets of boundaries, conventions, and texts that define the group. People often need to shift between those groups, and therefore those literacies. (Barton 34) Those spheres, groups, and technologies can all be seen as sponsors of specific literacies. These sponsors, according to Brandt (358), set and maintain the definitions and practices found within that particular literacy, and profit from that role. This thesis examined how two of these sponsors, new media and evangelical churches, interact, compete, and shape one another and by extension, the literacies, and how this might impact the people practicing Christianity during this time of convergence.

Composition scholars see don't see digital writing platforms as benign instruments. Instead they shape not only new media texts, but also the way the writers think and interact with language, knowledge, society, and even themselves. Teaching digital composition means developing strategies for making the transparent controls and values embedded in the technology apparent (Selfe and Selfe 481-485). Stuart Selber's elegantly conceived approach involves breaking the task of new media literacy into three interconnected constituent elements. Writers of new media need *functional literacy* to have the requisite technical skills to write. They also need *critical literacy* to make the technologies' values transparent, and

therefore less controlling. Finally, these writers need *rhetorical literacy* to effectively shape their compositions into texts that serve their personal and social goals. These three empower the writer, wresting agency from complex technological systems and sponsors and restoring it to the composer of texts (25-29). These three literacies become a model lens through which to view new media literacy and communication. They help separate technological influence from human influence when looking at how churches are using new media to further their goals.

Churches, like other religious and non-religious institutions, have specific values, worldviews, traditions, and texts that define them as communities and make them important in the lives of individuals. This also makes them sponsors of a specific literacy (Brandt 360). As a sponsor, churches profit in some way by establishing and maintaining the parameters of this literacy. This profit need not be exploitative. It can merely be the continuation of an institution that members find beneficial. Evangelical churches have an established literacy that shapes reality and perceptions. Interestingly, many of these literacies are directly tied to one of the great technological shifts, the arrival of print. Practices such as Bible study, quiet meditation, the shift toward preaching over ritual performance, theology over tradition, and de-emphasized visual elements in architecture, came with the arrival of print and coincide with the Protestant Reformation (Horsfield 169-175). More democratic and decentralized control found in church governance reflects shifts facilitated by print and the spread of ideas. Two of the institutions examined in this thesis, a seminary education and Christian books, are based in print culture. Scholars also point to shifts in fundamental concepts such as the way we understand God, authority, and perceptions of the self, as being influenced by the expansion of reading and writing. All of these help define the evangelical church and are maintained through an accompanying literacy that is heavily invested in print culture, as well as oral traditions such as preaching and teaching (Eisenstein 311-367).

New media comes with its own set of values and practices. The interconnectivity of the Internet exposes users to a myriad of ideas, cultures, and truth claims. New media content bubbles up from these sources making it far more democratic than books. The ideas of authorship and authoritative knowledge are being renegotiated through open-source platforms and crowd sourcing. Powerful commercial, political, and social institutions, such as Amazon.com, Wikileaks, and Facebook exist in virtual spaces without brick and mortar analogues. People, too, are undergoing shifts in the way they perceive themselves, their personal agency, the communities they form, and their place in societies. Affiliation need not follow previous borders of geography, language, space and time. This shift is disruptive to governments, business, and cultural institutions alike. The evangelical church is not immune. Complicating this issue is an evolving set of writing and reading conventions shifting upon fast-changing digital platforms. These platforms contain affordances, such as video, audio, graphical representation, powerful computational function, position tracking, etc. Texts are malleable, combining these affordances. Audiences are not fixed, nor are contexts. It is a challenging environment for effective communication even without conflicting values systems.

Churches using new media negotiate their messages in an environment that in many distinct ways are antithetical to their values. Evangelical Christianity has an exclusive message about the nature of God, man, and reality. Evangelical Christianity authority arises from a precise interpretation of ancient texts. Evangelical Churches are hierarchical. They are dependent on immediate social interaction. They have moral values that conflict with other worldviews. They have established authoritative educational and denominational institutions to conserve, maintain, and propagate these values, most of which are products of the print age. Each of these is subject to disruption by interconnected new media. Beyond that, computer technology is an extension of capitalistic enterprises that are often in conflict with spiritual and social values emphasized by religion. Using these communication platforms often means subjugating hu-

manistic activity to the economic goals of the creators and sponsors of the technology. As sponsors of specific literacies, new media and evangelical churches have potential points of competition and conflict (Selfe 49).

Evangelical Christianity is dependent on communication. It is a religion built around a message, not an ethnicity, or a location. Shrinking back from new media is not a viable option. Churches gain agency over new communication technology through creating a new literacy. Through their own approaches to new media they resist values that threaten their mission, while embracing values and affordances that are compatible and beneficial. Christian education, whether in seminary or through expert supplemental materials, is the vehicle by which unique perspectives and approaches to using technology are disseminated. This study sees this demonstrated in the examples examined.

NorthPoint.org is a sophisticated and innovative approach to church structure, community and ministry. Taking advantage of web-based solutions, it links members and affiliates in new and previously impossible ways. Their approach raises many questions about how ministry is being transformed by technology. What changes do established categories of ministry undergo as they are remediated to new media platforms? How do leaders facilitate a sense of community, and is it scalable, or does it have limits based on proximity? How do remote audiences interact with video content? What rhetorical strategies are employed by content creators to ensure meaningful communication? How are commercial and secular values shaping the church through embedded values in the platform? Answering these questions would require more intensive research techniques. What is gleaned through our survey is a picture of a church grappling with new technologies. Every traditional category of ministry is represented on NorthPoint.org. In migrating ministry, in creating new approaches, through trial and error, they are exploring the potential of computer-mediated communication to serve a church. This is part of a feedback loop, where other ministries

study and copy the NorthPoint example. Where books are written about NorthPoint's approach. These activities are beneficial to establishing a unique evangelical approach to new media literacy.

The survey of seminary communication classes revealed an approach to new media that was uneven and even deficient. Only one class, at Candler, offered a scholarly approach to new media touching on key issues about how media affects message and community. Sadly, that class is only an elective taught in a two-week summer session. None of the seminaries offered core classes covering what we identify as critical to understanding media from a functional, critical, or rhetorical literacy perspective. The classes taught took a highly instrumental approach to media, one we have determined is ill equipped to resist the power media have to change message, perception, and community. Pastors with this view will face difficulty making critical choices about platforms, content, and social media. Instead, they might defer to "tech" people on staff, or under contract, to make those decisions. This diminishes the role of pastor in shaping the message and community. It also sets up potential conflict between religious authorities and those who have the expertise to implement technology. A communications class in seminary has the potential to introduce the issues put forth by scholars such as Stuart Selber, and help seminarians to begin creating approaches to new media use. In seminary's defense, the ability to read and write has been a given for incoming students. As a post-graduate school, they've had every reason to expect incoming students to be "literate." This expectation made sense when writing was limited to print. Media convergence has complicated the meaning of literacy, and therefore the expectations should shift. Not only are the core competencies different from print, new media brings many potentially disruptive elements. As co-sponsors of an essential literacy tradition, seminaries must adapt to ensure the continuation of core values.

Taken as a whole, the expert books I examined touched on nearly all of the salient issues this thesis identified. However, none capsulated all of the points we have made about the influence of these technologies on church because only one of the authors had an educational background that would expose

them to the critical scholarship in this thesis. Composition studies' approach to digital rhetoric is a relatively new field. It will take time for critical theories and approaches similar to *multiliteracy* to become a standard approach. Still, key issues such as shifts in perception of the self, community formation, difficulties in making communication effective, and potentially disruptive outcomes linked to technology, were all covered. A discussion is underway between Christian leaders about new media. As that discourse, gathers momentum it will yield distinctly Christian approaches.

Taken together these three analyses reveal a growing awareness among Christian leaders about how new media affects church formation and communication. The shoots are still green but there is an emerging literacy that seeks to reform new media into forms useful to Christian ministry. This is to be expected. Scholars have shown us the interplay between individuals, texts, and sponsors of literacy. These relationships shape the way people access and create communication. It is not a top-down pedagogical campaign, but rather a recursive process as people access literacies that are important to their goals, and sponsors profit from establishing and promoting their particular texts and approaches (Brandt *Literacy in American Lives 19)*. That is what is going on in this community. Technology promises increased reach, efficiency, and immediacy to church ministries; all things they desire. As they access these benefits they come in contact with less desirable aspects, such as loss of control, potential disruption, and commercialization. How to gain the good while mitigating the bad becomes the challenge. Answering that question, through theory and praxis, yields a new approach. A new literacy is emerging and being shaped by new media and the Christian communicators using it.

This study affirms approaches to literacy that recognize the many facets of students' lives beyond the classroom, the challenge new media presents to effectively communicating in diverse situations, and the need to impart critical and rhetorical understandings to underpin "lifeworld" activities in a shifting media landscape (New London Group). Scholars such as Wysocki and Coley raise concerns about teach-

ing composition with a wider view of the student's life beyond the academy. This study examines an aspect of composition as it exists in a particular sphere of life. Teachers should avoid a myopic view of writing that meets only the demands of the classroom, or of academic discourse. Studies like this help illustrate the rich variety of writing situations and some of the difficulties different rhetorical and technological scenarios bring to digital composers. Making the writing relevant to a student's whole life increases the saliency, efficacy, and ethicality of our classrooms.

This study also reinforces the need for teaching new media in a comprehensive manner that goes far beyond technical competency. Feenberg points toward the necessity of critical thinking skills that empower the student to understand technology as it relates to, and is under the agency of, humanity. Stuart Selber's approach goes beyond Feenberg to give teachers a roadmap for teaching the critical skills alongside requisite competencies. This study reveals this to be a role particularly suited to composition classrooms, and currently beyond the understandings of seminaries, even though communication is central to their educational mission. Further studies might reveal similar difficulties with new media for other postgraduate institutions, such as law, medicine, or business schools. Historically, these fields have counted on candidates who are "literate." Now, due to convergence, many students are arriving unprepared to create effective and relevant communication. As Paul Levinson points out, the technology of writing is changing rapidly, more rapidly than curricula in English programs, which, of course, leads other disciplines. Students need a framework to approach composition as it exists on digital platforms. This study shows these deficiencies in real world settings, and points back to the rhetoric and composition for solutions.

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