

THE MEDIUM AND THE MISSION:  
HOW CAN THE CHURCH FAITHFULLY FULFILL HER  
MISSION IN THE DIGITAL AGE?

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## Introduction

According to a recent report by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, “The vast majority of teens in the United States—eighty-seven percent of those aged twelve to seventeen—now use the internet.”<sup>1</sup> Teens and Gen Y are leading the transition to a wired nation, with the average teen now spending more time on-line (seventeen hours a week) than watching television (fourteen hours a week.)<sup>2</sup>

An explosion of Internet usage has become the defining characteristic of the twenty-first century, yet how many Christ followers comprehend the life-shaping power of the Internet as a medium? Too often we are told that *only* the message or the content matters and that the medium itself is neutral. This paper will contend that when the church holds this position, she is in danger of letting the medium subvert her mission.

Many people believe that the medium or method is neutral and only the content or message is vital. For example, General David Sarnoff, in an address at the University of Notre Dame, argued that “We are too prone to make technological instruments the scapegoats for the sins of those who wield them. The products of modern science are not

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<sup>1</sup> Amanda Lenhart, Mary Madden, and Paul Hitlin, “Teens and Technology: Youth Are Leading the Transition to a Fully Wired and Mobile Nation,” *Pew Internet & American Life Project*, 5 October 2005 [pdf]; available from [http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/162/report\\_display.asp](http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/162/report_display.asp); Internet; accessed 6 April 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Nia Williams, “Science and Technology 2: Spending More Time Online,” *Kids News Room*, 1 August 2003 [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.kidsnewsroom.org/newsissues/072503/index.asp?page=Science2>; accessed 24 May 2006.

in themselves good or bad; it is the way they are used that determines their value.”<sup>3</sup> Many Christian leaders have repeated this idea. Rick Warren, named as one of the most influential pastors in the United States by *Time* magazine,<sup>4</sup> stated in *The Purpose Driven Church* that “The message must never change, but the methods must change with each new generation.”<sup>5</sup> In considering these statements, we must recognize that as Christians we often uncritically adapt new technology to fulfill the mission of the church while forgetting the potential undermining effect of the medium on our mission.

Marshall McLuhan, a Christian who spent his life studying the effects of media, stated in his book *The Medium Is the Massage*, “societies have always been shaped more by the nature of media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication.”<sup>6</sup> To emphasize this idea, McLuhan coined the famous aphorism “the medium is the message.”<sup>7</sup> McLuhan contended that we are often blind to the ways the

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<sup>3</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 11.

<sup>4</sup> David Biema and others, “The 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America,” *Time*, 30 January 2005 [magazine on-line]; available from <http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101050207/index.html>; accessed 24 May 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 62.

<sup>6</sup> Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), 8.

<sup>7</sup> McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 7.

medium shapes us, and a number of Christians who have thoughtfully engaged in the study of technology would agree.<sup>8</sup>

If the medium is the message and the Internet is continuing to expand exponentially in usage, then the church cannot afford to sit in the dark any longer. Indeed, the Internet as a medium represents both dangers and advantages for the church.

However, to determine the potential risks and benefits of this technology, we must ask: How can the church benefit from the collective wisdom of those who have thoughtfully reflected on this technology? How can we critically analyze the opportunities and dangers of recent Internet technology?

If the church is to faithfully fulfill her mission in the digital age, she must develop an approach to media that reflects the wisdom of the experts. This paper presents a plan for this. First, by summarizing the thoughts of McLuhan, Miller, and Levinson, I will examine the hidden power of the medium.<sup>9</sup> Second, by following in the footsteps of McLuhan, Levinson, and, most recently, Hipps, I will provide a demonstratable way for the church to better assess the dangers and opportunities of recent Internet technology as it relates to her mission. Finally, using the advice of experts Borgmann and Dawn, I will

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<sup>8</sup> Christian works that argue we have become blind to the medium of technology include Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Bluff* (Grand Rapids: Eermans Publishing, 1990); Marva Dawn's *Unfettered Hope* (Louisville: Westminster John Know Press, 2003); Albert Borgmann's *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 1984) and *Power Failure* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press 2003); and Shane Hipps's *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> I am indebted here to Marshall McLuhan and Shane Hipps.

examine how the church can engage in crucial counterforces by identifying focal concerns and appropriate practices, thereby permitting the church to live in the culture of technology without allowing the medium to subvert her mission.<sup>10</sup>

## **The Nature of Media**

### Media as an Extension

McLuhan understood that when we create tools our tools re-create us. Technology and media are, therefore, extensions of humans. As such, we must critically examine the power of media. McLuhan noted,

All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered. The medium is the message. Any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments. All media are extensions of some human faculty—psychic or physical. The wheel is an extension of the foot. The book is an extension of the eye, clothing an extension of the skin, electric circuitry an extension of the central nervous system. Media, by altering the environment, evoke in us unique ratios of sense perceptions. The extension of any one sense alters the way we think and act—the way we perceive the world. When these ratios change, men change.<sup>11</sup>

Take the car for example. The car is an extension of the foot. The medium of the car has profoundly shaped cities. Cities developed prior to the invention of the car tend to be centralized and cover small areas of land. Cities like Los Angeles, whose boom years happen to coincide with the invention of the car, tend to be polycentric and cover

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<sup>10</sup> Albert Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 22. Borgmann was the first to use the phrase “crucial counterforces.”

<sup>11</sup> McLuhan and Fiore, *Medium Is the Massage*, 26–41.

much larger areas of land. You could comfortably fit the land areas of San Francisco, Manhattan, Boston, Minneapolis, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, St. Louis and Milwaukee into the city limits of Los Angeles with space to spare. The medium of the car is significant. People created cars and cars have in turn re-shaped cities.

### The Medium Is the Message

Many have repeated the idea that the medium is neutral and only the content of the medium is important. Yet McLuhan, in his book *Understanding Media*, gives numerous examples of how the medium shapes us in significant ways. Near the beginning of the first chapter he stated, “. . . the personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology.”<sup>12</sup> McLuhan shared how different forms of media have significantly shaped humankind; for example, print media caused humans to become more detached and more logical, and the electric media caused people to become involved and participatory in the whole of humankind. Regarding the invention of the machine, he stated, “In terms of the ways in which the machine altered our relations to one another and to ourselves, it mattered not the least whether it turned out cornflakes or Cadillac’s. The restructuring of human work and association was shaped by the technique of fragmentation that is the essence of machine technology.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 8.

McLuhan, with this example and many others, consistently points us to the fact that technology is not neutral. The invention of machine technology changes us, as much as what we produce from the machines, if not more. Our behavioral patterns and way of life are altered according to the technology we create and utilize; new media creates new kinds of people. Part of the reason the media shapes us significantly is because people tend to focus more on the content than the medium. This is why McLuhan said, “Our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they are used that counts, *is the numb stance of the technological idiot*. For the “content” of a medium is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind.”<sup>14</sup> His observation is that while most people are focused on the juicy piece of meat, (content) the burglar (medium) is already at work.

Rex Miller, in his book *The Millennium Matrix*, also acknowledged the life-shaping power of the medium. After twenty-five years of researching social change throughout history, Miller found that the best way to organize the major societal shifts over time was by considering the dominant medium of the age. Miller stated,

The Millennium Matrix builds on the premise that when the primary means of storing and distributing information changes, our worldview changes. Here’s how this works. When our means of storing and distributing information change, our perceptions change. Changed perceptions create changed understandings and even changed psychology. Changed identity affects relationships. Changed relationships affect the traditions and institutions that support those relationships. These changes eventually reach a cultural critical mass, igniting a battle between old and new worldviews. Communication is the medium for relationship,

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<sup>14</sup> McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 18.

community, and culture; so a more efficient or powerful tool of communication results in their restructuring.<sup>15</sup>

Miller presented a twenty-three-page Millennium Matrix chart in his book, which indicated changes in how we believe, how we know, how we live together, how we see beauty, and how we work and trade. Miller contended that there have been four different eras defined by the media of the day, including oral, print, broadcast, and digital eras. The ancient world, which Miller dated from the time of the earliest humans to A.D. 1500, was primarily formed by oral communication. The modern world, from A.D. 1500–1950, was shaped by print. The postmodern world, from 1950–2010, is fashioned by the broadcast. Finally, the convergent world, from 2010 forward, will be shaped by digital media.<sup>16</sup> In other words, digital media will be dominant form of communication. Miller’s point is that our lives are shaped by the medium of the day in ways that often go unperceived by those living during that time.

To make this same point, Eric McLuhan makes reference to Jacques Ellul’s book *Propaganda*, saying that “Ellul explains that the basic conditioning or shaping of populations is done, not by programs for various media, but by the media themselves, and by the very language that we take for granted.”<sup>17</sup> He quotes Ellul as stating, “Direct propaganda, aimed at modifying opinions and attitudes, must be preceded by propaganda

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<sup>15</sup> Rex Miller, *The Millennium Matrix: Reclaiming the Past, Reframing the Future of the Church* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2004), X.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 95–118.

<sup>17</sup> Marshall McLuhan and Eric McLuhan, *Laws of Media: The New Science* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 114.



that is sociological in character, slow, general, seeking to create a climate, an atmosphere of favorable preliminary attitudes.”<sup>18</sup>

While McLuhan understood that the content does indeed matter, he was trying to draw our attention to what often goes unnoticed—the power of the medium to create an environment that in turn shapes us in ways that are hard to detect. As McLuhan noted, “Environments are not passive wrappings, but are, rather, active processes which are invisible. The groundrules [*sic*], pervasive structure, and over-all patterns of environments elude easy perception.”<sup>19</sup>

It’s like the old argument of nature versus nurture: which one shapes us more? They both shape us. Despite the fact that people tend to believe this adage, they are often blind to it when it comes to the issue of medium versus message. The church must open her eyes to the power of the medium by assessing the dangers and opportunities of recent Internet technology. One way to do this is through the “laws of media.”

### Understanding the Laws of Media

Near the end his life, McLuhan worked on a full-length book about the laws of media, knowing they had the ability to awaken people to the media’s hidden power. Before he could finish, he suffered a major stroke in September 1979.<sup>20</sup> Seven years after

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<sup>18</sup> McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws of Media*, 18.

<sup>19</sup> McLuhan and Fiore, *Medium Is the Massage*, 68.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Levinson, *Digital McLuhan: A Guide to the Information Millennium* (London: Routledge, 1999), 188.

McLuhan articulated these four laws in a magazine article, Eric McLuhan studied his father's notes and completed the full manuscript.

Eric McLuhan, like his father, believed that “serious artists are the antennae of the race.”<sup>21</sup> He noted how T.S. Elliot made this same point regarding Dante, suggesting that “A great poet or a serious artist should be able to perceive or distinguish more clearly than ordinary men the forms and objects within the range of ordinary experience and ‘be able to make men see and hear more at each end’ of the spectrum of their sensibility than they could ever notice without his help.”<sup>22</sup>

The four laws of media can act as an “antennae” for the church to understand the hidden power of the Internet. The four laws, stated below, are in the form of questions. When the church asks the right questions, she will be better able to discern the proper vocation of any medium. However, “They can be asked by anyone, anywhere, at any time, about any human artifact [technology].”<sup>23</sup>

### **1. What Does the Medium *Extend*?**

Every medium is an extension of humanity; the car is an extension of the foot, the shovel is an extension of the hand, and the book is an extension of the eye.

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<sup>21</sup> McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws of Media*, 6.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

## **2. What Does the Medium *Diminish or Make Obsolete*?**

When we progress in one area, we tend to regress in another. This doesn't mean that the former medium completely disappears. For example, the stove replaced the open fire, but we still cook over open fires when we grill or camp. The use of the open fire has simply diminished. The open fire went from being the primary mode of cooking to being a secondary method, used more for pleasure than necessity.

## **3. What Does the Medium *Retrieve*?**

Not only does each medium both extend and amputate something, it also retrieves something from the past. Hipps described this well:

Every new medium retrieves some ancient experience or medium from the past. In other words, there is no such thing as a completely new technology. When we discover which medium is retrieved, we can study its effects in hindsight in an effort to anticipate the future of the new medium. For example, the medium of e-mail retrieves the telegraph. If we want to understand the future effects of e-mail, we would be wise to study the cultural effects of the telegraph in the 1800's.<sup>24</sup>

## **4. What Does the Medium *Revert to or Become When Pressed to an Extreme*?**

When a car is pressed to the extreme, it creates pollution, traffic, and car accidents. The pleasure of drinking alcohol pressed to the extreme can become depression and hangovers.

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<sup>24</sup> Hipps, *Hidden Power of Electronic Culture*, 41.

This tetrad of questions was McLuhan's way to "gauge the health, status, heartbeat, [and] prognosis of our media."<sup>25</sup> Hipps reminded us that

New questions serve to move our minds beyond traditional ways of thinking. This is why McLuhan framed his Laws of Media as questions rather than statements. This is not an analytic activity but one that demands creativity, synthesis, and openness. Our media presents us with an array of questions and no clear answers. McLuhan knew our cultural context was always changing, so the methods he used to investigate and analyze culture were quite unconventional. Decades ago he said: "In a global information environment, the old pattern of education in answer-finding is one of no avail . . . Survival and control will depend on the ability to probe and to question in the proper way and place . . . the need is not for fixed concepts but rather for the ancient skill of navigating through an ever uncharted and unchartable milieu. Else we will have no more control of this technology and environment than we have of the wind and the tides."<sup>26</sup>

As the church starts to use this ancient skill of navigation, she can analyze recent Internet technology as it relates to her mission.

### **Understanding Recent Internet Technology**

#### Web 2.0

When it comes to defining "recent Internet technology," I am talking about Web 2.0. Though there is not a full consensus on how to define Web 2.0, Wikipedia states, "Web 2.0 refers to a second generation of services on the World Wide Web that let people collaborate and share information online. In contrast to the first generation, Web 2.0 gives users an experience closer to desktop applications than the traditional static

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<sup>25</sup> Levinson, *Digital McLuhan*, 17.

<sup>26</sup> Hipps, *Hidden Power of Electronic Culture*, 42, 43.

Web pages.”<sup>27</sup> The term was popularized by Tim O’Reilly of O’Reilly Media,<sup>28</sup> who gives a number of examples of Web 2.0 as opposed to Web 1.0 (see table 1).

Table 1. Web 2.0 versus Web 1.0

<b>Web 1.0</b>	<b>Web 2.0</b>
Personal Websites →	Blogging
Britannica Online →	Wikipedia
Ofoto →	Flickr
Directories (taxonomy) →	Tagging (“folksonomy”)

*Source:* Adapted from Tim O’Reilly, “What Is Web 2.0?” *O’Reilly*, [www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html](http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html) (accessed April 6, 2006).

While it is helpful to have a basic understanding of Web 2.0, it is even more important to examine specific forms of Web 2.0, such as social networks. This following example will demonstrate how the church can critically assess current and new technology as it relates to her mission.

### Understanding Social Networks

As of 2005, Wikipedia reported that there are over three hundred known social networking Web sites.<sup>29</sup> Some of the most well-known sites include MySpace, Xanga,

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<sup>27</sup> *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Web 2.0,” 5 June 2006 [encyclopedia on-line]; available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web\\_2](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2) Internet; accessed 6 April 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Tim O’Reilly, “What is Web 2.0?” *O’Reilly*, 30 September 2005 [magazine on-line]; available from <http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html>; accessed 6 April 2006.

<sup>29</sup> *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Social Network Service,” 26 May 2006 [encyclopedia on-line]; available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Online\\_social\\_network](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Online_social_network); accessed 6 April 2006.

and Friendster. Perhaps the most defining element of a social network is that it enables people to experience virtual community as they build a list of friends (who may at first be strangers) and share various information with each other. Most sites enable users to share pictures, music, and comments. Members can join interest groups, have a blog, and send mass e-mails to their friends. The sites are used for promoting events, bands, services, and most anything. Because of the variety of mediums that are available in many social networks, you might say that social networks are the “queen” of Web 2.0 technology, for social networks have the ability to synthesize all that is available on the Web.

While there are a growing variety of social networks, by far the most popular is MySpace. To get a sense of how the church can use McLuhan’s tetrad of questions, let us analyze MySpace with the goal of understanding the medium as it relates to the mission.

#### An Overview of MySpace

According to Wikipedia, MySpace has just over eighty million registered accounts, making it the largest English-language social networking Web site in the world and the fifth-largest Web site of any kind in the world.<sup>30</sup> According to Wikipedia, “MySpace is a social networking website offering an interactive network of blogs, sign in user profiles, groups, photos and an internal e-mail system.”<sup>31</sup> MySpace is particularly popular in contemporary teenage culture.

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<sup>30</sup> *Wikipedia*, s.v. “MySpace,” 6 June 2006 [encyclopedia on-line]; available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MySpace>; accessed 10 May 2006.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

### Applying McLuhan's Tetrad to MySpace

The church can learn much as we apply McLuhan's tetrad to MySpace. The way McLuhan and his son presented the tetrads was "in appositional, poetic form,"<sup>32</sup> possibly to heighten the simultaneous versus sequential process of discovering the effects.<sup>33</sup> As a student of the process, I will follow their lead. It doesn't matter how you read this poetic form; you can start and end anywhere. Figure 1 represents my reflection on the different sources I've studied. It is designed to help analyze what we tend to overlook.

Global Village Social Connecting Networking Variety of Ways to Connect Speed of Connection	Identity Fraud Disembodied Community Disincarnate People Blurring of Business and Pleasure Blurring of Work and Arte Blurring of Public and Private Behavior Blurring of Childhood and Adulthood
<b>ENHANCES</b>	<b>REVERSES INTO</b>
<b>RETRIEVES</b>	<b>OBSOLESCE</b> (Amputates or Diminishes)
Village-like Encounters Participation Decentralization Independent Artist Literacy Connection with old Friends	The Walls of the House Space and Time Judgment (What is real?) Mass Culture (No Gatekeepers) Nation-State Allegiance Local Neighborhood

Fig. 1 The tetrad applied to MySpace

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<sup>32</sup> McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws of Media*, 99.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

While this analysis is admittedly incomplete, it demonstrates how the church through the right questions can analyze recent Internet technology in light of her mission. McLuhan's laws of science enable the church to pay attention to the life-shaping forces of the medium itself. As Postman stated, "No medium is excessively dangerous if its users understand what its dangers are. It is not important that those who ask the questions arrive at my answers or Marshall McLuhan's. This is an instance in which the asking of the questions is sufficient. To ask is to break the spell."<sup>34</sup>

The popularity of MySpace and other social networks has spawned even more virtual communities. Because building community is a significant part of the mission of the church, she should be aware of the dangers and opportunities this medium entails as it relates to this aspect of her mission. Joshua Meyrowitz commented on powerful effects that virtual communities can have on people. In *No Sense of Place*, he states, "The situational analysis offered here [in his book] describes how electronic media affect social behavior—not through the power of their messages but by reorganizing the social settings in which people interact and by weakening the once strong relationship between physical place and social 'place.'"<sup>35</sup> Meyrowitz identified what social networks can devolve into by recognizing the four ways digital media blurs distinctions, as noted

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<sup>34</sup> Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 1973), 161.

<sup>35</sup> Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), ix.



above. As he said, “By bringing many different types of people to the same ‘place,’ electronic media have fostered a blurring of many formerly distinct social roles.”<sup>36</sup>

Understanding social networks has great implications for the church. First, the church must remember that not only is her message and mission important, but the medium by which she accomplishes her mission is just as vital. Second, the church ought to thoughtfully think through each part of her mission and consider the best medium in which to accomplish the different aspects of her calling. Using the tetrad, she can both assess and possibly predict the dangers and opportunities of various mediums. Yet there is still one thing that the church must do if she wants to prevent the medium from subverting her mission. This will be addressed in the next section.

### **Engaging in Crucial Counterforces**

Borgmann declared that “contemporary culture will not step out of its concealment when challenged by the conventional vocables of benefits and harms.”<sup>37</sup> What Borgmann and Dawn advocate, beyond assessing the dangers and opportunities of recent Internet technology, is engaging in focal concerns and practices as crucial counterforces to the prevailing lure of the technological society. Focal concerns of the church could be captured in Jesus’ words to “love God and love people,”<sup>38</sup> while focal

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<sup>36</sup> Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Dawn, *Unfettered Hope*, 76.

practices should enable us to stay true to our focal concerns. In the Christian context, churches should engage in these practices in a way that honors her creeds.

Borgmann and Dawn recognize that one of the reasons technology is attractive is because it removes burdens. They are asking us to carefully consider if it always best to remove every burden. Their concern is that a technological paradigm helps to create a consumeristic society. They alert us to the fact that when technology moves beyond its proper vocation, society becomes “characterized by the proliferation of devices that produce an endless stream of commodities unrelated to any context and thereby leaving consumers without a world of relationships.”<sup>39</sup>

Dawn remarks, “Borgmann identifies three steps by which our focal commitments limit technology and its paradigm—when we clear space for our focal concern, simplify its context, and extend that engagement to wider areas of our lives.”<sup>40</sup> Let’s look at how we can apply these ideas to social networks and virtual community.

While virtual community, as seen in the tetrad, enhances and retrieves some valuable things, the church needs to keep in mind her creeds when it comes to assessing the merits of virtual community as opposed to incarnate community. Since one of the central creeds in Christianity is the incarnation, the church should be careful to keep flesh and blood community at the center, and virtual community at the margins. If Jesus left a realm in which time and space had no consequence in order to live in a particular time, in a particular place, and with particular people, this should speak to the church in the

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<sup>39</sup> Dawn, *Unfettered Hope*, 57.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

digital age as it relates to her focal concerns and practices regarding community and mission. While there are benefits to virtual community, the church should consider what is lost and what happens when virtual community is pushed to the extreme.

One of the focal concerns of the church is cultivating a deep and meaningful community; the practice that enables the church to remain true to this concern is to be regularly engaged in flesh and blood community. Though it is perhaps more challenging than virtual community, and more of a burden, it is a burden worth bearing because what it produces is more vital, richer, and more rewarding. When the church engages face-to-face interaction, living life together in the concrete world, this fosters her ability to keep flesh and blood community a focal concern and protects her from the potential danger of the medium subverting her mission as it relates to building real community. For the medium is the mission.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This paper provided a pattern by which the church can assess new media such as blogging, podcasts, other Web 2.0 technology, and any technology in general. While there are many vital issues and concerns this paper could not address,<sup>41</sup> there are three

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<sup>41</sup> For example, the issue of the digital divide is an important one. Many people lack Internet access and therefore have many reduced opportunities. This is a vital concern for the Christian concerned with justice and equality. While this issue is beyond the space limitations of the current study, Susannah Fox provides a succinct discussion. See "Digital Divisions: There Are Clear Differences among Those with Broadband Connections, Dial-up Connections, and No Connections at All to the Internet," *Pew Internet & American Life Project*, 10 October, 2005 [pdf]; available from [http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/165/report\\_display.asp](http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/165/report_display.asp); accessed 6 April, 2006.

distinct lessons we can take with us. First, McLuhan, Miller, Levinson, Hipps, and Postman have enabled the church to awaken to the idea that the medium is the message. The church no longer needs to be blind to the hidden power of the medium. She can recognize that humans create technology and that technology, in turn, re-creates humans. When the church remembers that the medium has a life-shaping effect, she can move forward in her mission with greater wisdom.

Second, by understanding McLuhan's laws of science and applying them to one form of recent Internet technology—social networks—the church has a means by which she can assess the dangers and the opportunities of Internet technology as it relates to her mission. Asking the right questions uncovers the hidden power of the Internet as a medium.

Finally, with the help of Borgmann and Dawn, we can recognize that understanding the dangers and opportunities of Internet technology is not enough; the church must also engage crucial counterforces by identifying focal concerns and practices that honor her creeds. In this way, the church can both prevent the medium from subverting her mission and faithfully fulfill her calling in the digital age.

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