

Whose Turf Is It, Anyway?

Supplement to William Hagenbuch's symposium presentation

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Pablo Picasso is known for saying, "Everything you can imagine is real." If this is true (or as this continues to become true), then where should the church imagine? Now that we are literally in a new age of connection, what conversations does theology need to initiate with technology?

To begin, share an honest assessment with your congregation's leadership as you prayerfully consider this question: Who do we exclude when we share that "All are welcome"?

For many, a deeper question rests under the surface. What, really, are we afraid of losing?

All my research points to the well-understood notion that live, in-person conversations are best. As more and more generations interface with technology earlier in life (a three-year-old can order from Amazon, for example), what will connections and conversations mean a year from now, when hopefully we live lives post COVID-19? At the exponential rate that technology advances, what will connections be like ten years from now? I suggest these two questions be answered by the seminaries we love and the congregations we serve.

I "met" many wonderful authors, contributors, and futurists when researching my 2020 major project. In order, these are six citations stand alone. No more info before or after these is needed. Each author offers a window into the work we are called to do as we go and make disciples (Matthew 28:19).

We have to turn church into the crossroad of life.... We have to reinvent ways to connect with each other so that we give to each other the gifts that we are... Church isn't the sort of thing you can go to. You can be the church, you can become the church, you can even do church, but you can't go to church... You're the church whenever you're with other Christians in such a way that you depend on each other enough that to do it you have to die to yourself. In that situation and almost only in that situation, can you love each other, serve each other, live in unity....This sort of life doesn't happen mostly in buildings with steeples but in the street, at home, at work, in the creation of art, on the telephone, while you babysit, change people's oil or eat together.[1]

John F. Alexander and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *Being Church: Reflections on How to Live as the People of God* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 30–31.

While unchurched Americans are likely to own a Bible and have spent some time reading it, they are generally not attracted to or compelled by what they have been exposed to in God's Word. For some this is due to a lack of tools for interpreting the content. Maybe they are confused about different interpretations they have heard in various churches. Perhaps they own a translation that is hard to understand. Some of them simply ignore the Bible because they have not been exposed to practical

applications.... The bottom line is, the Bible is generally accepted as legitimate religious literature but not as a useful life resource.

George Barna and David Kinnaman, eds., *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 2014), 59.

When church is equated with a meeting that meets in a building at a particular time, it implicitly leads to a split between church life and the rest of life, thereby creating a sacred/secular divide. Directly and indirectly, Christians can be led into thinking that the church meeting is the primary spiritual activity of their lives, thus creating a secular sphere.

Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2005), 101.

Because Christian worship's foundational materiality is the bodies of worshippers, these misgivings must not be taken lightly. A first step in responding to them is to point out that in fact no digital world can be entered, no website accessed, and no app installed without a body. Thus, digitally mediated practices too are bodily practices.

Teresa Berger, @ *Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 18.

We're in the most exciting time to be church, and the most exciting time to share the gospel and live the gospel—and social media is making that possible. What social media has done is made this far-flung world of people very, very intimate, very close, very accessible. My deepest hope and prayer is that people are really starting to get that.... We're at the point where people are understanding that this is a very valuable tool. It's here to stay.... The conversation I like to be in with people is [that social media presents us with] very valuable tools. How are we going to use them? How are you going to use them? How are you going to think strategically about who you're going to reach, and then how do you think tactically about how to reach them? The tools you plug in later.

Meredith Gould, "Social Media Is a Tool for Evangelism," October 29, 2013, The Episcopal Diocese of Texas video, 16:37, <https://vimeo.com/78111049>.

In an increasingly secular culture, we must be able to lead seekers to an authentic encounter with God, or they will look somewhere else. The old paradigm taught that if you have the right teaching, you will experience God. The new paradigm says that if you experience God, you will have the right teaching.

E. Byron Anderson, ed., *Worship Matters*, vol. 1, *A United Methodist Guide to Ways to Worship* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1999), 20–21.

I welcome hearing from you following the symposium and into the future. Please contact me with questions, reservations, frustrations, contributions and food. Definitely food. I am a foster-to-adopt dad of 5 who range in age from 7 to almost 2. Those little ones? Yes, they can eat!

Blessings to you as God calls you to beautiful ministries now and into the future.