

**DEVELOPING THE TEXTUAL COMMUNITY  
ALONGSIDE THE INTEGRATION OF  
CONVERGENCE CULTURE AND MEDIA**

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**Submitted to the Faculty of the  
College of Biblical and Theological Studies,  
Trinity Southwest University**

**In partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree**

**Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Biblical and Theological Studies**

**August 2012**

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# **DEVELOPING THE TEXTUAL COMMUNITY ALONGSIDE THE INTEGRATION OF CONVERGENCE CULTURE AND MEDIA**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

“I love gadgets!” We’ve all heard people who have echoed this refrain. It’s common for many to admit to this affinity for technology, after all this is the age of technology! But what about people two or three thousand years ago, or for that matter, even five hundred years ago? If someone were to say, “I love gadgets!” in antiquity, what could they have been referring to in such primitive, pre-technology times? Perhaps back then, a “gadget” would be something like an abacus, an oblong frame with rows of wires or grooves along which beads were moved. In essence it was an ancient calculator. Or perhaps they would’ve been enthralled with the bathhouses of the Romans that features sit-down toilets and hot and cold saunas that ran through a series of underground pipes. Such “technology” back then was considered cutting edge! But relatively few had access to these appliances. Instead these were reserved either for institutions or the ruling elite. Certainly the mainstream Christian church wasn’t enjoying such devices to any measurable extent.

Moving our gadget-loving analogy to more contemporary times, we can think of one “gadget” that radically changed the way the world communicated: the printing press. Moveable type, which allowed the mass production of literature, especially biblical literature, is often credited to the German developer, Johannes Gutenberg around 1440. His mechanical “gadget” was based on already existing screw presses. Gutenberg was a goldsmith by profession but developed a complete printing system and perfected the

printing process through all its stages by adapting existing technologies to the printing purposes. He devised a hand mold made for the first time possible the precise and rapid creation of metal movable type in large quantities, a key element in the profitability of the whole printing enterprise. Guttenberg's invention was a monumental one. This gadgetry would make the Bible the most assessable it had ever been before. The text of scripture could now be seen, read and heard by the masse.<sup>1</sup> In short, Johannes Gutenberg helped advance "textual communities" by the integration of a newly developed media culture!

### **What is a textual community?**

My first experience with the expression *textual community* came in a conversation over coffee with a friend. But this term was first advanced by Brian Stock in his Book, *Listening for the Text: On Uses of the Past*, in which he highlights the literacy upsurge of twelfth-century Europe. Essentially Stock portrays the budding of Christian communities with its members gathered around ancient texts. Stock calls these, "microsocieties organized around the common understanding of a script.," in most cases being the text of scripture.<sup>2</sup> Although these communities were experiencing an outbreak of literacy, not everyone in such communities was necessarily literate. Stock notes that the minimal requirement in said communities was one literate, an *interpres*, who understood a set of texts and was able to pass on his message verbally to others. Thus an oral and aural dynamic was set up whereby biblical texts were read and interpreted to the community that gathered. This process cannot be underestimated. In fact, much modern day

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia: Printing Press: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Printing\\_press](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Printing_press))

<sup>2</sup> Brian Stock, *Listening For the Text: On the Uses of the Past*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 23.

preaching, which bases itself on the interpretation of the biblical text by a clerical *interpretes*, has a clear relationship that, at least rudimentarily related to this twelfth century practice.<sup>3</sup> Indeed it could be stated that Christianity won the West partly through the content of the Bible and its communication of the text to various communities of Christian believers. Thus every biblical church could be, in its framework, a textual community, by virtue of its reading and consideration of the biblical text. Furthermore, as Brian Stock points out, there can be no orality without an implied textuality, even as there was no literacy without the primal force of the spoken word<sup>4</sup>. Taking Stock's seminal description to another level, I will advance the idea that the intent of Christ Himself and the practice of the Apostles was the establishment of the New Testament Textual Community—the church. Even today, more than two thousand years removed from the inscription of the written documents of scripture, we still take our cues for faith and practice from these ancient records.

But let's go back for a moment to our "gadget" analogy and fast-forward to more modern times. The advent of the computer chip has brought gadgetry to an entirely new level not even imagined in times of the then burgeoning Roman Empire or even Guttenberg's Europe! Today both accessibility to information and the ability to communicate and interact socially through a myriad of devices dwarfs anything humankind was doing a decade ago, let alone a millennia or two ago. The modern fascination with communication devices and their doorway into social connectivity has no real parallel in ancient times. Although this technological universe with its solar system of microcircuits, microchips and mega-modern social networking would be alien

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 4.

to ancient cultures, the principles of utilization and advancement remain the same today as in Caesar's day or even Guttenberg's. What's different today from those earlier times is that technology is mainstream and therefore the masses can benefit, from Atlanta to Argentina, from Albuquerque to Addis Ababa. Neither bookish institutions nor the ruling elite can claim any corner on today's gadget-communicating accessibility. This presents the possibility of contemporary textual communities benefiting from these technological advancements. Not only that, such technology can even help to develop the textual community into more literate, better-equipped and even better-suited to achieve its objective of spreading the message of the scriptural text to its community, district, country and world. This dissertation will in part explore the formation and the development of the modern textual community as well as it's nascence in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. Furthermore I aim to demonstrate the viability of using media to further the objectives of the textual community much the same way the church of yesteryear enjoyed the benefits of Guttenberg's invention.

### **Calvary of Albuquerque as a Textual Community**

Formed as an incorporated non-profit in 1982, this local Albuquerque, New Mexico Christian fellowship of over 14,000 attendants regards itself as a modern-day textual community and as such, regularly communicates this identity intramurally. As a Protestant Christian church, this almost thirty-year-old organization engages in the regular practice of textual elucidation by an *interpretes* in the office of a pastor-teacher, or teaching pastor (Ephesians 4:11). In fact this is fundamental to its existence and purpose. Because of the immediate familiarity of this author with this institution (I serve as senior

pastor), Calvary of Albuquerque will become the primary case study in the scope of this dissertation. Its roots in the Jesus-Movement of the 1960's, its own unique history in the Southwest, its present activity and its future aspirations will be highlighted as the textual community that that developed in part by the integration of Convergence Culture and media (both old and new).

The church community at Calvary is unique, though certainly not singular in its approach to line-upon-line, verse-by-verse exposition through books of the Bible so that its messages (or sermons) are connected by sequential renderings of the Biblical text. This method can be traced further back than even the New Testament to the post-exilic gatherings of Jerusalemites under Ezra who, “read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and...gave the sense.” (Nehemiah 8:8). But apart from that extraordinary occurrence, the real exemplary underpinning for this practice finds its roots in the exercises of the early church. This initial community, in part, built its belief and practices from the text of the Bible as interpreted through its first apostles. This was its normal and regular practice. The first century physician and biblical author Luke divulged the priorities of this community, saying, “they continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine.” (Acts 2:42). In other words, one apostle, then another, acted as the *intrepres* (using Stock’s language) who understood a set of texts and was able to pass on his message verbally to others. Clearly then, the budding community of the early church shows that the *idea* a textual community has its roots deeper down and further back than twelfth century Europe as Stock suggests.

Far different from the Roman Catholic tradition of *Lectio Divina* (the practice of transcendence using the text of Scripture to attain a liturgical communion with the

Divine), Calvary of Albuquerque has maintained the approach of a plain rendering of the text of scripture and its application to the personal lives of those who hear it. At Calvary the Biblical Text is seen as both vital and central. The belief is that the clear exposition of scripture follows a traditional protestant hermeneutic that seeks to find the plain (or evident) sense by careful observation, a consequent interpretation and a personal application. Thus the fellowship at Calvary of Albuquerque is *Biblio-centric* in its value and *expositional* in its practice. I will unpack the thirty-year history of Calvary of Albuquerque and demonstrate its place and contribution in the framework of the historical textual community.

### **Integrating Media & Convergence Culture in Textual Community**

Think of our “gadget” theme from above. Two thousand years ago the ancient Romans would have been lauded by social scientists for their breakthrough technology with the establishment of the Roman bathhouse that enabled social connectivity at a dynamic level. And years later, fifteenth century Europe was shaken by the communication revolution brought on by moveable type presses. But to think of those “technologies” in the same paragraph as today’s exponentially budding media seems quaint in the very least and perhaps even laughable. What our modern world sees in an average day in terms of information that is developed, made available, and exchanged would’ve taken centuries in the aforementioned antiquated eras.

Convergence Culture is wholly a modern phenomenon. It is the place where old and new media collide. This hybrid term has been popularized by Henry Jenkins, the DeFlorz Professor of Humanities and the Founder and Director of the Comparative

Media Studies Program at MIT. As one of America's most respected media analysts, Jenkins uses the term, "Convergence Culture" as one in which there is the flow of content across multiple media platforms.<sup>5</sup> It describes how people interact, participate and communicate through transmedia hardware and software. The old media might in some cases be a book, newspaper, or a 70mm filmed documentary while the new media may be an MP3 file, a clip on YouTube, or a QR Code displayed at the end of an magazine article to direct mobile device users to another delivery platform. Sometimes old and new media interact and complement each other quite nicely but clearly with the passing of time one eclipses the other, though not necessarily. Convergence culture creates a social intersection or a networked public where media producer and consumer morph, fuse or splinter as the interaction is made.<sup>6</sup>

A quick example of that intersection can be readily seen: Rather than watching television productions via traditional media such as on cable networks or by purchasing DVD or Blue-Ray disks, now authorized websites (Hulu, iTunes, Netflix and other proprietary network sites) are emerging to compete and even overshadow it "old school" predecessors.

Abigail De Kosnik (Assistant professor at Berkley Center for New Media and Department of Theater, Dance & Performance, University of California Berkely) argues that millions of internet users use peer-to-peer protocols to illegally download episodes due to them being free and requiring no subscriptions. Today access to content is global. And many who are annoyed by the delay of American export to other countries many

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<sup>5</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, (New York and London, New York University Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>6</sup> University of Texas, Arlington,  
[http://www.uta.edu/ra/real/syllabi/406\\_1867\\_\\_5330\\_syllabus.pdf](http://www.uta.edu/ra/real/syllabi/406_1867__5330_syllabus.pdf)

programs available for download almost immediately after their airing. It seems that demand and creativity drives the immediacy of the instant communication train!<sup>7</sup> People know what they want and are getting it by learning to crawl through the new media loopholes! This poses some challenging issues to the modern textual community. In such a world that is capable of sustaining Convergence Culture the traditions of the Textual Community can be greatly threatened. But they can also be greatly helped. This is, after all, the world we find ourselves in and we are called to clearly herald the Good News of the Gospel to the socially isolated peoples of New Guinea as well as to the socially integrated folks on Facebook.

Consider this: An online study of more than five-hundred youth ages ranging from thirteen to seventeen conducted by Harris Interactive and commissioned by World Vision revealed that 80% of teenagers use social media. What's more, 44% of teens say they've become more aware of others' needs as a result of using social media. And 34% of teens say they "friend" or "like" or "follow" charitable causes or organizations.<sup>8</sup> This level of social interaction was unheard of just a few years ago but think of it, no one born after 2004 will never have "not known" such a platform of interconnectivity. Where does the church fit in to this trend of social media? Should we steer clear of it or should believers employ it to advance the calling of God on earth as the Textual Community? Even unbelievers or perhaps better stated as, "outsiders" are asking the church to get with it and communicate to them on their level (their level not being cassette tapes or 8-tracks). They are asking for churches and Christian organizations to "Bring it more

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<sup>7</sup> Futures of Entertainment, *Watching With the World*: [www.convergenceculture.org/weblog](http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog)

<sup>8</sup> Outreach Magazine, May/June 2011, 110.

mainstream” and utilize the avenues of the Internet.<sup>9</sup> How will the Textual Community respond to Convergence culture? How should it? This dissertation aims to answer that and demonstrate via case study a media trajectory that employs both old and new media platforms.

Some countries such as Brazil, Russia, India and China are economically rising countries that are embracing New Media and are using it to gain greater influence on this planet. Some of these countries utilize large event opportunities to utilize the integration of new media for the betterment of their economic growth. China achieved greater visibility through both the Olympics and the Shanghai Expo and Brazil is positioned to gain wider attention by hosting the Olympics and the World Cup in the next few years. Such environments are active in producing a strong digital infrastructure and therefore thriving creative industries.

This dissertation, then, will develop the essence of the textual community and use as its primary case study Calvary of Albuquerque, and discuss the encroaching wave of these technology-based communication platforms as means to advance the prime objectives of the textual community.

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<sup>9</sup> Outreach Magazine, May/June 2011, 114.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There have always been controversies about the relationship of the church to culture, as well as disagreements inside the church itself about how that relationship should be managed. Much has been postulated, written, and argued concerning what is acceptable church worship or what cultural tools and approaches could be used for church practice. What should be considered the best media forms with which to worship God? Is one form of media (one medium) better or more godly than another? How far should technology reach into the work of God before it becomes obtrusive? One could even deduce that this tendency goes all the way back to the earliest days of mankind—the days of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-8). The dilemma of these two brothers lay in what sort of medium they would use in their sacrificial approach to God: Was it to be from the ground or from the flocks? What was considered acceptable worship has ever been in the forefront of the minds of God's people. Sadly the outcome of the first disagreement ended in *worship envy*: Cain killed his brother Abel.

As time progressed, God unfolded more of His purpose for mankind. His chosen method of communication to the people at large was through a previously unknown medium—text written in stone. Through the exodus, the community of the Israelites moved from a mob that escaped the slavery of a tyrant Pharaoh to become a society of worshipers whose reverential cues were to be taken from the God-inspired (and initially God-written) text. While Moses was up on Mount Sinai receiving those words from God, the freshly-escaped Israelite refugees had already been led into sensual revelry in the camp below. At the incitement of presumably a few, but with the approval of Moses'

own brother, Aaron, the people's worship resembled a more pagan flavor than the kind that God had prescribed to Moses. The medium they chose was visual imagery, something to no doubt illustrate to them certain divine attributes. It is noteworthy that the first four commandments in the Decalogue set forth the textual parameters for acceptable worship. Those first four directives formed the first tablet of the law and were *theocentric* in nature and application. Thus was born the "textual community." This group of people would forever hereafter be tethered together as a spiritual family whose common bond was the inspired text given by God. But certain issues would always remain: What is the relationship of God's people to the media they employ for the sake of their spiritual life?

### **Purpose of the Study**

Broadly speaking, the purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between text and culture. For over one millennium, Western culture was influenced—and it could be argued—governed by the interpretation of the text of Scripture, typically through the lips of an interpreter. Through the centuries, the church has maintained either a direct or indirect relationship of its people to that text. Indirectly, Christian believers were *told* by hierarchical interpreters what the text says and what it means, thus creating an oral/aural relationship between leadership and laity. Directly, those who could read the text for themselves could discover its meaning, thus bypassing the need for dependence on an *interpretes* (textual interpreter) and/or creating a more objective experience of textual interaction. Within early Western societies these textual communities had limited media (mass means of communication) to expand the community. As time progressed, the

media playing field dramatically changed, so much so that a “media culture” has developed that impacts textual communities in both helpful and hurtful ways.

Specifically, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship that already exists between the “people of the Book” (Bible-believing Christians) with the ancient texts of the Bible and the rapidly changing world of old media and new media possibilities within a convergence culture. There is still and will ever be a relationship between God’s people and the Scriptures, “given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16). For most believers within textual communities, the Scriptures are an ever-fixed point. The sixty-six books of the Bible form the bedrock by which every point of faith, theologically and practically is built. But the church’s adaptation to, or rejection of, available media is up for grabs. My purpose is to demonstrate how God’s church (a.k.a. the textual community) can utilize convergence culture to both fortify its constituents and expand its influence.

## **Research Problem**

The problem that this study aims to address is focused on a constant in our culture: *change*. Simply put, *the effectiveness of the biblical text is challenged by the upsurge of a visual culture and the convergence of both old and new media*. With the instant access to information and the steady stream of ideas via digital component devices, the playing field for establishing truth has been leveled, at least in the outlook in the cultures in which this predominantly resides. At one time knowledge and ideas about truth were confined to a relatively small stream that trickled from literate interpreters of the textual canon of Scripture. The text was revered by the masses because they were *told* it was

God's truth and *expected* to listen and comply. Theirs was an aural commitment followed by compliance to those who read and interpreted. There was no marketplace of ideas or forums for discussion and/or dissension.

Today, the worlds of ideas—many that radically oppose the ideals of a biblical textual community's—are readily available to most everyone around the globe. Rather than a single stream flowing from the lips of a few, it is a gushing river—a floodplain in which every culture and continent is connected. Many streams that feed that river are certainly polluted (though not all), and how the church responds to these varies.

This study will primarily analyze the effectiveness of a single textual community in the Southwestern United States (Calvary of Albuquerque) and the implementation and integration of convergent culture in its core values.

### **Initial Research Question**

Is there a relationship between the community growth of Calvary of Albuquerque and the implementation of convergence culture? If so, what is that relationship? The following are all related to this particular question: Has the community been compromised in terms of its relationship to either the text of Scripture or to the God that inspired that text?

There is no denying that the community of Bible believers has developed throughout its almost 30-year history, but how has media helped or hindered that development? In particular, how has the confluence of media platforms become a factor in the spiritual development of said community?

## Subsidiary Questions

To resolve the query offered above, this study proposes and attempts to answer a number of subsidiary research questions:

1. How did a textual community function in its earliest formation according to those who have formulated the term itself?
2. What are key components to these earliest textual communities?
3. What is the proper relationship of Scripture to the Christian community, and how can the concept of a textual community bring purposeful parameters to the local church?
4. How can the term “textual community” be broadened (the re-visioning of Stock’s definition) to include and describe any New Testament church?
5. How did Calvary of Albuquerque come into being as a textual community in the Southwest?
6. What has been the role of media in the development of this church?
  - A. What key media technologies have been used to enhance the textual community?
  - B. What is the “critical path” for those entering the life of the textual community and how has media augmented that path?
7. How has convergence culture made its debut on the world scene and what is its relationship to the church?
  - A. What are the positive aspects of media in general and especially new media?

- B. What are the negative aspects of media in general and especially new media?
  - C. Does the technological latitude inherent in convergence culture give greater power and freedom to those within the textual community?
8. What is the definition of “effectiveness” in the area of convergent media and does it meet the church’s definition of effectiveness?
- A. What key media technologies are used in the ministry and deemed effective to the life and witness of the larger mission of the church?
  - B. What follow-up ministry is engaged once someone contacts or logs on to one of the media outlets/devices? Is there any human contact within this application of convergence culture?
  - C. How can media and convergence culture change the way the church ministers to its community?
  - D. What are some of the negative aspects of convergent media as experienced by Calvary of Albuquerque?

### **Definition of Terms and Key Concepts:**

***Textual Community.*** The term *textual community* was proposed by Canadian historian Brian Stock in his book *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past*,<sup>10</sup> Stock’s reference and historical focus for his handling of this term is twelfth century Europe, which witnessed an outbreak of literacy and an attendant rise in spiritual movements shortly after the first millennial period. A textual community was a band of believers

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<sup>10</sup> Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text: On Uses of the Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

formed around an interpreter who read and interpreted religious texts. In that “pre-print” world, the authority of the teacher rested in the text he interpreted. My proposal is that today’s “post-print” society of Christian believers is very similar—but in a hybrid and much more developed form. Christ’s appeal to the text of Old Testament Scripture and the apostles’ subsequent similar appeal provide the basis of the church as a textual community. The Christian church has historically based its relevant existence and its practices on the written documents of Scripture: “This is what was spoken of by the prophet” (See Acts 2:16).

***Grammatica.*** The term *grammatica* refers to the science of interpreting poets and writers. Akin to the science of hermeneutics, *grammatica* utilizes systematic principles for speaking and writing correctly.<sup>11</sup> *Grammatica* was responsible for producing a special kind of literacy, the effects of which we are still experiencing in Western societies today. *Grammatica*, chiefly a textual discipline, placed those literate as the privileged class over the illiterate masses that depended upon the reading and interpreting of texts by others.<sup>12</sup>

***Media, New Media, Transmedia.*** *Media* is simply a term describing the means to store and deliver information. Traditional media is regarded as books, newspaper, radio, and broadcast television. At the root of all media lies the relationship between the entertainer (or host, or teacher, or interpreter) and the audience. If the host is an ensemble

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<sup>11</sup> Martin Irvine, *The Making of a Textual Culture: Grammatica and Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), xiii.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

of fictional characters and the audience interacts with them through reading, then the media is a novel. If the host is a filmmaker and the audience interacts with him by sitting at home or in a theater watching a real life exposé, the media is a documentary. If the host is a Bible teacher and the audience interacts with him only by listening in a car, the media is radio (or possibly a tape, CD, or MP3 device).

The term *new media* is a more recent phrase that emerged in the later part of the twentieth century. The term refers to on-demand access to content any time, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation, and community formation around the media content. The audience base for new media is online. The important distinction particular to new media is the "democratization" of the creation, publishing, distribution, and consumption of media content. In traditional media one had to prove to producers and business executives that the idea would be profitable and was worthy of publication. In the new media world the only one that needs to believe that your idea is a good one is *you!* That means a lower threshold for opportunity. What is the result of this leveled playing field? It's simply that countless people whose ideas would have once been immediately discarded can now be placed online and go anywhere. This is often referred to as "going viral," a buzzword that describes the rapid and often uncontrolled spread of ideas analogous to the spread of viruses in a human body.

What also distinguishes new media from traditional media is the digitizing of content into bits. As a departure from its analogue counterpart, there is a dynamic aspect of content production, which can be done in real time; but these offerings lack standards and have yet to gain traction.

The idea behind the term *transmedia* is the dissemination of stored information across multiple platforms and formats. This term, used by MIT Professor Henry Jenkins, carries the idea of broadcasting that aggregates fragmented audiences by presenting new modes of presentation and social integration. It is the strong opinion of many media purveyors that any story transmitted across multiple platforms can make the characters more compelling.

***Convergence Culture.*** Once again, media analyst and MIT humanities professor Henry Jenkins has popularized this descriptive term. Closely related to his idea of transmedia, Jenkins sees convergence as what is developed as a result of transmedia or the flow of content across multiple platforms. Convergence is how the audience responds, interacts, participates, and communicates through transmedia's digital components of hardware and software. *Convergence culture* is produced when a social intersection is created by the networked public in response to transmedia.

### **Assumptions of This Study**

This author assumes that the essential elements of the Christian faith are true and valid for all people of all time. Along with that, it is assumed that there is inherent value in both research of factual knowledge and the presentation of logical thought. Furthermore, the author assumes the Bible is the revealed and inerrant word of God, and believes in the divine inspiration of the biblical text. The later assumption does not refer to *natural* inspiration (just a high degree of human achievement), nor a *conceptual* inspiration (just the general ideas but not the words are inspired), nor even a *mechanical* inspiration

(divine dictation to a human medium). Rather this author assumes both the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures: that all the words are inspired and that the very words themselves are inspired by God Himself.

Beyond these is the additional assumption that as humans, we are made in the image of God; therefore, to be “redemptively creative” beings will bring God glory. We humans are privileged to live in a burgeoning age of technology. The obvious fact is that such technology can be used for good or evil—but to be created in God’s image is to “redeem” fallen man’s created devices, machinery, technology, and skill for the glory of our Creator.

### **Limitations and Delimitations of this Study**

This study will center primarily on the spiritual cultural within the community of believers associated with Calvary of Albuquerque in its almost 30-year history, especially in its employment of media technology. Though firmly tethered to its historic past—both in the Jesus Movement and its textually oriented Biblical predecessors—the study will focus mainly on the methods and practices of Calvary of Albuquerque in its use of all forms of media. The research that was conducted is recent and geographically limited and therefore may not reflect the specific nature of the past or all other places. The focus is on Calvary of Albuquerque and not other Christian communities. Media opportunities such as print, radio, television, intramural video/audio, and the Internet will be discussed insomuch as they promote the development of the textual community of Calvary of Albuquerque. Though there may be a direct correlation with other ministries, this study

will focus directly on the subject of convergence culture within the textual community of said church.

This study will touch upon but not discuss in detail the negative aspects of media and new media, except where they interface with the mission of the church. The downside of media proliferation such as pornography is well known and well documented elsewhere. Nor will this study focus on the place of media in ancient textual communities, though a passing correlation will be noted.

### **III. FOCUSED LITERATURE REVIEW**

A project of such a divergent scope (the ancient models of textual community and the modern platforms of modern convergent media) must draw upon the expertise from a number of academic fields of study and therefore intrinsically risks complexity. In addition to the world of vanguard digital communication trends and the modern culture of technology, the scholar who seeks to answer the questions posed in this study must delve into the fields of medieval history and liturgical studies, sociology and textual interpretation, as well as be conversant in the modern church and its associated trends. Both available printed literature as well as Internet research must be consulted to understand the Christianity's past view of text and media and to navigate a strategy for the future. All these bodies of knowledge give insight into the central theme and ultimate significance of this paper: the use of technology in the growth and development of the Christian community.

#### **Limited Available Resources**

Until most recently there was a scarcity of any material pertaining to the subjects of convergence media and the church. Far more material exists in church history with regards to the textual communities of the pre-print Middle Ages in Europe. Also there is proliferation of material in the secular field vis-à-vis the modern explosion of technology. This is seen in the overabundance of books, magazines and online articles offered. For instance, MIT Convergence Culture Consortium which explored the ways the business landscape is changing in response to the growing integration of content and brands across

media platforms.<sup>13</sup> This is frequently done with entertainment as market researchers ponder the one demand of consumers: *options! They want what they want when they want it.*

Comparatively there is precious little written about the scope that this dissertation seeks to uncover: the positive usage of media and convergence culture used for the building up of the textual community and for the expansion of its message. Some works stand out and do so because of their singular scarcity. This paucity may be due to a number of reasons, the following of which represent the most common:

- *Development:* Technology changes at such a tremendously rapid rate and it is therefore difficult as well as time consuming to commit to a technological trajectory that will keep pace with such exponential advancements. The plain thinking of many Christian organizations is to not enter the fast paced “rat race” demanded by the technological treadmill but to remain safely tucked behind the old “tried and true” methods of message delivery, thus a development strategy is not employed.
- *Ignorance:* Much of the modern church is simply unaware of such changes in technology and therefore what may be available to further their stated goals. and thus is less apt to incorporate such into their organizational polity. Aging congregations especially would be less apt to be in-the-know of media developments and therefore less likely to engage its usage for either personal enrichment or outreach. Considered by many to be a phenomenon of younger generations, digital devices and new-media platforms slowly, if ever, trickle

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<sup>13</sup> Futures of Entertainment Convergence: [www.convergenceculture.org](http://www.convergenceculture.org)

upwards in age bracket, leaving mature congregations out-of-the-loop in terms of the opportunities afforded by such.

- *Incapacity*: Due to the considerable financial commitment it takes to adopt and utilize the technology of media, it is often avoided. Budgetary considerations needed to fund and maintain programs and ministries of local churches and Christian organizations often don't include the use of media (whether old media or new media) simply due to the limited supply of "discretionary funds." This, coupled with the technological "know-how" and media experience required for any ratio of success, renders many organizations unable to engage with technological advances, let alone utilize it to its fullest potential. Incapacity, both financially and experientially, render many spiritual organizations unable to proceed in this digitally dominated culture.
- *Unwillingness*: Many church organizations deem technology, especially the convergent media culture as an encroachment. Some even see it as evil and therefore not appropriate for integration. In the very least many church organizations still see technology as a distraction (indeed one of the true downsides inherent within all media forms) and therefore unsuitable for the development of spiritual life. George Barna, founder of *The Barna Group*, a market research firm specializing in studying the religious beliefs and behaviors of Americans and the intersection of faith and culture, weighs in here. He notes that, "The Internet has become one of the pivotal communications and community-building tools of our lifetime. Churches are

well-advised to have an intelligent and foresighted Internet strategy in order to facilitate meaningful ministry,” Yet Barna also quickly informs that many churches, especially small churches are less technology-friendly. “Many small churches seem to believe new tools for ministry are outside of their budget range or may not be significant for a church of their size. It may be, though, that such thinking contributes to the continued small size of some of those churches.”<sup>14</sup> Barna’s warning aside, the fact that available technology is still considered to be unspiritual and even downright carnal is the prevalent thinking among many Christian groups. (You’ll probably never see an Amish black carriage sporting a GPS unit nor an mp3 player to listen to online sermons during a Sunday drive!)

The literature I am drawing upon includes sources that are divergent as night and day. Some sources focus on the ancient, spiritual, pre-print textual communities that had their context in the pre and post exilic communities of Judaism. Others treat the New Testament communities and their future influence even into the Medieval European era. Still other sources have their focus in the contemporary, secular and rapidly changing post printing-press world of the digital age. The supposition of this dissertation is that to merge the two does not necessarily detract from the purposes of either, and that a way can be proposed for the two to serve each other compatibly.

The following authors and their works were drawn upon for the formation of thought and direction of purpose for this dissertation. The literature described below was consulted because of its unique contribution to the premise of this writing:

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<sup>14</sup> Preaching Online: *New Barna Research on Technology in Church*  
<http://www.preaching.com/resources/preaching-online/11574394/>

## **Authors Researched**

### *Stock*

Brian Stock's offers a great deal of insight with a few important writings. Three works stand out here. First is his seminal little book, *Listening for the Text: On uses of the Past* (1990) where he develops the basic model that I will make application of for the case study of Calvary of Albuquerque and what he terms a "textual community." Primarily dealing with the medieval world, Brian Stock demonstrates how the past interest in language in the Middle Ages forms the background to the contemporary study of oral and literate culture. Stock has developed the definition and meaning of textual community in *The Implications of Literacy: Written language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (1983) in which he details the spate of literacy and parallel rise of spiritual movements shortly after the first millennial period, 1000 to 1200 A.D. Stock investigates several movements that were considered heretical by the Catholic Church which included at its core the proclamation of the text of scripture. Additionally, Stock's third work under consideration is *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text* (2001) in which the author uses Augustine as his touchstone and considers the progression of the Western reader and western reading practices from antiquity to the Renaissance. My suggestion is that there exists a similarity between the pre-print world of such ancient textual communities and the post-print world of the modern church that bases its beliefs and practices on the exposition and interpretation of the biblical text. Stock's idea to refer to ancient societies as "textual communities" was formulated to account for medieval religious movements. Stock's model is helpful in understanding the

foundations that support the modern textual community but I will move beyond Stock's model (which primarily served to identify those non-literate pre-Renaissance people who came together out of common reverence for the text and a shared experience of public oral proclamation and interpretation) to include elements of a successful modern textual community. His definitions and observations of history prove invaluable to the discussion of this dissertation.

### ***Morgan***

Adding to the discussion of the makeup and workings of a textual community is Donn F. Morgan in his work, *Between Text and Community: The "Writings in Canonical Interpretation."* (1990). Morgan's book is helpful in describing the first functioning textual community of post-exilic Judaism in ancient Israel and thus sets a foundational model for subsequent generations of both Christians and Jews. Since the purview of his historical consideration predates the textual communities proposed by Brian Stock, Morgan brings a helpful precedent to bear. Morgan's unique research and perspective equipped him to take part in the Jewish-Christian dialogue and to help in the understanding of the role of the Bible in both respective communities. Morgan identifies what he calls the "canonical community" rather than Stock's "textual community." His contribution focuses almost exclusively on the era after the Babylonian Exile of the Judean Jewish communities and the resultant community of faith that developed which became centered around the canon of scripture. At the heart of the study for Morgan is the description of God and community, and principally how this community related to God with the text of scripture at its core. Rather than taking on the multiple foci of Torah,

Prophets, Psalms and the Writings, Morgan primarily is concerned with the designation of just the Writings (Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, Song of Solomon, Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, and 1 & 2 Chronicles) since this was the period when the canonicity of these was being determined.

It is my assertion that Morgan's model is most helpful in providing both the paradigm for the earliest Christians in the first few centuries. Also his description of the "canonical community" of post-exilic Judaism paves the way for us to view the modern church, especially the one used in this study (Calvary of Albuquerque) as a community of believers that has the Scripture at its center. The returned exiles of the Jews met in synagogues upon their return (an institution hitherto unknown in Judaism before the Exile), and the centerpiece of their worship was "Torah" and the collection of literature associated with the "Prophets." At the same time they were developing a relationship with the previously mentioned body of literature called the Writings. This is a noteworthy departure from the normal Jewish pre-exilic lifestyle, when the Temple, its priesthood and sacrifices were central. But now the Jewish society had emerged as a true textual community.

### ***Irvine***

Martin Irvine was considerably beneficial to my research of the textual community especially with his insights on the disciplines of literacy within the later Latin community. His substantive work, *The Making of Textual Literature: 'Grammatica' and Literacy Theory 350-1100* (1994) demonstrates how culture was shaped by the principle

of *Grammatica*—addressing the Latin literary text itself in terms of language, meaning and value.

Delving into the essential components of literary theory, the nature of literacy, education, biblical interpretation, the literary canon and linguistic thought, Irvine establishes how *grammatica* was the central discipline that produced the culture of the textual West. Sources from the ninth to the eleventh centuries presented *grammatica* as the science of interpreting the poets and other writers as well as the systematic principles for speaking and writing correctly. Irvine develops the view that this was the period when The Writings (known at that time as *scriptura*) and that the canonical texts, both Christian as well as classical (the *auctores*) formed a culture that was fundamentally textual. It was the social practice of *grammatica* that provided an exclusive access to literacy, the understanding of Scripture, the knowledge of a literary canon and membership in a textual community. Martin Irvine’s insight into the hermeneutic of the Latin textual community provided for me the necessary balance this study needed. Irvine helped to bring clarity to the *interactive discipline* that was employed by communities of believers when dealing with the text of scripture. Adding to the excellent work of both Stock and Morgan with their terms of *textual community* and *connonical community* (respectively), Irvine make use of another helpful term he calls the “grammatical culture”—a literary culture sustained and reproduced by *grammatica*, which he contends provides a model for the textual culture.

### ***Campbell***

Kirsty Campbell's *The Call to Read: Reginald Pecock's Books and textual Communities* (2010) is principally a commentary on Reginald Pecock's writings and textual communities. Pecock, a Welsh clergyman, attacked the primacy of episcopal authority in the government-controlled church and was consequently deprived of leadership influence in 1458. Campbell's book is the first full-length study to situate the works and contribution of Pecock in the context English theology of the late medieval period. Campbell examines the important and innovative contribution Pecock made to late medieval debates about the roles of the Bible, the Church and practices of devotion in fostering a vital, productive, and stable Christian community. Though an early opponent of Wycliffism, Pecock vigorously tried to refute what he considered doctrinal error and to foster a faith based on reason and understanding. Kristy Campbell writes about the textual community envisioned by this Oxford trained theological cleric and his attempt to educate the laity by establishing a community of readers around his books, to influence and change the ways people understood their faith, the world, and their place in it. Her great contribution to this dissertation is in demonstrating the power of texts to effect religious change in a culture. Reginald Pecock was motivated by his concern for looming heresy within Christian communities and thereby attempted to reshape meaningful Christian practices and forms of belief.

### ***Anderson***

Immensely helpful to the discussion of how technology is influencing the Christian church is Kerby Anderson's *Technology, Spirituality, & Social Trends* (2002).

One of the first to weigh in on the church and the exponential explosion of technological advancements, Anderson writes to Christians with the express purpose of helping them to better understand the digital age and how to navigate it. The book is written in two parts with the first unveiling the current technological trends (already outdated in certain parts) and the second detailing the current societal trends (being both predictable and applicable in any age).

What is especially beneficial is Anderson's "Theology of Technology" articulated in the first chapter whereby he seeks to even present a biblical mandate for the development and usage of technology for Christian communities. The downside is that precious little that is written about this novel and needed concept of a "Theology of Technology" The theological marriage between ethics and the digital era begs to be explored, hence the scope of this dissertation. Still, Anderson is most obliging in his exploration of technology and human nature, positing even the most bizarre of scenarios: the possibility that computers may assume certain human functions and the potential societal movement towards granting "human" rights to those machines that functions with human capabilities. As anyone would assume, Kirby Anderson produces the upside as well as the cons of being a Christian in the digital age. Though meant to be a more garden-variety work aimed at the mainstream, *Technology, Spirituality, & Social Trends* is a valuable exploration for the purposes of this dissertation.

### ***Vanier***

Jean Vanier, a philosophical academic from England who spend time in both Canada and France exploring live in community, that is literally in a commune environment. His

book, *Community and Growth* (1989) is the result of his observations and experiences with such communities. He founded the l'Arche community for the mentally handicapped in France and outlines the ups and downs of living in community and the need for loving others intentionally. His work is extremely insightful into the challenges and blessings of living in direct community with others, especially as he analyzes human nature via basic human relationships. Vanier shares those insights while helping the reader to consider his/her relationship to Christ as Savior.

What sets Vanier's work apart from previous tomes that deal with textual communities (a la Stock, Campbell and Irvine) is the setting itself and the personal experience conveyed by the author. Not written from the vantage point of an historical researcher but rather as one who has actually lived in community, Jean Vanier is able to wade through the social, spiritual and personal issues of group-think as individuals blend their lives together in a setting considered to be out of step in contemporary culture.

Vanier's underlying premise in his book seems to be that we all live with the wound of loneliness. By accepting our suffering and using it to connect with people affected by poverty in a community setting, we can experience the character of God. Though not specifically addressing the textual community per se as the purview of this dissertation pursues, still Vanier is helpful in describing how a group of believing community members can be changed by the announcing of the Word of God because of its ability to touch our deepest being. To Vanier, listening to the needs of the community members over listening to the text of scripture is more his focus. Bet definitely (although sparsely) he tips his sociological hat to the value of scripture as an element in the life of the community.

## *Jenkins*

Particularly influential in the development of my thinking about how the contemporary church could use the technology available in the development of the textual community was from the writings and video clips of Henry Jenkins. Chiefly his book *Convergence Culture, Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006) added a great deal to the shaping of my approach to the “digital church.” It was Jenkins who popularized the hybrid term, Convergence Culture, and it is he who pioneered the relationships between multiple media platforms. As an observer, researcher and participant of this unusual amalgam culture, Jenkins documents what he has seen as well as prognosticates where it will lead the human race. The social implications of the media age are staggering in the kinds of change it may bring.

Dr. Jenkins brilliantly scrutinizes the prevailing new mores of “participatory” culture” over and against the older, more familiar, more traditional and more passive media spectatorship. His insights assist in the exploration of what already is taking place in the ever-changing age of advanced “delivery technologies” (iPads and mp3 devices) with the ancient, never changing values provided by the text of Scripture. From the viewpoint of the scholastic observation and media analysis to determine cultural transformation, Henry Jenkins is pivotal in understanding where we’ve come from, where we are presently and what the future may look like. Believing that convergence will redefine the face of American popular culture, Jenkins helps leaders see opportunities to direct their content over multiple channels to increase the effectiveness of messaging.

### ***Hipps***

Where the bookshelves are scant in providing any helpful material on the intersection of faith and technology, author and Mennonite pastor Shane Hipps provides a dose of literary refreshment. His work, *Flickering Pixels, How Technology Shapes Your Faith* (2009), points the Christian toward a creative response to the media saturated world by alerting us to the dangers as well as prospects. Hipps is highly practical as well as pastoral in his approach and his thoughts, providing Scripture as the principle guide for navigation through the digital maze.

Seeing Christianity as fundamentally a “communication event”, one in which God reveals Himself to humanity, Shane Hipps contends that God wants to communicate and has done so with a variety of media already (angels, prophets, scriptural text). This opens up enormous possibilities for the utilization of communication technologies to advance the cause of the Creator to His creation through pixels, bits and bandwidth. I enjoyed the musings of another pastor who is considering the present technologies alongside of their integration into the development of Christian community. His observation of spiritual, social, societal and theological trends in the presence of expanding media is groundbreaking and enjoyable.

### ***Fromm***

Charles Fromm is the president of Worship Leader Magazine, Inc. and earned his PhD at Fuller Seminary. He previously served as Chairman/CEO of Marantha Music and has lectured at Princeton, Fuller, Baylor, Oxford and UCLA. His thesis entitled, *Textual Communities and New Song: The Routinization of Charisma in the Jesus Movement*

(2006) provided much of my early seminal thinking for this dissertation. Writing primarily about the development of the “Jesus Movement”, Fromm traces two streams: the musical expressions of the Jesus People Movement in Southern California beginning in the 1960s and the institution of the teaching-church that housed it. His argument is that Christian music played a catalytic role in the Jesus Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, generating its collective identity and guiding the journey of the movement’s followers into the megachurches of the 1960s. The phenomenal success of the movement and the ecclesiastical and commercial institutions that evolved from it, he argues, was due largely to its innovative use of media technology to build communities and its successful fusion of mass-mediated popular culture with reinvented forms of traditional Christian worship.

Besides providing an interpretive framework for understanding how the Jesus Movement happened and how a new generation of seekers and believers emerged as a result, Chuck Fromm has engaged theological and sociological resources to create a grid to understand this youth-driven movement. He shows the balance between leadership charisma and the charisma of music.

### ***Barna***

From the realm of research comes the writings of George Barna and in particular, *Futurecast: What Today’s Trends Mean for Tomorrow’s World* (2011). The Barna Group is an independent research group that has been conducting and analyzing primary research to understand cultural trends related to the values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of Americans since 1984. George Barna’s research is especially helpful as he helps apply his findings to the Christian church. Barna’s belief is that information is

critical for decision making if it is used to motivate people into action. His hope is that churches will acquire *useful* information so as to help them form strategies to make the world a better place to live in. In this latest book by Barna, he contributes immensely to our understanding of current trends in media, technology and entertainment, and his fourth chapter is devoted solely to such trends.

Aside from these aforementioned literary works, I have also secondarily considered others, though not as heavily. They are as follows:

- Borgmann, Albert. *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology*. (2003) Baker Books
- Hefner, Philip. *Technology and Human Becoming*. (2003) Augsburg Fortress.
- Lohrmann, Daniel. *Virtual Integrity: Faithfully Navigating New Web World*. (2008) Brazos Press
- Postman, Niel. *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (1992) Vintage Press
- Bauerlein, Mark. *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future* (2008) Tarcher/Penguin
- Singhal, Arvind. Cody, Michael. Rogers, Everett. Sabido, Miguel. *Entertainment-Education and Social Change: History, Research and Practice* (2004) Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers

## **Research Methodology**

My approach to the presentation of this dissertation was to garner the appropriate ideas and facts through a variety of sources. The following methodologies were used:

### **Witness Participant**

The initial significant methodology for this study can be described as that of being a “witness participant” as a result of the author’s own dynamic encounter with a burgeoning and developing Textual Community of Calvary of Albuquerque, and one in which new media and convergence culture has been employed and successfully integrated. Because of the close association with the subject of this study, being an integral part of its thirty year history, experiencing the growth centered around the text of Scripture, acquiring and utilizing various platforms of media (considered both old and new forms), the author became a participant in its unfolding history. This included the study, meditation, cross-referencing, researching and proclamation of all sixty-six books of the Bible, verse by verse, no less than three separate occasions. This educational process became the basis of development for the community itself, and therefore can rightly be called a true textual community.

In addition to the personal oversight of textual exploration and application was my personal involvement in the community’s acquisition of platforms of media delivery to serve the purpose of the expansion of the textual community. These include several full-power radio stations across the Southwestern United States, the development of television and radio programs aired around the world and the utilization of digitally rich

technology that both disseminate information and encourage interaction of participant-based hi-tech platforms.

## **Personal Research**

The aforementioned personal experience coalesced into a quest for understanding the usefulness old and new media in the personal lives of the members of the community at Calvary of Albuquerque through research. By direct questionnaire (Appendix A) a sampling of over nine hundred congregants over the course of two months yielded relevant information about the interaction of church community members with various forms of media. In addition a citywide research poll *Research Poll* (Appendix B), conducted by the national polling agency, McLaughlin and Associates was vital in understanding people's media palette and practices. (NOTE: Due to the extensive amount of ministry events and activities associated with Calvary of Albuquerque, the methods used to ascertain the information for the research will focus primarily on core ministries, with the exception of this congregational pole and a citywide poll).

The research program necessary to address the scope of this dissertation involved a comprehensive search for books, articles, video clips, academic theses and dissertations in two major categories. First were materials relating to the history, designation and development of ancient textual communities, especially during postexilic biblical history and medieval European history when distinct groups gathered around the proclamation and interpretation of ancient texts. Second were works exploring the more current trends in media, technology, computer communication and media convergence. Most every

notable resource was examined by the author. My extensive personal library, as well as computer libraries, theses and dissertations were mined for this study.

## **Interviewing Media Mangers and Developers**

Personal interviews were also conducted of stakeholder populations including Media supervisors, tech support personnel as well as select members of the congregation by the utilization of various media offerings. In addition I personally conducted interviews of select vanguards of contemporary Christian organizations dedicated to utilizing convergence culture to expand their mission. Questions centering on communication goals, historical development, measuring effectiveness and projected outcomes and related topics were all discussed. Significant among the interviews was a phone interview and “Skype” meeting with John Blandford, and then a subsequent face-to-face interview with the founder of part of Global Mission Outreach, a San Jose based media group, which aggressively seeks to use available technology to spread the gospel message worldwide in the next few years.

## **Reports and Documents**

A variety of reports, original media documents, legal documentation, Board-Meeting notes and minutes, websites and their related web pages and staff handbooks were consulted and compared for research collection.

From the various literary tomes that were assimilated as part of this research, a model was constructed. By distilling and adapting Brian Stock’s concepts of textual community (1990), a spiritual/sociological model was created and used as a starting point

to define a church based on Bible exposition in general and Calvary of Albuquerque in particular. Stock's concept of textual community and the key element of the "interpreter" to proclaim the text served simply as a place to begin. Stock's theory was developed to account for religious movements and church affiliations in the medieval period and therefore his model needed adaptation for contemporary models, especially in the modern age of cross-platform multimedia. To accomplish this I examined relevant literature supporting Stock's model. This included historical and sociological literature on previous and post-medieval communities. Next I explored the field of communications and in particular the more recent writings about Convergence Culture as treated by Henry Jenkins. The historical and theoretical insights, gleaned from both key lines of research, were used to generate the needed lens by which to view and evaluate research data, interviews and miscellaneous documents.

## **V. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA**

### **The Formation of Community and Its Relationship to Scripture**

When I first heard the term, “Textual Community,” something measurable resonated in my heart. No doubt because of my own love for the Biblical text and my spiritual roots since conversion, I instantly understood its meaning. I had been a pastor that believed and practiced the notion of both biblical inerrancy and scriptural applicability. This expression seemed to capture in one phrase what I believed the church to be about: a community of people solidly formed around the exposition of Scripture. Based on the writings of Brian Stock, the term was introduced to me by friend and academic, Charles Fromm. Wanting to interview me for his own PhD work at Fuller Theological Seminary, he was exploring sociology, theology and communication theories to analyze the history of the Jesus Movement of the 1960’s and 1970’s to account for the ecclesiastical and cultural institutions that developed from it, especially as they pertained to music.

Years before I had founded a burgeoning church community in the Southwestern United States and was then currently residing in San Juan Capistrano, California pastoring a South Orange County church while also helping friend and mentor Chuck Smith at Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa before moving back to Albuquerque to resume duties at the same church community I had founded. With the experience gleaned in those three churches and the focused interest I had in the teaching and preaching of scripture, I was immediately drawn into Fromm’s ruminations about the “textual community” with its origins. I wanted to hear more.

Fromm explained, and would later write, that Stock's model was organized around 4 components: one or more charismatic interpreter(s), an educational process; group rituals where the text is proclaimed and community created, and a narrative that historicizes the group and connects it to salvation history.<sup>15</sup> The initial interest that was generated inside me by the term *textual community* began to grow that day and which stream flows in the pages that follow.

## **What is Community?**

Defining something as basic as the Christian Community will vary according to era and the spiritual movement one subscribes to, but I will move from general to specific.

Webster defines a community as, “a unified body of individuals; the people of common interests living in a particular area; an interacting population of various kinds of individuals.”<sup>16</sup> That's a good starting point but still insufficient for our purposes.

Still more complete is the definition provided in the first edition of Noah Webster's 1828 Edition: “A society of people having common rights and privileges, or common interests, civil, political or ecclesiastical; or living under the same laws and regulations.”<sup>17</sup> This definition moves us closer to our intended goal since the interests of the Christian Community are in part ecclesiastical.

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Fromm, *Textual Communities and New Song in the Multimedia Age: The Routinization of Charisma in the Jesus Movement*, PhD diss., Fuller Seminary, 2006, iii.

<sup>16</sup> Miriam Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary. Miriam Webster Inc., *Publishers*, Springfield Mass 1984

<sup>17</sup> Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*, Republished in Facimile Edition by Foundation for American Christian Education, New York, Iversen-Norman, 1885

But the church “community” is singular. It’s uniquely God’s Family. What we have in common is that everyone who is a part of it is cleansed by the same blood and regenerated by the same spirit. Everyone in this community is a servant of the same Master and is a citizen of the same heavenly country, temporarily displaced in the environs of this world while we await the coming of our Community Leader, Jesus Christ, at His second Coming. The New living Translation of the New Testament rightly names the first church a “community of believers” (John 21:22), designated the first Christian as a society having a common interest by their faith in Christ.

Moreover, it is a “textual community”, in which those who are part of it are readers of the same scripture from which comes our instructions for life and our cues for living life to the fullest. The earliest believers were given to a fourfold commitment, the first being that of the “apostle’s teaching” (Acts 2:42), which was their reading and interpreting of the Old Testament text and the truths taught them by Jesus Himself.

### **Christianity as a Community**

In 1974 some thirty-five hundred evangelical leaders from around the globe assembled in Lausanne, Switzerland for the International Congress on World Evangelization. In part, the purpose for meeting was to probe the essential nature of the church—its purpose and expression. There were several key statements issued at that conference that helped to clarify the identity and expression of God’s people on earth. Among those statements was this: “The church is at the very center of God’s cosmic purpose...the church is the community of God’s people rather than an institution, and must not be identified with any

particular culture, social or political system, or human ideology.”<sup>18</sup> Clearly the Lausanne conference saw the church in terms of *community* and *peoplehood*. The church is to be, in Howard A. Snyder’s terms, *The Community of the King*.” The institution is only secondary to the community of people who share a common interest in their cherished faith. Furthermore it is a community that is distinct from other communities—one that Jesus Christ Himself is to rule over. Its culture is a Christ-culture. Its social system is one based on brotherhood rather than politics. And its ideology is based upon the Scripture.

The church has always been a community whose very heart is the gospel and the air it breathes is the rarified air of Holy Scripture. Martin Luther and Phillip Melanchthon taught that the church is, “the congregation of the saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught.” And thus its true unity is based upon the unifying belief concerning the teaching of the Gospel.”<sup>19</sup>. Essentially these Reformed leaders knew the church was to have the *text* of Scripture residing near the core of its community life.

“Church” is a term found in the New Testament, and comes from the Greek *ekklhsia* (*ekklesia*) by the combination of two Greek words that mean “to call out.” The word itself is found some one hundred and fourteen times on the pages of the New Testament scriptures. Though we know it to refer to Christian community, it heralds from the idea of a Greek public assembly of citizenry and became the predominant descriptor of the community of the earliest believers. Essentially the church is composed of sinners who have responded to God’s effectual *call out* of the world. They have been converted to Jesus Christ as Lord and Messiah, and have been initiated into one body by the

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<sup>18</sup> Howard Snyder, *The Community of the King*, Downers Grove, Inter-Varsity Press, 1978, 33-34.

<sup>19</sup> Howard Snyder, *The Community of the King*, Downers Grove, Inter-Varsity Press, 1978, 35.

Spirit.<sup>20</sup>

The church in the New Testament had many objectives. They existed first and foremost to bring glory to God (John 17: 22, Revelation 4:11). Second, it should be a community that reaches the lost by training and deploying evangelists to make disciples in unreached areas of the world (Matthew 28:18-20, Luke 24:47). Third, it should exist to mature the members of its own community to be effective and to grow spiritually in order to reproduce themselves. A church should encourage enriching fellowship within its own membership (Acts 2:42). By mutual caring and by lifelong learning of the scriptures, a church should support the textual education that provides the bases for all the above. It is to be a community where values, derived from scripture are taught and practiced. It is a community where basic Christian beliefs, taken from scripture, are fostered and disseminated in order to cultivate loyalty to Christ and His Kingdom. The authority of the exalted Christ is expressed on earth through the *Spirit-illuminated Scriptures*. The Bible possesses unique authority because it was written by personally trained and Spirit-inspired apostolic spokesmen for Christ. Hence all normative beliefs and practices must be subject to scriptural pronouncements. The major doctrines of the Bible hold greater weight than all ministers, creeds, confessions, and church councils.<sup>21</sup> Paul's words resonate here: "All Scripture is given by *inspiration of God* (*Greek: qeopneusta*:that is, 'God breathed') and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16)

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<sup>20</sup> Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce Demerest, *Integrative Theology, Volume Three*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan Press, 1994, Volume 3, 273.

<sup>21</sup> Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce Demerest, *Integrative Theology, Volume Three*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan Press, 1994, Volume 3, 275, 281.

## **Modern Communities of Faith**

Jean Vanier, a Canadian philosopher, founded and organized communities especially where those with developmental disabilities could come, find their place, and share life together. Vanier was the founder of the l'Arche community for the mentally handicapped in France. He defines "community" as "groupings of people who have left their own milieu to live with others under the same roof (i.e. a commune), and work from a new vision of human beings and their relationships with one another and with God."<sup>22</sup> Vanier began l'Arche in 1964, a few years before the famed communes of Christian hippies emerged on the western seaboard of the United States. Vanier's desire was to join person to person geographically, live the Gospel and follow Jesus Christ more closely. His heart for this new community is expressed poignantly when he states, "Each day brings me new lessons on how much Christian life must grow in commitment to life in community, and on how much that life needs faith, the love of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit if it is to deepen."<sup>23</sup> Vanier never intended to become elitist nor to suggest that there is no community life outside of Christianity. Rather, he seems to understand the human condition and social makeup quite well. He insists that the message of Jesus is one that invites His disciples to love one another and to live out community in a special way. Jean Vanier as a philosophical academic, while being firmly rooted in his own faith, admits that some groups who gather and find their identity together can foster a certain kind of

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<sup>22</sup> Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*, New York, Paulist Press, 1991, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*, New York, Paulist Press, 1991, 11.

elitism, convincing themselves that they are better than others and that not everyone can “join the club.” The security that is provided by the common qualities of this kind of community can also become a wall of separation to non-members, especially those who regard themselves as God’s chosen people. The danger becomes when they believe that *only* they have been chosen by God and not others. But Vanier’s communities seem, at least in stated purpose, to break down barriers and welcome differences in people. This communal style of living, according to Vanier, is to help people *become more*, to grow and not just be manipulated by the group. By the breaking down of barriers that would normally divide people in a society, these types of social structures are intended to help members overcome the fear of rejection because they are different from others.

Communal living is considered to be an extreme form of the community experience by our modern culture. However community is to be a place where limitations, fears and even egocentrism are revealed, a place where weaknesses are discovered, and where love can heal the wounds of isolationism and the darkness of self-doubt, replacing these with liberation and a safe place to deal with our “sins.” But this is only one such example of a modern community of faith. There is another, one that is closer to my own heart, and one that I have had some experience with.

The early Jesus movement saw its greatest appeal to the young, disenfranchised counterculture. For youth growing up in the United States in the 1950’s and 1960’s, the world was a dramatically different place than it had been for their parents and grandparents. The generation born after World War Two in America was the wealthiest in history, enjoying a decades-long spurt of material prosperity and technological productivity, relatively free from economic fears. But other fears assaulted their uncertain

future. The wonders of technological innovation meant that this new generation grew up in the shadow of the “bomb,” and the ever present terror of nuclear annihilation was never far away. I regularly played in my friend’s back yard in Southern California, whose house was complete with an underground “bomb shelter,” popularized during that post war era.

But that same technology became an unprecedented force. Mass communication by television provided news, entertainment and music to be piped into living rooms across this country. This mass media revolutionized the American political, cultural, and even spiritual life of the American nation primarily due to its effect on the young. New ideals coalesced by new musical forms helped to forge a cultural bond and a collective identity. The generation that watched televised accounts of President John F. Kennedy murdered, the Beatles first American foray on the Ed Sullivan Show and the Vietnam War began to grow wrestles as seeds of rebellion were sprouting in their impressionable minds. This post-Second World War generation wanted to proclaim their liberation from the old standards that had guided relations between countries, races, sexes and individuals. Some joined movements to protest injustice or the then-current Vietnam War. Other simply “sat” in public places to demonstrate peacefully and to identify with others in a new communal way of “group-think.”

Simultaneously the Jesus Movement, originating in the warm but culturally virulent climes of southern California was generating steam. Disillusioned with both the values and religious expressions of their parents, teenagers wanted a spiritual reality that would transcend imposed paradigms. Pastor Chuck Smith and his wife Kay wanted to do something about the huge number of aimless hippies they saw meandering the beach

communities near their Newport Beach home. Smith suggested that they start a “house Ministry” for these kids. There had been communes already in existence up and down the California seaboard and elsewhere, but not Christian communes. Spreading out from the highly volatile San Francisco suburb of Haight-Ashbury, the communes that existed at the time for havens for experimental sex and reinforcement of the drug-culture. So Pastor Chuck Smith rented a two bedroom house in Orange County California and dubbed it, The House of Miracles.”<sup>24</sup> This was the first of many such communes that would be part halfway house and part discipleship center. Much of my own personal early discipleship and training in scripture came from one of these new communities of faith.

According to one account, within a week of opening that first “House of Miracles,” twenty-one young men had accepted the Lord and were now living there; within two weeks there were thirty-five kids, wall to wall, sleeping in the house. One kid was even sleeping in the bathtub!<sup>25</sup> I remember my own experiences of a highly textually-oriented regiment of early morning devotion and listening to an hour long sermon on the Old Testament, followed by a workday, dinner and then listening to another hour long tape of a New Testament sermon. This was a new community! This was a community of God’s people under a new authority of King Jesus. And this was my first encounter with a textual community! Bible studies were daily occurrences, and it seemed everyone carried a bible constantly. Fresh songs were being written by musical troubadours in this new movement, and most of us spent a great deal of time discussing

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Fromm, *Textual Communities and New Song in the Multimedia Age: The Routinization of Charisma in the Jesus Movement*, PhD diss., Fuller Seminary, 2006, 174.

<sup>25</sup> Charles Fromm, *Textual Communities and New Song in the Multimedia Age: The Routinization of Charisma in the Jesus Movement*, PhD diss., Fuller Seminary, 2006, 175.

the meaning of various scriptures. The Bible, that ancient document that tells of the history of the Jewish people and the redemption through God's Son, became the foundation for a new kind of community.

## **The Community of the Text**

Christians believe that God revealed Himself through the written medium of Scripture and that the Bible is the most important book in the world. This eminent status that Christians have accorded the Bible has earned them the epithet, "People of the Book." Apparently first coined by Muhammad the Islamic principal, the term applied to both Jews and Christians alike because of the importance they placed on written revelation.

To the Jews, the writings of Moses and the Prophets were scripture and were, therefore, the fullness of revelation of God to His people. Although the physical universe attested to God's power and majestic creativity, mankind needed more specificity. Even exploring the entirety of our vast universe doesn't disclose to humankind the whole picture. The creation was never designed to divulge and supply all that God wants us to know about Himself and His will for the world. Surrounded by the beauty of the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve knew the handiwork of God, but in order to know God personally they needed to have direct communication. From the beginning, therefore, God revealed Himself not only through His creation but also directly through words.<sup>26</sup>

David mused on the difference and need of both *General Revelation* and also *Special Revelation* in his famous Psalm Nineteen. He described the power of General Revelation in the creation he saw around him:

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<sup>26</sup> Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, *Understanding Christian Theology*, Nashville, Nelson Publishing, 2003, 28.

*The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship.*

*Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known.*

*They speak without a sound or a word; their voice is silent in the skies;*

*Yet their message has gone out to all the earth, and their words to all the world. The sun lives in the heavens where God placed it.*

*It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding. It rejoices like a great athlete eager to run the race.*

*The sun rises at one end of the heavens and follows its course to the other end. Nothing can hide from its heat. (Psalm 19:1-6 NLT)*

But David quickly turned to the supreme value of *Special Revelation* as disclosed in the words of the biblical text. After looking around at the world God made, David then looked down perhaps to the Torah scrolls that were before him as he continued his musings:

*The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.*

*The commandments of the LORD are right, bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are clear, giving insight to life.*

*Reverence for the LORD is pure, lasting forever. The laws of the LORD are true; each one is fair.*

*They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold. They are sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb.*

*They are a warning to those who hear them; there is great reward for those who obey them. (Psalm 19:7-11 NLT)*

Back in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were able to gaze and marvel at what their Creator had done around and inside of them. But this alone could never bring them to know what the Creator's will for His creation, especially for them as humans, was. For them to understand that God wanted them to rule the earth and to tend it (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15), required that God communicate this to them in words. We cannot be certain as to how the communication came to them, but it seemed to be a regular occurrence since

God was in the habit of walking with these two in the “cool of the day”. This could have amounted to a daily chat with God and His creatures whereby He disclosed to them His will and gave them the ability to understand it. But then sin became a reality as it entered into the lives of God’s creation, which only heightened the need for personal communication.<sup>27</sup>

Special revelation add certain truths lacking in the revelation of God in creation and it also provides the lens through which people can see the truths provided by general revelation clearly and correctly. The “small book” of the Bible helps us to interpret the “big book” of the universe rightly. The Bible is the written record of revelation whether dreams experienced, visions given or the direct communication of God spoken to the prophets. When God spoke directly to people they were aware of His controlling influence. When it was written down, all of that was preserved for future reference.

In time God Himself saw to it that text became the new medium. When God wrote the Ten Commandments with His finger on the tablets of stone, Moses then brought that revelation to the people. That Decalogue informed them about how to relate to God in worship and then how to relate to one another. Thus was born the first “textual community.” This group of people would forever hereafter be tethered together as a spiritual family whose common bond was the inspired text given by God.

The Bible thus sums up God’s communication to mankind by saying He spoke in an assortment of ways (The “various times and various ways” of Hebrews 1:1). But the process of God communicating to man typically eventuated in the subsequent

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<sup>27</sup> Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, *Understanding Christian Theology*, Nashville, Nelson Publishing, 2003, 28.

construction of text. Sometimes it was through the medium of angels (as to Abraham in Genesis 18 and 19). At other times the medium was a dream while asleep or a vision while awake (Daniel 7, Isaiah 1). Again, the psalmist noticed the revelation of God through the media of natural wonders (Psalm 19). Then there was the voice of God. Many times that voice was an audible voice (1 Samuel 3:4, Exodus 3:2) But at other times it seems that God spoke through the inner voice of the individual conscience and communion with God. Perhaps this is what is meant when the prophets write, “And the Word of the Lord came unto me saying...” So first, God spoke.

Second, it must be noted that God spoke to mankind using *their words*. That is, the prophet’s message was God’s message. They were saying what God wanted to have said. When these fiery and courageous representatives stood before kings and nations and said, “Thus saith the Lord...” it was the words of God articulated through human speech.

Third, the words of God were written down into textual form. In the first written revelation God Himself inscribed His words onto stone. (Exodus 24:12, 31:18, 32:15).

Later they were written down by those to whom God had spoken. Moses wrote down what God told to him (Exodus 17:14, 34:27-28, Deuteronomy 31:9, 19, 22, 24). The prophets did likewise (Isaiah 8:16 Jeremiah 51:60). Those who penned the historical books in what is known as *The Writings* (2 Kings 1:1, 2 Chronicles 35:4) did the same.

Writing, which seemed to have been invented in the early fourth millennium B.C., became, then, the principle medium by which God revealed himself to people once He had communicated to the primary recipient.<sup>28</sup> The meaning of the term “medium” is simply the agency or means of doing something, or a means by which something is

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<sup>28</sup> Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Chicago, Moody Press, 1968, 331.

communicated or expressed. In other words, language and its consequent inscription became a primary means by which God communicated His messages. By meticulous attention and exacting discipline, manuscripts were prepared and then copied with utmost precision and accuracy. The materials used varied from era to era but principally were as follows:

***Skins.*** This was possibly the earliest material used for manuscript transmission. There were other materials such as clay tablets and stone, using a writing stylus and chisel, but not for making rolls and/or books. The first skins used were of coarse texture and made for rather heavy, bulky rolls. These were the materials used in early Hebrew history and led to further refinements in the post-exilic period.

***Papyrus rolls.*** These were used almost exclusively during the New Testament period, chiefly due to their inexpensive character when compared to vellum and parchment. *Papyrus codices* were introduced when attempts at collecting the individual rolls revealed that there was a need to make them less cumbersome to handle. Formerly each book or group of books was written on a single roll, but this multiplicity of rolls was replaced by codices in the early second century.

***Vellum.*** This material was made from animal skins, mainly from sheep and young goats. It was considered expensive and was therefore reserved for more costly copies of manuscripts.

***Parchment.*** From as early as the days of the New Testament, parchment was used in writing composition (2 Timothy 4:13) But there were differing

qualities of both parchment and vellum and were thus often used during the same time period.<sup>29</sup>

To bring insight into the quality of attention given to the transmission of both biblical and Talmudic texts, Josh McDowell provides the research of the intricate system or transcribing ancient synagogue scrolls. This demonstrates the regard for the scriptures and the reverence for the authority of the “text” within the ancient Jewish communities. “1. A synagogue roll must be written on the skins of clean animals, 2. Prepared for the particular use of the synagogue by a Jew, 3. These must be fastened together with strings taken from clean animals, 4. Every skin must contain a certain number of columns, equal throughout the entire codex. 5. The length of each column must not extend over less than 48 or more than 60 lines; and the breadth must consist of thirty letters. 6. The whole copy must be first-lined; and if three words be written without a line, it is worthless. 7. The ink should be black, neither red, green nor any other color, and be prepared according to a definite recipe. 8. An authentic copy must be the exemplar, from which the transcriber ought not in the least deviate. 9. No word or letter, not even a *yod*, must be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the codex before him... 10. Between every consonant the space of a hair or thread must intervene; 11. Between every *parashah*, or section, the breadth of nine consonants; 12. Between every book, three lines. 13. The fifth book of Moses must terminate exactly with a line; but the rest need not do so. 14. Besides this, the copyist must sit in full Jewish dress, 15. Wash his whole body, 16. Not begin to write the name of God with a pen newly dipped in ink, 17. And should a king address him while writing that name he must take no notice of him.” Furthermore, the rolls in

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<sup>29</sup> Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Chicago, Moody Press, 1968, 350.

which these regulations were not observed were consigned to be buried in the ground or burned.<sup>30</sup> The veneration paid to the written text of scripture is extremely noteworthy and confirms their reliability. These copyists were so convinced that when they finished transcribing a manuscript they had an exact duplicate, that they would then give the copy equal authority.<sup>31</sup>

In post-biblical periods the medium of writing continued but materials continued to be improved upon all the way up until the invention of moveable type and beyond. The two most important were:

***Redressed parchment.*** This was used for copying manuscripts after the original writing had become faded. Sometimes parchments were “erased” and “rewritten” as in the case of the Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus, also known as a *palimpsest* (Greek, “rubbed again”) *rescriptus* (Latin, “rewritten”). These were texts of a later date than the earliest parchment texts.

***Paper.*** Invented in China in the second century A.D., paper was introduced into early Turkistan as early as the fourth century, manufactured in Arabia in the eighth century, introduced into Europe in the tenth century, manufactured in Europe in the twelfth century, and became common by the thirteenth century.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, San Bernardino, Campus Crusade of Christ International, 56-57.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 57

<sup>32</sup> Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Chicago, Moody Press, 1968, 350-351.

Reverence for the scriptures and the regard for the purity of the sacred text has been part and parcel of the legacy of God's people from Old Testament to New Testament times and beyond. At the beginning of its existence, then, the Christian church found itself equipped with a book, a collection of sacred scriptures, which it inherited. But the new movement was not based on the book: it was based on a Person, Jesus Christ, crucified under Pontius Pilate, raised from the dead by God and acknowledged by His followers as Lord of all. But the book bore witness to Him; in this role the early Christians found it indispensable. At the same time they found the record of His life and teaching, his suffering and triumph, indispensable to their understanding of the book.

In this they were following a precedent established by Jesus Himself. Throughout His ministry Christ appealed to the Scriptures. His insistence that, "so it is written" is too deeply imbedded in all the gospel strata to be reasonably regarded as only the product of the church's reflection on the events of His life and death in the light of Easter and its aftermath. If the main lines of Old Testament interpretation found in the various New Testament writers are traced back to their origin that origin cannot be found elsewhere than in Jesus' own teaching.<sup>33</sup>

Of particular note to this discussion is the postexilic Judaism of ancient Israel and its precedent, especially for Christians and their relationship to the text. The role of Ezra the scribe marked the watershed for the development and understanding of "scribe". The ancient position of scribe, used often in the administrative sense, was changing as Ezra, by reason of his learning was capable of interpreting the Law for the common people. Moreover, by his priestly lineage (Ezra 7:6) he symbolized the close connection between

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<sup>33</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, (Downers Grove, IVP Academic, 1988), 55.

the priesthood and this official interpretation of the law which existed probably until the second century BC.<sup>34</sup>

D.F. Morgan provides a look into functioning Jewish communities of the post-exilic era to specifically trace their development into the early rabbinic and Christian periods. He demonstrates that the hermeneutics found in the Writings (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, Song of Solomon, Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, and 1 & 2 Chronicles) continued into the Rabbinic and early Christian period and are critical to understand modern Christian and Jewish communities of faith. After a century of foreign domination and then return to rebuild, the time was ripe for community builders such as Ezra and Nehemiah to enter the scene. Without three aspects—strong leadership, a place for community organization and resultant identity, and the ability to differentiate Israel from its neighbors while still relating to them—the future of these Jewish people was in danger. Essential to these community builders was the city of Jerusalem and the holy texts, which governed their forefathers before they decided not to obey it. The special genius of these community builders and the literature they produced was not in their political ability and organizational aptitude, but more in their ability to ground such insight and acumen in the sacred traditions of the past as found in the text of the Torah and the Prophets. Ezra became a Moses-like figure to the people, a lawgiver of sorts, and a skilled interpreter of the Torah. By this both the Torah and the Prophets became integral

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<sup>34</sup> Merrill C. Tenny General Editor, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Volume 5*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House), 300-301.

to the community and provided the necessary authority its present future survival and mission.<sup>35</sup>

To see this traditional “textual lineage” progressing from the Old Testament into the New Testament times and especially with the precedent set by Jesus Christ for His followers becomes vital in understanding any subsequent textual movements. The Jews and the Christians have always been, from their inception, a textually based community of believers. This is not *Bibliolatry*, a worship of the Bible itself, but rather a Christ-centered belief that God has spoken through the scriptures, that the Bible is of divine origin, filled with inerrant truth and vital and useful application. As the Apostle Paul put it, who himself is a classic example of how the early Christians viewed their relationship to the text of the Bible, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right.” (2 Timothy 3:16 NLT)

## **The Textual Community Rediscovered and Revised**

In order to demonstrate the relationship between the ancient communities of Jewish and Christian believers who thoughtfully and purposefully sought to live according to the will of God as revealed in the text of Holy Scripture and the modern community of faith in such movements as the Jesus Movement and in particular Calvary of Albuquerque, we turn to consider Brian Stock’s original phraseology and meaning. We will then expand and even redefine the model in order to fully appreciate the purpose and mission of Calvary of Albuquerque and the ongoing use of media to further that purpose.

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<sup>35</sup> Donn F.Morgan, *Between Text and Community: The “Writings” in Canonical Interpretation*, (Minneapolis, Augsburg Press, 1990), 45-46.

Admittedly Brian Stock uses the term *textual community* in a much narrower sense in his writings than I will here. His focus is on twelfth century Europe, in which he spotlights an outbreak of literacy and an attendant rise in spiritual movements shortly after the first millennial period in European history from about 1000 to 1200 A.D. Stock examines several movements that, as “microsocieties,” were organized around the common understanding of a script during the Middle Ages. These groups were developing a new attitude towards literary authority, allowing the community life to be guided by those who were literate. But in many ways the pre-print world of that era and the post-print world of the Jesus movement hold many similarities that will further the redefining of the term textual community.

What is notable is the Stock rightly observes that, in contrast to the Middle Ages, the ancient world was mostly a literate society. In other words, language had a fixed grammar, schools employed books, and many institutions had written laws. Further, when Christianity made its initial appearance and then spread, it did so in a world that assumed a large degree of literacy as the norm, and with a clergy who maintained that they were in direct dialogue with God.<sup>36</sup> Stock postulates that Christianity won the Western World partly through the content of the Bible, which it reinterpreted to suit its needs but it also conquered by exploiting a proven means of communication. This, maintains Stock, provides a legal, institutional, and societal framework for the interdependence of oral and written traditions. There was no orality without an implied textuality: there was no literacy without the primal force of the spoken word.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Brian Stock, *Listening For the Text: On the Uses of the Past*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990) 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

Evidently Stock found that the conventional terminology of “church,” “sect,” and “denomination” provided a set of labels that were inadequate to the task of explaining or clarifying such groups. Thus the phrase he invented to replace the conventional terminology, “textual community,” describes “a group that arises somewhere in the interstices between the imposition of the written word and the articulation of a certain type of social organization. It is an interpretive community, but also a social entity.”<sup>38</sup> A vast majority of people in Medieval times, noted Stock, were unable to read or write and were dependant upon literate authority figures to share the Word of God with them.

Wherever there are texts that are read aloud or silently, there are groups of listeners who can potentially profit from them. A natural process of education takes place within the group, and, if the force of the word is strong enough, it can supercede the differing economic and social backgrounds of the participants, welding them, for a time at least, into a unit.<sup>39</sup>

In developing his model, Stock uses the story of Valdesius who lived and ministered at the end of the twelfth century and whose name is more commonly known as “Waldo,” founder of the movements known as the “Waldesians.” Valdesius (Waldo) became quite a popular preacher, so much so that local priests and the hierarchical structure of Rome denied legalization of the Waldesians as interpreters of the text and branded them as being a heretical sect.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Brian Stock, *Listening For the Text: On the Uses of the Past*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 150.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>40</sup> Charles Fromm, *Textual Communities and New Song in the Multimedia Age: The Routinization of Charisma in the Jesus Movement*, (PhD diss., Fuller Seminary, 2006), 104-105.

The goal of this chapter, is to understand Stock's concept of textual community (since Stock's model was formulated to account for medieval religious movements) and then to extend its relevance to the era of post-print, mass media and convergence culture.

In Stock's model for the textual community there are essentials.

What is essential for a textual community, whether large or small, was simply a text, an interpreter, and a public. The text did not have to be written; oral record, memory, and reperformance sufficed. Nor did the public have to be fully lettered. Often in fact, only the *interpretes* had a direct contact with literate culture, and, like the twelfth century heretic, Peter Waldo, memorized and communicated his gospel by word of mouth... Through the text, or, more accurately, through the interpretation of it, individuals who previously had little else in common were united around common goals... The essential bond was formulated by means of belief; its cement was faith in the reality of belonging. And these in turn were by-products of a general agreement on the meaning of a text.<sup>41</sup>

Stock outlines four basic components of the textual community (a charismatic interpreter, an educative process, rituals of community, and a means of legitimization through historicization). I will follow these to expand the model but with the emphasis being upon the *Biblical* text, rather than on the variety of texts used to form these Medieval communities. With regard to the charismatic interpreter, not all agree that natural gifts of charisma, personal magnetism, or political persuasiveness are in view, but rather a gift of grace. The charisma of the interpreter is a gift for dramatic oral presentation of Scripture, and the ability to expound on its meaning in a way that effectively links the group to the text. Since the Scripture is at the center of the community, not the person of the leader, there may be more than once charismatic

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<sup>41</sup> Brian Stock, *Listening For the Text: On the Uses of the Past*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 37.

interpreter, and the community may avoid a dramatic crisis upon the death or departure of the founding interpreter. The glue for the community is the shared belief in the text.<sup>42</sup>

Stock furthers his field of focus when he undertakes the study of Augustine of Hippo and the resultant communities after his influence. Though much earlier than his medieval counterparts, this fourth century philosophical cleric saw the personal importance of being shaped by the text and not merely the community that resulted from it. For Augustine, as an example, to change impulse and behavior, one was to mediate on the text of Scripture. Augustine believed that the best way to achieve this “conversion” (alteration in thought and behavior) was by means of the meditative reading of the Bible, through which emotions like charity could become a part of the individual’s lived narrative. Meditative practice, that is the thoughtful reflection upon scripture, helps men and women to attain the objective of transcending physicality. Augustine also believed that reading the text of scripture aimed at preparing the believer for the afterlife.<sup>43</sup> Thus in his writings, Brian Stock ties these two eras of Christian history together, emphasizing the corporate benefits in one and the more personal benefits in another, noting that twelfth century medieval adherents of these textual communities had roots in post-Augustinian thought. Even Gregory the Great observed that as students of the Bible, “we

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<sup>42</sup> Charles Fromm, *Textual Communities and New Song in the Multimedia Age: The Routinization of Charisma in the Jesus Movement*, (PhD diss., Fuller Seminary, 2006), 123.

<sup>43</sup> Brian Stock, *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 6.

should transform what we read within ourselves, so that the mind, roused by the ears, brings together and puts into practice what we have heard by means of our way of life.”<sup>44</sup>

Showing that this ancient precedent is reflected in western Christian thought, Stock quotes Jean Leclercq, the Benedictine monk, and author of a classic study on *Lectio Divina* (Latin for *Divine Reading*, the ancient Catholic practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer) and the history of inter-monastic dialogue. He cites that, “In Christian, as in Rabbinic tradition, one cannot meditate on anything else but a text, and since the text in question is the necessary complement, almost the equivalent, of *lectio divina*.”<sup>45</sup> To meditate (*meditari* in Latin) means to think about something constantly, ponder or reflect; it has also the sense of contemplating a course, devising, planning, rehearsing, or exercising. A *meditatio* (a meditation) is consequently a type of thinking, a mental exercise.<sup>46</sup> Stock’s historical framing of these practices is helpful to understanding the ongoing emphases placed upon the text being central to church life throughout the ages and connecting especially the early ruminations and writings of Augustine with the practices on pre-print Europe.

From the eleventh century, it became customary for monastic authors to speak of three interconnected ascetic activities, *lectio, meditatio, and oratio* (reading, meditating and speaking).

During the Middle Ages *lectio divina* was not a type of interpretation, that is a branch of exegesis, hermeneutics, or theology. According to Stock it was,

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<sup>44</sup> Brian Stock, *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 14.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

...a contemplative practice that brought together the Hellenistic tradition of spiritual exercises and the meditative reading that characterized Jewish and Christian devotional traditions. As time passed it was inevitable that Christian thinkers engaged in *lectio divina* would begin to ask questions about the nature of the interior reflection that was involved: how words and images functioned in the mind during devotions, and how such internal representations could influence lived experience or be influenced by it. This type of thinking gave rise to what was later called, *Lectio Spiritualis*. As it evolved over time, *lectio spiritualis* did not develop into a separate tradition, but it came to differ from *lectio divina* in a number of ways that have to do with internal words and images in a contemplative context.<sup>47</sup>

Suffice it to say, the medieval textual community, though borrowing from Augustinian ideals, squarely emphasized the reading/proclaiming/listening to the spoken word by an *interpretes* whose meditative preparation showed itself in the power of the spoken word and from the time of Benedict to the death of Bernard of Clairvaux in 1153, most books in the field of spirituality were designed to be read in an institutional context. By and large they were produced in limited manuscript copies and circulated within monastic houses. Only infrequently did codices leave the institutional milieu altogether. This began to change from about the middle of the twelfth century. One important force was vernacular preaching, which consisted in the oral reading of scripture in a vernacular language with a simple commentary, making it possible for the Bible to be understood by nonliterate (that is nonreaders of Latin).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Brian Stock, *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 106-107.

<sup>48</sup> Brian Stock, *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 109.

## **The Foundations of a New Textual Community**

The Jesus Movement of the 1960's and 1970's saw many expressions of youthful zeal among the counterculture generation that was growing tired of old religious patterns that preceded it. This showed up most noticeably in its musical styles. Shedding the formality of earlier years, new musical prophets like Bib Dylan, The Beatles, Joan Baez, and Jimi Hendrix pared down the overproduced fluff of orchestral backdrops and opted for a punchier soundtrack of “message driven” songs reflective of the antiwar and antiestablishment sentiment that had been fomenting across America. The music had become almost a new language, a scripture of sorts that brought identity to a generation intent upon finding one. And many of them did find their identity in the most countercultural message known to man—the message of the gospel.

The music of the counterculture prepared the field for a small church in Southern California that was poised at the crossroads of cultural confluence and tradition. Calvary Chapel, and chiefly its pastor Chuck Smith, began welcoming so many of those young people who felt marginalized by society into its spiritual community. Calvary Chapel became a place of refuge as well as encouragement for scores of alienated hippies (as well as those just burned out on traditional church models) longing to get in touch with God. Through a more casual style and raw approach to church, many transformed counter-cultured kids found Calvary Chapel to be a creative environment to give them an identity as well as a cause.

Chuck Smith and his wife Kay clearly remember the Lord impressing on their hearts to, *reach out in love* to the thousands of young hippies they saw dotting the streets and beaches of then conservative Orange County. They began praying. Kay organized

prayer groups of her friends while Chuck prayed with the elders of the church as well as church members. Before long they felt a quiet change in the air, an excitement just beneath the surface. Both Chuck and Kay could feel growing inside their hearts, as if independent of their own efforts a growing burden of love and concern from God for these young people.<sup>49</sup> While others were repulsed by these long-haired types, this prayerful pastoral couple saw only the emptiness in their hearts that had caused them to turn to drugs to the answers to life that only Jesus Christ could provide.

So just as the dream-bubble of utopia led by drugs, gurus and free sex was in the process of being popped, something else was afoot. From its beginning, the youth movement had looked to its singers and musicians as bards and poets who would not only announce, but help lead the way into the new age of personal, sexual, and spiritual freedom. When the dream of peaceful transition into the “Age of Aquarius,” a false millennium in which “peace will guide the planets, and love will steer the stars,” ended in nightmares, Calvary Chapel in Orange County pastor Chuck Smith along with their cohorts of youth missionaries were rising up, ready to proclaim the ancient word of confident hope: *Maranatha!*<sup>50</sup> A new movement was born that has reverberated around the world.

But even more significantly, the Calvary Chapel Movement has become one of the most clearly flourishing textual communities in the history of the church. Brian Stock’s idea of textual community was developed in the historical context of medieval

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<sup>49</sup> Chuck Smith and Tal Brooke, *Harvest*, (Costa Mesa, Word for Today, 1987), 28.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Fromm, *Textual Communities and New Song in the Multimedia Age: The Routinization of Charisma in the Jesus Movement*, (PhD diss., Fuller Seminary, 2006), 166-167.

history and at a time in which verbal/auditory relationship of the text became the primary mode of message delivery. Through gifted interpreters and audiences compelled to listen, communities took shape. With Calvary Chapel, considered by many to be a real historical revival, the core of the movement was, and remains, the reading of the sacred text of scripture by the entire congregation and the interpretation/exposition by a gifted pastoral interpreter.

Author Hugh Steven gives a cameo view of what a typical church night was like in the early days of Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa:

The truths, though centuries old, are fresh and new. Many mark and underline their Bibles with felt pens. Chuck preaches for an hour and goes through five chapters of Luke. But he still has more to say and no one seems tired. At one point Chuck departs from his message and tells the congregation he has some interesting truths about Judas but says they will have to wait until they get into John 12 to find out what it is. Immediately a reverent disappointed ‘Ahh-h-h’ sweeps the room. Chuck continues to speak for another thirty-five minutes.<sup>51</sup>

As the church grew from fifty people to five hundred and on into the thousands, Chuck’s format rarely varied. In the Old Testament he would often take on ten chapters per night to teach to the rapt congregation. When he came to the New Testament, Chuck slowed down his pace a bit and cut his survey study from ten chapters to five chapters per Sunday, partly to spend more time developing the important truths of the New Testament. Chuck Smith to this day (2012) continues to teach through the Bible consecutively, verse-by-verse and chapter-by-chapter from the Old Testament book of Genesis to the New Testament book of Revelation. I was in weekly attendance personally for more than two

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<sup>51</sup> Hugh Steven, *The Reproducers: New Life for Thousands*, (Glen Dale, G/L Publications, 1972), 5.

successive journeys through the scripture with Pastor Chuck Smith and had the privilege of teaching in the same manner from that same Costa Mesa pulpit for two and a half years. This approach to making the text of the Bible a central tenant in the church's burgeoning life has become its legacy. Chuck's gift for powerful and persuasive interpretation of scripture began by a shift he made early on in his ministry. It was this shift that set the course for Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa as a textual community and for those who would follow Chuck such as myself in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Chuck Smith reminiscences about this monumental shift:

My messages were topical, taken from Scriptures throughout the Bible. There was no consistent pattern in my preaching. One week my text might be from Matthew, the next week from Isaiah, the following week from Revelation, and the following from Genesis. I would share whatever topic happened to interest me that week or whatever scripture might have just spoken to me. The most difficult part of the ministry at that time was finding a text from which to preach. I would find myself reading a book of the Bible until some scripture sort of stood out in my mind and then I would develop from that text my message...About this time I was reading the book, 'The Apostle John' by Griffith Thomas. In one of the chapters he had outlined studies on 1 John. As I studied those outlines I found that they were excellent sermon material and there were approximately forty of them...I expanded the outline studies of Griffith Thomas and we spent a year on 1 John. The interesting thing is that during this year our church experienced greater growth than we had ever seen before. We had more conversions and more baptisms than we had ever experienced in the past. The people were suddenly filled with joy in their walk with Christ, they were experiencing greater power over sin, and they had a greater assurance of salvation (everything the book of 1 John promises to the reader)...God's word did the work in their lives.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Chuck Smith and Tal Brooke, *Harvest*, (Costa Mesa, Word for Today, 1987), 137-138.

After reading Halley's Bible Handbook whose strong suggestion was that every church should have a congregational plan of Bible reading, and that the pastor's sermon be from the part of the bible read the past week, Chuck decided then and there that through-the-Bible teaching would become the normative practice for Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa. Expository teaching, found pastor Smith, is stronger than topical teaching for feeding the flock and building up the community of believers. A true textual community has been born.

### **Go East Young Man! (To the Southwest)**

One of the significant aspects of the textual community of Calvary Chapel has been its ability to reproduce itself in virtually every other culture around the world. Calvary of Albuquerque began officially in 1982 but before that as a small bible study in late 1981 on a Thursday night inside the clubhouse of a local grouping of apartments. Listed in 1988 and 1989 as the fast growing church in America by Dr. John Vaughn<sup>53</sup>, Calvary in Albuquerque continues to grow and has become the largest church in the state of New Mexico.

Right before Valentine's Day of 1982, Calvary of Albuquerque began Sunday morning services in a rented local theater, the Far North Cinema (almost a portend of the church's future use of media). By June all 300 seats of the theater were filled and the congregation had to move to a renovated storefront that accommodated 400 seats, and then 550 seats after a quick remodel. By 1983 we had to add another service to provide accommodation the growing crowds. Next we moved to a nearby shopping center that

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<sup>53</sup> Worship 101: *Teachers*: <http://www.worship101.org/teachers.htm>

would seat 900 along with enough space for a much-needed children's ministry as well as a bookstore. That was in 1984. We stayed there for two years, once again doubling to two Sunday morning services. After the landlord made conditions intolerable, the way was opened for us to purchase out first (and historically our only) church building—a massive but simple Sports Center in the northern corridor of the city of Albuquerque. Even there, at a facility able to accommodate over 2500 per event, services went from one to eventually four weekend services. What began as a simply bible study in a local apartment building clubhouse has grown into a thriving textual community.

But my spiritual journey began long before this. I had never read the bible growing up even though there was one in our home, mostly for posting family events like births, deaths and marriages. The only thing I really remembered about the Bible we owned was not the scriptural but rather the ornate pictures interspersed between its many pages. I often studied those pictures as a young child. Growing up in a Catholic family in Southern California, I distinctly remember my curiosity about the spiritual meaning of life, even once supposing that I saw God one early summer morning while tripping on LSD. I even went to church that day and watched the priests and altar boys levitate themselves and float through St. Joan of Arc church towards the choir loft by means of the residual Lysergic Acid in my blood system! It was the closest to any “personal encounter” with God in my life up to that moment. Without the compass of scripture I wandered through many experimental phases as a teenager trying desperately to discover my purpose for being alive. After a longer bout with mind-altering drugs along with dubious practices like astral-projection and spirit writing, the emptiness in my life was only accentuated. I felt ready for the truth, but all I found was false spirituality through all

these experiments. During that time period I often asked questions of professed Christians who had no real compelling answers nor lifestyles that would attract me to their beliefs nor cause me to research their chosen path any further. I even tried to talk people who said they had been converted *out of being converted* based upon what I considered to be faulty logic.

Then I had my first powerful experience with the confluence of ancient biblical truth and modern media. It would be that experience that would alter my life forever and set me on a trajectory of Bible study and the eventual use of a variety of media platforms to get that message out to others.

While living in San Jose in the summer of 1973, partly to escape the Jesus Movement that had swept southern California, I was alone in my brother's apartment and decided to watch television one afternoon. The booming voice of Dr. Billy Graham, along with the visual of him pointing to a large black bible during his televised Crusade, made its impact on me. His blue eyes seemed to pierce through the screen and I sat mesmerized as I heard things I had never considered before. I needed to make a choice and I did. For the first time I understood the gospel through the mouth of the greatest evangelist of our time, and it was being conveyed to me by electronic media possible only in the modern era.

After praying to receive Christ in my bedroom that warm summer day I spoke to a follow up counselor through the media of telephone and was sent a book and print media through the mail from Billy Graham headquarters in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Multiple media had already been employed to get me to hear the gospel message and to be further trained in spiritual things. One of the things that the literature helped me to understand

was the need to be in a loving community where the bible was being taught. The only place I knew like that was back down in southern California And so I left San Jose to sit under the text-based teaching of pastor Chuck Smith at Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa.

After years of solid spiritual growth and marrying my life partner Lenya, we moved to New Mexico to find work and to start a bible study. My idea was to provide something that other churches were not—teaching through the entire bible, chapter by chapter and book by book, just like I had seem modeled. I also thought it was important to try and not compete with other churches which mostly held their midweek services on Wednesday nights. To those who first came to the early meetings I announced, “Lets just use these Thursday night Bible studies a supplemental spiritual meals in order to strengthen you for the communities of faith you already belong to.” I wanted to teach the Bible and see a community of faith emerge around the love for God and the text of scripture he gave but I also wanted to give God “elbow room” and not presume he had called my to start a church.

So, week by week we made our way through the Gospel of John, one chapter at a time. Before we could even finish that book and start the Book of Acts which would logically follow, the clubhouse room we were meeting in was already packed to capacity and people were sitting outside the doorway on the floor and down the steps and around the corner just to listen in. As the study outgrew the original meeting room, people began asking, “What next?” but I honestly did not have an answer. I had never done this before. All I knew was we had seen a community develop solely around our mutual love for Christ and for the study of the text of Scripture. It was simple and beautiful and biblical

just the way it was but I knew something would be needed to accommodate the growing spiritual hunger as evidenced by the number of people coming.

One of things I wanted to see was a level of commitment that wasn't generated by me. I needed to know that God was doing something inside the hearts of these people who were coming every week to study the Bible together. After asking several of them to join me in a weekly prayer meeting just to find out from God what the next step was to be, I decided one evening to discover the level of their longer-term commitment. So one Thursday night, after I had led the group in song and before the bible study began, I polled the group. I asked for a show of hands to let me know about their desire to take our meeting beyond what it was and to add a Sunday morning service. Everyone in that room raised their hands in the affirmative (Some people even raised both hands!) I knew then that a transformation was occurring before my eyes. We weren't just another group studying the Scriptures. We were becoming a community, a body of believers—a textual community celebrating our mutual love for the God who loved us enough to communicate His truths through the scriptures. That's when we found the movie theater and began our first Sunday morning meetings.

It wasn't a perfect environment. The theater often was left to us soiled and not cleaned up from its previous night's entertainment. We would often wade through a beach of popcorn and onto sticky floors of spilled cokes and candy wrappers. We had to drag my little PA system that I had brought with me from California, set it up in front and meet in a very dimly lit environment, not really conducive to a *textual* community. But now we officially had two weekly meetings, one on Thursday night and one on Sunday morning. I was leading the worship for both and teaching the Bible at both while holding

full time employment at a local hospital. So I immediately went to work on building a team.

As our congregation grew in those early months and years, so did questions from other churches. “Where do you come from?” “Why are you here?” “What are you all about?” So I would explain that I come from Calvary Chapel in Southern California and we’re all about the expositional teaching of Scripture and that everything we do flows from that. Some observes and even attendees tried to impose a more structured template for us telling me, “You need to take up a formal offering” or “You really should use pledge cards if you want to grow.” Others advised me to, “find key families and get to know them and utilize their influence and finances,” etc. I was still working in the field of Radiology at a local hospital and medical office and would for months to come until the church reached about 300 to 400 people. It was then I decided I needed to give myself full time to the ministry.

Finally we purchased the former “Sports Center,” a massive indoor soccer complex, tearing up the Astroturf and putting chairs directly onto the asphalt to convert it to an instant meeting room. Attendance at Calvary jumped to 4000 adults on the first day. It was all pretty mind boggling to most of us at the time and we still look back with wonder. All I was really certain of was that *the Word of God was doing the work of God in the lives of the people of God.*

After a few years, the leadership of the church saw the need to briefly codify the purpose statement of the church so those who come could have marching orders with which to go by. So in 1984 we summed it up in an easy-to-remember statement: *UpReach, InReach* and *OutReach*. The church website reads as follows (2011):

**Our Three-Fold Purpose:**

1. **UpReach:** We believe that loving God is man's highest calling and our relationship to Him is our highest priority. All ministry flows out of this relationship.

2. **InReach:** As members of a spiritual family, we seek to equip one another for service and to grow to spiritual maturity. Thus, we seek to be trained according to the Bible, which we believe is the "owner's manual" for our lives.

3. **OutReach:** Our desire is to go out beyond the "Christian camp" into the world to expand the kingdom of God through evangelism. We believe God has given every Christian a "sphere of influence" in which to make an impact for Christ.<sup>54</sup>

Like my pastor, Chuck Smith, the core values of building up the body of Christ were now part of my spiritual DNA. I am certainly a product of what I saw modeled. I sat every week and saw and heard a man teach the Bible and was able to observe the effect that it had on people's lives and thinking. Calvary of Albuquerque stands as part of the efficacy of "The Text."

Going through a book of the Bible and continuing straight through it does a number of things. First, it established the authority of scripture. When people see and understand the principles given in the sacred text of Holy Scripture form the basis for godly living, they become "people of the book" in that it becomes their rule, their guide, their regulatory canon for all things in life. Second, going through the scripture consistently allows the reader to discover what God places emphasis on and not what a preacher or group might emphasize. The sheer balance of topics that exists in the biblical real estate helps believers know what is important to God versus what is imposed by people. Some ministries emphasize money much more than the bible does; other focus on prophecy more than the bible does; still others emphasize the family more than scripture

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<sup>54</sup> Calvary of Albuquerque Mission Statement: <http://www.calvaryabq.org/churchinfo.asp>

itself does. Going through the Bible chapter-by-chapter brings a healthy understanding to the things that God really cares about and what things are really secondary.

There is a third benefit. When a pastor gets a book of the bible and ploughs straight through it, those who listen discover that the Bible places a greater thrust on what God has done for man rather than what man should be doing for God. Topical teaching falls prey to the whims of the speaker, who may decide to zero in on virtually anything he wishes to speak about. Often preachers will use the Bible as a platform to exhort or cajole a congregation into doing something for God, to perform first, and then as a consequence, enjoy the blessing of God. The Bible as a whole reveals God as being always the initiator. His part is always first which calls for a resultant response in the believer. This order should not be overlooked and verse-by-verse exposition helps to reinforce this.

Calvary of Albuquerque as a textual community has even sought to fortify its emphasis on being a community of Christ followers who gather around the text of scripture its design elements and iconography. The current logo for the church fellowship incorporates the same intentionality as expressing spiritual growth that springs from the Word of God by featuring the shape of an ancient stone tablet and emanating from it a fully ripened head of grain. When it was first presented to by a graphic designer I immediately understood its visual conveyance. Also residing on the website for the church is the logo with the subsequent explanation:



The Calvary of Albuquerque logo represents "growth from the Word of God." The logo is in the shape of a stone tablet, symbolizing the tablets on which Moses had received the Ten Commandments from God. The design on the tablet represents a fully bloomed head of grain, signifying the spiritual growth and harvest that is produced when the seed of God's Word is planted in the hearts of His children.<sup>55</sup>

### **Back to the Ocean but Head for the Hills**

For a period of time I transitioned from Calvary of Albuquerque to labor in a different field—one in my home state of California. The church was Ocean Hills Community Church in the South Orange County town of San Juan Capistrano, a city rich in spiritual heritage from its inception as a California mission town. I was simultaneously helping Pastor Chuck Smith by teaching his through-the-Bible Sunday night survey. The church in South Orange County, in contradistinction to the church I had founded in Albuquerque and the church I had been mentored at in Costa Mesa was anything but a textual community. Though bearing the title of “Community Church” it was actually a menagerie of several disjointed communities that coexisted together simply by its use of

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<sup>55</sup> Calvary of Albuquerque *Who We Are*: <http://www.calvaryabq.org/churchinfo.asp>

the same property. Much like the sociology of a Starbucks coffee shop where people go to be “alone together,” the church was, to their admission, lacking solid bible teaching and thus they invited me to come.

After having been there for a few weeks I started to look over old Board Meeting minutes and try to assess not only its current state but also its history. While speaking to different leaders and staff members and looking through Board documents I came across an independent report done by some outside ministry consultants who had been invited to look at the church, evaluate it and render a recommendation for a future course. The group’s assessment was that Ocean Hills Community Church had become a place for “Silo” ministry. Their sense was that it was a place where a number of separate groups would come and meet but have very little, if anything, to do with one another. It was like family where the children were allowed to go to their respective bedrooms and to eat dinner with their own friends rather than with their own family. It wasn’t a community church; it was really a “communities” church with several separate communities coexisting independent of one another. The group of consultants recommended that the entire number of those using the church come together for unified corporate Bible Study. For many this was a novel concept. For me this was the essential core for doing church. The consultant came and saw, but they hadn’t conquered.

I soon discovered that change wouldn’t come easy. I proposed immediately to start a midweek study of the Bible and have all the key ministry leaders and home group leaders participate. The idea was met with stiff resistance. Some flatly opined, “Don’t you dare change Wednesday nights!” The only activity happening on Wednesday nights was the diverse collection of small groups meeting independently on campus like they

had done most other nights. I felt like the parent in the aforementioned dysfunctional home, who, when he called for the whole family to leave their private meetings in their bedrooms and come down to the dinner table together for family time, was met with sighs, moans and recalcitrant behavior. While much of this can be chalked up to human nature's resistance to change familiar patterns of behavior, clearly this church would resist the call to become a textual community.

Walter Kaiser has put it well when he tells of the need for spiritual nutrition that can only come from a steady diet of scripture within the framework of a textual community:

It is no secret that Christ's Church is not at all in good health in many places in the world. She has been languishing because she has been fed, as the current line has it, "junk food"; all kinds of artificial preservatives and all sorts of unnatural substitutes have been served up to her. As a result, theological and Biblical malnutrition has afflicted the very generation that has taken such giant steps to make sure its physical health is not damaged by using foods or products that are carcinogenic or otherwise harmful to their physical bodies. Simultaneously, a worldwide spiritual famine resulting from the absence of any genuine publication of the Word of God (Amos 8:11) continues to run wild and almost unabated in most quarters of the Church.<sup>56</sup>

## **The Expansion of a Convenient Term**

While the focus of this chapter has been chiefly historical, recounting the formation of the textual communities of primarily two churches, a word of explanation is necessary to understand why I have applied Brian Stock's term of *textual community* to entities well

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<sup>56</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1981), 7, 8 of the Preface.

outside the purview in which his original context lay. I have sought to extend the relevance of Stock's concept (since Stock's idea was formulated to account solely for medieval religious movements) into the modern era of mass media and convergence

culture. While in Stock's model an *interpretes* was required, in the expansion of the term's relevance, the pastor-teacher assumes that role. The distinctive feature of pastoral leader of Calvary of Albuquerque lay in the method of teaching, which was and remains the active and continuous teaching of the Word of God in a method as ancient as the canon of Scripture itself, known for centuries as *lecto continuum*—the public proclamation and exposition of Scripture where the text itself is central in the life of the worship of God.<sup>57</sup>

The Apostle John presented Jesus Christ as the living Word of God, the *Logos* (Gr. *logoV*), a concept the Greek world looked to explain the cause of all things universal. That isn't to negate the power of the written word or "the book" in its static state. There is a power attached to a codex or a scroll especially within the "culture of the Book," and the nature of most every Christian community to be tied to some acknowledgment of inspiration of the text of Scripture. But we insist that the *written Logos* is presented to ultimately point to the *living Logos* in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The text is not a dead letter as long as the Spirit of God breathes spiritual life through it to people and as long as humans, guided by the Spirit, proclaim it. Brian Stock states that,

Those enlightened directly by God can receive His words in a variety of ways. But the rest of us, as Augustine observed, have to read the transcript...For Christianity, it is implicit in the communicative strategy that privileges the spirit of the text as the essential bonding of God and man.<sup>58</sup>

Stock continues his thought that helps us to expand upon his definition as he writes:

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<sup>57</sup> Charles Fromm, *Textual Communities and New Song in the Multimedia Age: The Routinization of Charisma in the Jesus Movement*, (PhD diss., Fuller Seminary, 2006), 101.

<sup>58</sup> Brian Stock, *Listening For the Text: On the Uses of the Past*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 149.

The metaphors of orality do not end with the original creation of the text. They are invigorated each time Scripture is read. The ritual of reading recapitulates the primal experience of speaking and hearing the word of God. Each reading is a speaking anew. But the reality of scriptural knowledge is established contextually by believers who arrive on the scene *post textum*. For them, faith may be in the word, but proof is in the text.<sup>59</sup>

Our word *Bible* can be called the great-grandson of the Greek word *biblos* (*bibloV*), which was the name given to the outer coating of a papyrus reed in Egypt during the eleventh Century B.C. The plural form is *Biblos* is *Biblia* (*biblia*), and by the second century A.D. Christians already began to use this term to describe their writings. It was this Greek term that eventually gave birth to the Latin term of the same pronunciation (*Biblia*), which was then translated into the Old French *biblia* by the same process. The modern English word *Bible* is derived from the Old French with an Anglicized ending. So the word is the product of multiple stages of transliteration and transmission.<sup>60</sup>

So the name for a community developing around the oral proclamation and interpretation of the written word of God is rightly ascribed as a “textual community.” In order to be shaped into a textual community, the understanding of Scripture has to become priority. And on my journey, from evangelist Billy Graham whose North Carolinian intonation of, “The Bible says,” to pastor Chuck Smith’s weekly refrain,

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>60</sup> Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago, Moody Press, 1968), 21.

“Shall we turn in our bibles to...,” the Bible has become the shaping text, the rule of life, the north star, the bottom line, and the establishing principle for the life and practice and for the community of faith at Calvary of Albuquerque.

And so the fitting term, introduced by Brian Stock, has come of age into a more fitting description of not merely a Bible-based church, but a Bible teaching and Bible-centric church.

### **Replication and Distribution of the Message**

There has always been the need to reproduce the text that is adhered to by the textual community. Whether it was the scribe of the Old Testament reproducing scrolls, or the copyist of the third century replicating codices, copying, recopying and distribution was (and still is) a needed practice. In the Old Testament to be a “scribe” was to have a highly esteemed craft that certain clans enjoyed. It seems to have been a family guild profession and the skill was passed from father to son. Among the Kenites were “families of scribes” dwelling at Jabez (1 Chronicles 2:55). Passing down the text to the next generation becomes a vital ingredient in the future of any textual community.

The very name “Scripture” (*graph* in Greek) denotes something in written form. The oracles of God, considered sacred and rightly so, because they were considered to be at the very heart of the community of faith required the employment of a medium. Ink, parchment, and the scribe would serve in the copying and subsequent distribution of the messages from God. The pen or quill in the hand of a prophet or apostle brought forth the original autographs. Sometimes Paul the Apostle used an *amanuensis* (or *personal scribal secretary* as noted in Romans 16:22). But what about the copies of such works, how did

they emerge and then get distributed? Jeremiah wrote the first edition as well as the second edition of one of his works. He produces two editions of his scroll to Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 36:28). Similarly, some students of the gospels have suggested that Mark may have had two editions. In such cases both editions are inspired, but the later supercedes the former in a supplementary and complementary sense, in somewhat the same manner that the New Testament does the Old Testament.<sup>61</sup>

The autographs (what are sometimes referred to as the originals) are not available any longer. This is perhaps because of man's tendency to worship religious artifacts and relics, the medium itself rather than the meaningful content of the message of the medium. Another reason we have none of the "originals" is that in the wisdom of God, no one could tamper with them. It's practically impossible for anyone to make changes in thousands of existing copies, thus preserving the message, which is the core of all biblical "texting."

So ancient versions, reconstructed from early manuscripts and versions came to be treasured as well as copied. The earliest manuscripts, known as *uncials*, were written in capital letters throughout. Later manuscripts, known as *minuscules*, were written in lower case letters or in flowering letters, cursives.<sup>62</sup> Some manuscripts were written on scrolls and others as books.

Between the "autograph" and the modern bible is a chain with important links all falling under the title, *transmission*. If it is asked whether or not Bible scholars today possess an accurate copy of the autographs, the answer is a resounding *yes*. The proof of

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<sup>61</sup> Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Chicago, Moody Press, 1968, 345.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

that lays in the quotation from the church Fathers throughout the ages. There are some 36,000 corroborative quotations of the church Fathers from the first few centuries that include almost every verse of the New Testament. Some of these citations begin in the first century and continue in unbroken succession from that time. This provides an unbroken chain of testimony in the continued primary medium used for centuries: *hand-copying*. As previously noted, the procedures of preparation and preservation of the biblical manuscript copies reveals the fidelity of the transmission process so that no other major document from antiquity holds the same degree of integrity as does the Bible in its replication.<sup>63</sup>

In the dynamic flow of history, with the advent of some very important and world-changing communication devices, the message and thus the textual community would enjoy widespread impact. The printing press in more ancient times, the advent of vocal recording, the modern camera, radio, television and the computer stand as megamile-markers in the landscape of technological communication. In this chapter we will explore both the replication as well as the distribution of the message of the textual community.

### **A Modern Preacher with an Ancient Message**

Dr. Billy Graham has long used technology to distribute his message to the world. I had the distinct honor of being with him in March of 1995 in Puerto Rico from where he staged what was called the largest global crusade in history, called *Global Mission*. His

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<sup>63</sup> Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Chicago, Moody Press, 1968, 355.

message, captured at the large stage of a stadium in San Juan Puerto Rico was sent instantly by satellite television to 185 other countries, and Graham's message was translated on site in sound booths into 47 other receptor languages and eventually into 150 other language. The target audience was 8 million people nightly.<sup>64</sup> From the earliest days of his ministry, Graham has used the power of the media. From the famous series of meeting in Los Angeles in 1949 where William Randolph Hearst sent a telegram to his newspaper editors reading, "Puff Graham," which gave him print coverage nationwide as a result to "Decision Magazine", "Decision Radio" and his worldwide television broadcasts, the Graham organization has capitalized on the integration of media with eh message of the gospel.

Speaking at Technology, Entertainment and Design Conference (TED) in 1998, Rev. Billy Graham spoke about the amazing impact of technology on the world—His topic was Technology, Faith and Human Shortcomings. At that conference Graham stated that he had visited the Silicon Valley years before and had breakfast with CEOs of various computer and technology corporations. He mused over how his eyes were opened about the future of technology and science. As the key communicator who headed up the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and had a history of utilizing available media to share the gospel message, he stated that he would love to live in that future age.<sup>65</sup>

Christianity is fundamentally a communication event. It is predicated on God revealing Himself to humanity. God discloses Himself to humanity. God wants to

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<sup>64</sup> San Francisco Chronicle online: Billy Graham Preaches to World Tonight:  
[http://articles.sfgate.com/1995-03-14/news/17799105\\_1\\_richard-nixon-graham-rev-billy-graham-crusade](http://articles.sfgate.com/1995-03-14/news/17799105_1_richard-nixon-graham-rev-billy-graham-crusade)

<sup>65</sup> YouTube, *Billy Graham: Technology, Faith and Human Shortcomings*:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90mj79GqWhc>

communicate whether it's by angels, burning bushes, stone tablets, written scrolls, talking donkeys, bold prophets, mighty heavenly voices, still-small whispers, and shapes traced in dirt. Any serious study of God will by necessity involve a study in communication, simply because the Bible shows God to be a communicative God. And any effort to understand God will be shaped by our understanding—or misunderstanding—of the media and technology we use to communicate and replicate the message preached. The key will become learning to *use them* rather than be used by them.<sup>66</sup>

## **The Preservation of Sound**

Sound recording is nothing new. Anyone in the western world alive from the 1900s onward knows this as part of everyday life. From Thomas Edison's first patent for the recording of sound onto a wax cylinder in 1877 (and the first recording label in 1888, The Edison Speaking Phonograph Company) to the development of the first electron tube by Sir Ambrose Fleming in 1905 to the present stage of the multi-track recording studio, there has been a steady march of technology.<sup>67</sup> Its impossible to know where this technological trajectory will end up since Edison could never have conceived the use of CDs, MP3s and MP4 files so prevalent today.

For years the media standard in the world of communication was the 7-inch tape reel. Analog recordings that evolved from grooves made in a phonographic record in the late 1800s were replaced by these magnetic tapes in the mid twentieth century and

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<sup>66</sup> Shane Hipps, *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your faith*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2009), 13-14.

<sup>67</sup> Charles Fromm, *Textual Communities and New Song in the Multimedia Age: The Routinization of Charisma in the Jesus Movement*, (PhD diss., Fuller Seminary, 2006), 209-210.

eventually ended up in a much smaller and more portable unit called the cassette tape which soon became the standard by which the ministry of teaching and preaching became the deliverable medium.

This popularized medium was relatively straightforward and easy to make. Made from a thin magnetizable coating on a long, narrow strip of plastic, a device could record and play back audio sounds. Magnetic tape revolutionized broadcast and recording. Before tape, all recording done for radio had to be live and was usually done before a live audience. Magnetic tape recording allowed of programming to be prerecorded. Also the recording industry was dramatically changed by tape. Until then, gramophone records were recorded in one take, but with tape, recording could be made in multiple parts, which were afterwards post-produced by mixing and editing with minimal loss in audio quality. Magnetic tape allowed the radio industry to pre-record advertising content as well, which formerly had to be presented live as well, and it also enabled the creation and duplication of complex, high-fidelity, long-duration recordings of entire programs.<sup>68</sup>

Ed Plummer, an early member of the Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa flock felt compelled even in the beginning to preserve hour-long broadcasts on cassette tapes and built a complete teaching library from Genesis to Revelation taught by his pastor, Chuck Smith.<sup>69</sup> Full copies of these tape cassette libraries were used at the Costa Mesa church campus to be checked in and out for those who may've missed a live message by pastor

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<sup>68</sup> Wikipedia: *Sound Recording and Production*:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sound\\_recording\\_and\\_reproduction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sound_recording_and_reproduction).

<sup>69</sup> Hugh Steven, *The Reproducers: New Life for Thousands*, (Glendale, G/L Publications, 1972), 63.

Chuck and the house ministry communes sponsored by the church also utilized them for discipleship purposes.

Originally, Ed simply wanted to have something meaningful to share with the thirty to thirty-five people who gathered in his home for a weekly bible study but soon discovered how helpful the messages would be for a larger audience. Ed clearly understood the value of the textual community utilizing the culture of media platforms. He was the marketing manager for a large Pasadena Electronics firm and had the technological experience in duplicating tapes. Ed began using a reel-to-reel seven-inch Sony recorder and four separate cassette decks that produced four tapes at one time. Soon others heard about Ed's project and they began requesting copies for their friends and relatives. The demand for tapes grew so rapidly that what started as an extra *avocation*, in two years became Ed's full time *vocation*. Eventually Ed quit his marketing managing career and formed "Promedia," a small company designed to mass produce and distribute the growing library of Chuck Smith's recorded Bible studies.<sup>70</sup>

Soon cassette tapes were being sent around the country by friends and family members at Calvary Chapel or taken home by visitors to the church. Small groups would gather, usually led by someone who either owned the tapes or found them helpful and who wanted to share them with friends and neighbors. Some of these groups grew quickly and often pastors would emerge from such groups who would pastor that small but budding congregation. Some groups wrote and petitioned Pastor Chuck Smith to send a pastor out their way who could lead them further into becoming a church. Some

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<sup>70</sup> Hugh Steven, *The Reproducers: New Life for Thousands*, (Glendale, G/L Publications, 1972), 67.

pastors, like Al James in Prescott Arizona, went out in response to such a request.<sup>71</sup> For Calvary Chapel, what began as a local textual community through the consistent commitment to expository teaching by its pastor was now expanding in ever-widening circles through the integration of the conventional analog media culture.

Radio was the next media format used to take the textual message outside the walls of the Costa Mesa church and provided a missional template to daughter churches such as Calvary of Albuquerque. In an effort to serve people who lived at great distances from the church, radio could be an accessible medium to supplement the spiritual feeding that they had become used to. Throughout Orange Country and the Los Angeles basin, one could now hear the bible clearly taught line upon line and precept upon precept.

Chuck Smith tells of Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa's use of radio media to further the textual community of the church:

Calvary Chapel also ministers over the airwaves, and this must account for many of those who travel long distances to fellowship here. A Nielson survey indicated that our Sunday morning Calvary Chapel service is the most listened-to program in the area during the entire week. As of today, Calvary's outreach has included numerous radio programs, television broadcasts, and the production and distribution of audio and written resources.<sup>72</sup>

### **Calvary of Albuquerque's Media Journey:**

A textual community in the multimedia age can enjoy many opportunities and is at the same time fraught with many challenges. The extraordinary forms that it can be expressed through seems almost endless as the multiple formats of delivery are made

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<sup>71</sup> Charles Fromm, *Textual Communities and New Song in the Multimedia Age: The Routinization of Charisma in the Jesus Movement*, (PhD diss., Fuller Seminary, 2006), 214.

<sup>72</sup> Chuck Smith and Tal Brooke, *Harvest*, (Costa Mesa, Word for Today, 1987), 12-13.

available. This can be seen clearly in the media history of Calvary of Albuquerque, listed by independent church analyst Dr. John Vaughn as the fastest growing church in America in the 1988-1989. Since coming to faith in Christ through the media of the television outreach of Dr. Billy Graham and being spiritually weaned by the media of Chuck Smith and often through cassette tapes, I was poised, ready, and open to the use of the aggressive technological platforms that would present themselves as available tools in the coming years.

As newlyweds, Lenya and I came to Albuquerque in 1981 with just the necessities: one worn out Datsun truck, a few clothes, a guitar and an entire cassette tape teaching library by Pastor Chuck Smith! These tapes would be used for both personal study as well as making them available as a lending library to those in the not-yet-formed textual community who wanted to listen to them. I would at first work full time, while studying for bible studies with any extra time. All this plus learning the ropes in a brand new marriage was an adventure. Truly church planting is the “extreme sports” version of Christianity!

The first Bible study in Albuquerque began simply and counted solely upon the media used in the preceding two thousand years of church history: *orality*. I taught the bible weekly and advertisement was by word of mouth. This was the only means by which others were informed about our new Bible Study at “The Lakes” apartments, inside a local apartment-housing clubhouse. The few who came at first told their friends or family members who were looking for a place to study the scriptures more in depth. But only a limited number of people found out about it due to the limiting nature of the medium employed. The medium of orality is normal confined to relational contacts and is

delivered one person per vocal discharge. Personal, one-on-one proclamation has always been part-and-parcel to the gospel mandate. However, why not use other means besides?

After a while a second means of media delivery was decided upon: the use of print media. We made little blue cards that simple read, “Bible Study, Thursday nights at 7 pm at the Lakes Apartments” and putting a map on the reverse side showing the nearest cross streets for a visual reinforcement. These printed invitations had some success but also only in a very limited way. The distribution of these little blue cars, roughly the size of postcards, depended upon the motivation and diligence of those who had them and their willingness to become the carriers. Still, some did come to the Thursday night bible study at the Lakes apartments holding their little blue card given to them by a motivated friend.

Still we wondered, “How could others, who may be interested in simply studying the scriptures but don’t know about our meetings, become informed?” So one attendee of the small bible study group went to a local Christian newspaper with a simple notice giving the same information as the printed blue the card. We were able to place our written notice free of charge and wait to see if anyone else would come. The wait-and-see approach was a bit more waiting than seeing, but still it was helpful. So now our media platforms were broadening: we had taken the jump from the media of word of mouth to the media platform that had changed the world hundreds of years earlier, the printing press. We were becoming a textual community and we were integrating standard forms of media to accomplish our purpose.

## **Making Use of Fulcrums of Communication Change**

A brief detour from Calvary of Albuquerque’s media history will help frame its use of media forms. History has times and events that bring massive change to the ways humans communicate with each other. One of history’s biggest pivotal fulcrums, changing communication and learning forever in the western world, was the advent of the printing press. Its significance cannot be underestimated nor sidestepped. In the fifteenth century, Johannes Gutenberg found an innovative use for a wine press, and the modern age of the printing press was born. Three media ingredients—paper, printing, and the alphabet—combined to ignite an explosion of nuclear proportions. In Guttenberg’s printing press, the phonetic alphabet was given a megaphone to amplify its reach. Printing made writing perfectly uniform and infinitely repeatable. For over four centuries, the printing press made the printed word the standard way of communicating and learning in the Western world.<sup>73</sup> The textual community could now be further strengthened by the availability of the text itself.

Of special interest to the church’s use of and response to this monumental invention is its structure. Mennonite pastor Shane Hipps brings insight into what impact this textual presentation had on the church:

The linear arrangement of pews in churches didn’t exist before the printing press. The medieval church didn’t have pews—just a wide open space for standing. But after the printing press, church seating started to mirror the page of a book. The impact of the printed medium is nearly endless. It not only led to a restructuring of physical space, it restructured our imagination and beliefs as well. This mass production placed information into the hands of everyone, which created the conditions that launched the Protestant reformation. It even reshaped the gospel.

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<sup>73</sup> Shane Hipps, *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your faith*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2009), 46.

The values of efficiency and linear sequence, which became more entrenched in the Western world with each passing decade, changed the way the gospel was conceived.” Hipps adds, “We become what we behold.”<sup>74</sup>

A basic fact is that a textual community relies on the availability of the text itself. In more ancient times the text was read by an *interpretes* of the community and only *listened to* by the rest of the community. But greater changes would be in store for Christians once the text would become wider spread through the use of the technology of the printing press. There is something notable among the advances made by this media delivery system: Guttenberg’s invention brought special advancement to the New Testament letters of the Apostle Paul. During the Middle Ages, before the invention of the printing press, the letters of Paul were seldom taught because their complex messages could not be captured in the colorful stained-glass scenes or drawn in illustrated prayer books. As an early medium, stained glass windows were only able to represent iconic bible stories, like those epic tales of Old testament heroism or those found in the gospels, stories about Jesus’ life and in particular, miracles. But they were unable to present deeper theological truths. The printing press revived the letters of Paul and helped to cultivate the reasoning skills needed to comprehend his message. As literacy became more the norm than preceding centuries, one could study the text for oneself. This is one reason why Martin Luther’s rediscovery of Paul’s letters resonated with print culture in a way it couldn’t have before that point.<sup>75</sup> The Protestant Reformation, which was largely a textual community revolution, owes as much of its success to the printing press as to

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 47-48.

<sup>75</sup> Shane Hipps, *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your faith*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2009),49.

Luther's own ninety-five thesis hand written and affixed to the doors of Wittenberg! And what Guttenberg's press was to the fifteenth century is what the computer would be like to the twentieth century.

## **Tape, Radio Waves and the Audio Revolution**

The next step for Calvary of Albuquerque in its media journey would become local radio. It was at first a modest step. Being new to this format and having no experience whatsoever, I wanted to start slow. I had a friend who had moved with me from California to New Mexico to manage a local Christian a.m. radio station. So Kent Bagdasar and I hosted a Saturday call-in "Question and Answer" program designed to engage local listeners in conversations about contemporary issues and the Christian faith. At the end of each Saturday broadcast we then invited people to our Thursday night bible studies. It was a simple summons, "If you're not doing anything Thursday nights, come out and join us for a study in scripture at the Lakes apartments." This proved more fruitful since radio as a media delivery system could potentially reach a broader audience through the amplitude modulation, the method of impressing sound on a radio signal that could be heard by individual receivers either in one's home or car.

Today, years after this first venture into radio, the church owns two radio networks, one designed to be a primarily teaching radio station featuring some the finest bible teachers in the world along with talk programs designed to strengthen the believer's faith and reach out to the local community. The other is a unique, non-commercial musical jukebox with a menu geared towards the younger generation, peppered with gospel messages throughout the day, and teaching programs on the weekends. Both

broadcast locally but have translators and transmitters to reach throughout the state of New Mexico and southern Colorado along with live stream Internet capability. These stations have become Calvary of Albuquerque's megaphone to reach out. But many more technological steps would have to be taken in between print media and owning radio stations for the advancement of this textual community.

Following the example set previously by Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa, the Albuquerque fellowship began to record the Bible studies and pulpit sermons early in its history as funds were made available. The church's first tape duplicator was purchased in 1982 and immediately made taped messages available after the church services. Moving from the Far North Cinema Theater to a more permanent rented location made that step more feasible. At each service (Sunday mornings, Sunday nights and Thursday nights), live capture was done via reel-to-reel tape decks located at or near the audio control console. A designated "Tape Room" was also marked off for the storage, sale and mailing of duplicated cassette tapes of the various teaching messages. These compact audiocassettes, that became so popular in the 1970s for the storage and playing of audio information, were still the general preference for those disseminating bible teaching and wouldn't see decline for another decade. Yet at the same time another revolution was brewing in audio technology. The advent of the CD (compact disc) would become the technological replacement for the cassette tape soon enough.

Cassettes remained popular for specific applications, such as car audio, well into the 1990s. But eventually these tapes were been relegated to the medium of nostalgia. The Compact Disk was first introduced in the 1970s but took some time to gain acceptance. "Format wars" have ever been the bane of any new technological

advancement, CDs included. Originally intended to be the replacement for the phonographic record, CDs have enjoyed wider application and were (and still are) used by the church ministries. In 1985 the computer readable CD-ROM (read-only memory) and in 1990, CD-Recordable were introduced.<sup>76</sup> But newer technological formats demand newer systems of delivery and reliability, bringing to those who employ them budgetary demands for replacement. Calvary of Albuquerque found itself having to make both tapes and CDs available for both early and late adaptors to CDs. Many still had (and still have) tape-only systems in their cars and thus wanted cassettes of the recorded messages. Most organizations discover that there is a “shoulder time” of a few years to shift from one delivery system to another. Thus the financial consideration for these organizations is one that will determine whether or not its overall response to technological advancements. And there will always be newer formats and the need for newer systems of delivery, and the need to include hardware and software upgrades in the organization’s budget.

Even the Compact Disk playback recordings would soon enough see a decline with the advent of yet newer forms of technology in the MP3, a patented digital audio encoding format. The computer age has allowed for digital audio compression for the transfer and playback of both music and high quality speech via this audio-specific format. The compression works by reducing accuracy of certain parts of sound that are considered to be beyond the auditory resolution ability of most people. This method is commonly referred to as perceptual coding. It uses psychoacoustic models to discard or reduce precision of components less audible to human hearing, and then records the

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<sup>76</sup> Wikipedia, *Compact Disk*: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compact\\_Disc](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compact_Disc).

remaining information in an efficient manner.<sup>77</sup> The MP3 has changed the way music is purchased and listened to worldwide. And it has enabled Calvary of Albuquerque to record live services onto a storage disk and have them available via retrievable archive or on computer thumb drives or to be emailed in this format. Though the ease of creating and sharing MP3s has brought a huge challenge of copyright infringement and “piracy,” still for the textual community that wants its message to get out and make maximum impact, this format is ideal. Calvary of Albuquerque has met these challenges by simply making all the recorded messages in its entire expositional history free of charge to anyone who visits the website and wishes to download them. Also any on-site-visitor who wants to plug in a thumb drive at one of the sermon kiosks located in the foyer of the main campus can walk away with an entire cache of sermon messages.

## **Hearing AND Seeing**

“Technology is nothing more than the modification of the environment to serve human ends.” So writes Kerby Anderson, president of Probe Ministries International, and syndicated columnist for the *Dallas Morning News*.<sup>78</sup> This modification might be a process or activity that extends or enhances a human function. A microscope, a telescope, and binoculars extend one’s visual perception. A tractor or backhoe extends one’s physical ability. A computer extends’ ones ability to calculate and to interact. Such platforms can be used by God’s people, especially by the textual community for expansion and reinforcement of its message. But what about the visual? What about using

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<sup>77</sup> Wikipedia: *MP3*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MP3>.

<sup>78</sup> Kerby Anderson, *Technology, Spirituality, & Social Trends: Probing the Headlines That Impact Your Family*, (Grand Rapids, Kregal Books, 2002, 15.

sight to enhance orality? Paul declared that, “Faith comes by hearing...” (Romans 10:17), so does that rule out seeing?

Calvary of Albuquerque has never taken an exclusive “either/or” approach. Rather it has historically abided by a “both/and” approach. The first step in using radio was in 1982 with “The Calvary Connection”, which began as a weekend call-in program on a local a.m. radio station. A few years later, a fifteen minute daily program using recorded messages captured live at the church campus was used, which developed into a full half-hour daily broadcast, called, “The Connection with Skip Heitzig,” now aired on hundreds of stations worldwide. The radio tagline which opens the program is, “Connecting you with God’s never changing truths in ever-changing times.” Thus the value of our textual community became reinforced by broadcast radio. But audio messaging wasn’t the only means utilized. The visual counterpart of our output of biblical exposition was also began being formed.

The culture today in the West is more visual than ever before. Images and icons are fast displacing words as the dominate communication schema of our culture—as seen by Nike’s ability to use its wordless *swoosh* icon without losing any brand recognition.<sup>79</sup> Images have a power to communicate that is formidable. Thus a side arm of Calvary of Albuquerque’s media delivery has been in making visual copies of live services available, as well as adventuring into the feature documentary world providing films on the life of the Apostle Paul (“The Long Road to Rome”), insights into the world of the

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<sup>79</sup> Shane Hipps, *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your faith*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2009), 17.

occult (“Shattered”), End Times Prophecy (“Epicenter” featuring Joel Rosenberg), and “Learning from the Land” (a tour of the Israel documentary).

Visual broadcasting for Calvary of Albuquerque began in the early 1980s with a half hour TV program also called the “Calvary Connection” which was filmed at first in Colorado Springs and then placed on local Albuquerque stations. These programs featured the use of then-contemporary Christian music bands along with cameo explanations of the gospel and the discussion of culturally relevant topics germane at the time of filming.

What is the value of sight over sound? It can be simply stated by one word: *impact*. Images initially make us *feel* rather than think. They can pin the logical side of your brain to the back of your skull, which is why image-based advertising is so effective. Printed words make us think and question. Images present an experience.<sup>80</sup> This can be helpful or harmful to the gospel message and the difference is largely dependent upon use and motive. Images are not well suited to articulate arguments, categories or abstractions. They are far better suited for presenting impressions. This is why, though television and film have been helpful tools, they primary presentation of expression for Calvary of Albuquerque has been vocal while the visual (both in print and in film) has not been ignored. The simple provision of preaching services in an Online, easily accessed format is an enormous benefit, especially for those who live far from a geographical area where a solid textual community might exist. Many letters and emails of affirmation to the “Connection” (the simplified term for the media arm of Calvary of

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<sup>80</sup> Shane Hipps, *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your faith*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2009), 76.

Albuquerque) attest to that. One short example is from Jacolyn Nelson, a North Dakota Resident who uses her computer to tunes into the live services at Calvary of Albuquerque to supplement her spiritual nourishment:

“My sister belongs to your church and shared the web address with me a year ago. I appreciate the opportunity to watch the services and teachings on-line. I have grown stronger in my faith because of them. Thank you.”

### **Brian Stock Meets a Contemporary Textual Community**

It's helpful at this point to revisit the four basic components of Brian Stock's model of the textual community and how they interface with the expanded definition as purported by this dissertation. The essential elements of the textual community are a first a compelling interpreter, seconds an educative process, third rituals of community, and forth a means of legitimization through historicization. Stock's discussion of textual community assumes the work of the interpreter, a charismatic interpreter (or a compelling interpreter) through proclamation. Indeed all four components of Stock's model of textual community can be seen in the practices of Calvary of Albuquerque.

1. *The Office of the Interpreter.* This is Stock's key element to identify the textual community. The practice of exposition preaching and teaching of the text of Scripture by the Senior Pastor, line upon line, verse by verse, book by book, taking sometimes eleven or more years to accomplish a single pass through the scriptures can be seen as a modern counterpart. The disciplined custom of *lecto continuum* has become endemic in the Calvary Culture and in particular at Calvary of Albuquerque. Furthermore it is our belief that the role must be by divine calling as evidenced by the biblical gift of teaching and not

just by anyone who fancies himself/herself as one. *“He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ, until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ.”* (Ephesians 4:11-13 NLT) Such an office is ratified by its immediate historical context seen in the fruit of the exercise thereof

2. ***The Educative Process.*** The shaping of the textual community comes through this process. The discipline provided by the aforementioned approach to teaching the Bible provides the process. This pragmatic simple method supplies a method often eclipsed in traditional churches by traditional lectionaries or church calendars. The process is further enhanced by encouraging church members to own and bring their own bibles to church services, most of which do, and by some who bring it in digital form to the church services. This educative process departs from Stock's model and follows a biblical model by giving providing the congregation with, “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20: 27). It can be easily seen that teaching a congregation through the entire Bible will give to them the will of God, in context and with the emphasis the context provides. The educative process is fortified by the availability of expository messages (and their visual counterparts) online free of charge.

3. ***Ritual of the Community.*** Every community of faith has its own rituals and not the least being the textual community. Rituals bring identity to the community and express its historical self-understanding. From meeting times, to music and prayer rituals, to giving of time, talent and treasure, these rituals help forge that identity. The traditional Christian rituals of baptism and the Sacred Supper of Communion have also been adopted, along with baby dedications and Christian burial. For Calvary of Albuquerque a unique ritual is it's style of receiving contributions. Rather than pressure pitched pleas or pledge Sundays or Capital campaigns, simple wooden boxes have been placed around the auditorium mainly and around the campus generally to make giving simple and easily accessible to people who come to worship. With the advent of recent technology through media, secure on-line giving ads to that meta-messaging that giving should be uncomplicated.

Another ritual that is no longer unique but was singular to the Albuquerque area when the church started was the kind of worship employed. More upbeat, amplified, contemporary rock music, though now widespread, was extremely controversial when the church began. Calvary of Albuquerque was even accused of using "light shows and rock-concert music" to attract young people by more traditional churches in the early 1980s when the church was growing rapidly as highlighted as "the fastest growing church in America." The reality was that the music simply reflected the musical tastes of a new generation and the fact that the pastor and staff grew up with the

music of the Beatles, Bib Dylan and Credence Clearwater Revival rather than Perry Como or the Lennon Sisters.

4. ***Historicization.*** This brings stability and strength to the community over the long haul and determines the narrative of the community. Every textual community can find its own local expression and be “contextualized” by name (or brand), but textual communities build upon their styles, values and rituals over time. The strength of Calvary of Albuquerque is that it has consciously placed one “codex” at the center of the life of the community and that is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Doing this keeps the members of the textual community in close connection to their spiritual past via the roots of Judaism and Christ’s’ Apostles via the Old and New Testaments. Also the establishing early in its history of replicating the textual messages through tape duplication, then video capture, CD and DVD format on then MP3, MP4, digital internet simulcast, computer flash-drives and QR coding have produced a heritage and legacy that transcends the geography of this textual community in the Southwestern United States. The use of radio and television has also helped to expand the historic legacy of Calvary of Albuquerque by the half hour daily radio program, *The Connection*. The “audio-seminary” result has served to equip thousands around the world with the same power of the biblical text.

But what are the real benefits of using technology to enhance the presence and mission of a textual community? Is media truly neutral? Can a generation be reached, taken through a process of discipleship and spiritually fortified by using it? Can the

message stay the same while the methods of distribution of the message change?

Certainly in one sense that's already an inescapable conclusion. The forms of Christianity have changed already as people, times and cultures have changed. If they did not, we would all have to learn Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic in order to read the scriptural text. A Bible translation is simply a new medium—the medium of a different language or the updating of a receptor language. But the church has a history of revisiting methodological changes.

The same discussion and debate exists in our present age. But this time at issue are different media. Christians have squabbled over the translations of the bible into various subculture dialects of English as well as the use of television radio, or print to broadcast a preacher's message. All of these things can extend the reach of the gospel. So do methods matter? We must be careful not to broad-brush the issue saying the media is merely the tool of communication, because often in the electronics age, "the medium *is* the message." The tool must serve the cause rather than the cause being limited or directed by the tool.

Media is anything that stretches, extends or amplifies some human capacity.<sup>81</sup> The telephone extends and amplifies the voice and the ear. Eyeglasses extend the focusing ability of the eye. Communication technologies also do this. The spoken word, books, email, cell phones and computer websites are all human creations that are a medium of one kind or another. The more we extend and amplify ourselves, the more the world changes.<sup>82</sup> As the world shrinks we witness the violent collision of previously distant

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<sup>81</sup> Shane Hipps, *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your faith*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2009), 32.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 33.

cultures. This “global village” changes the way we live and changes also the way people practice faith. The real challenge will become not to be servants of the things we have created, which is the very essence of idolatry.

In the next chapter I will speak to these challenges. There are both incredible opportunities as well as incredible landmines that lay ahead. And for the textual community seeking to develop through the integration of convergence culture, the task can be a daunting one.

## **The Reality of the Challenge of the High Tech Age**

The age of media proliferation, an age in which we find ourselves squarely in, deserves some examination and analysis. This chapter will do that, providing an assessment of the current technological landscape so as to consider both opportunities and challenges to the contemporary Christian especially to those seeking to reinforce and expand the message adhered to by the textual community. In seeking to navigate the future, one must know the past and the present. The last 150 years have seen the advent of the telephone, electricity, radio, television, car, computer and the ability to communicate through the Worldwide Web. It might even be said that the inventions of the past century and a half have been a human attempt to strive for freedom and communication, to be able to get control of our lives.

Perhaps this links us moderns to the ancient peoples of postdiluvian Babel who banded together to create a communication system and make a name for themselves (Genesis 11:1-9). So what are the trends that mark our contemporary trajectory in this digital age and how can they be harnessed for good? That’s an enormous question but

one that must be addressed. To explore current technologies is to examine not just an information explosion but online community building that could have implications for the textual community.

## **The Computer Generation**

There is probably no innovation that has so radically changed the way of life for Americans as the Internet. It is invisible unless one accesses it and yet extremely powerful. And the Internet continues to evolve bringing with it changes in the landscape of our personal lives. According to Mary Meeker, the Internet analyst at Morgan Stanley, the world is currently in the throws of the next great wave of technological advancement.<sup>83</sup>

Computers were once regarded as those experimental machines that government agencies were experimenting with but with no clear application to normal everyday life. The mainframe computer was introduced back in the 1950s. I remember my brother taking computer classes dealing with binary codes. His class was very sparsely attended as no one saw the real future computers would eventually play. The real revolution came in the 1970s with the creation of the microcomputer, followed eventually by the personal computer in the 1980s and the rise of the Internet in the 1990s. Today, at the time of this writing, the lion's share of the technological focus seems to be on the mobile Internet in which people don't need to be physically connected to a modem nor to a desk to stay connected.

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<sup>83</sup> George Barna, *Futurecast: What Today's Trends Mean for Tomorrow's World*, (Austin, Fed & Co/ Tyndale/Barna, 2011), 93.

The world of “high tech” is radically changing in its own developments and is radically changing the world in which we live. When my father was a boy, he was raised on a homesteaded ranch in the wilds of Wyoming helping his father plant and harvest with a team of horses. My grandson, however will not know a world without flickering computer screens, electronic fund transfers and the invisible highway called the “internet.” Many estimate that computer power is now doubling every eighteen months. According to Gordon Moore, one of the founders of high-tech giant Intel Corporation, every Christmas computer games are almost twice as powerful (in terms of memory and processing speed) as they were the previous year. As the years pass, the nature of this kind of gain becomes monumental. For example, when you receive a birthday card in the mail, it often has a chip that sings, “Happy Birthday to you.” Remarkably, that chip has more computer power than all the allied forces of 1945! Hitler, Roosevelt or Churchill might have killed to get that chip. But what do we do with it after opening the birthday card? Once the party is over, we throw the card (and chip) away. Today, your cell phone has more computer power than all of NASA had back in 1969 when it sent two astronauts to the moon; and the Sony Playstation of today, which costs \$300, has the power of a military supercomputer of 1997, which costs millions of dollars.<sup>84</sup>

To better understand kind of impact that media has on contemporary life, consider the sheer volume of content we ingest each year. Reasonable estimates, according to researcher George Barna, is that on average we take in about 3,500 hours per year from

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<sup>84</sup> *Your Cell phone has more computing power than NASA circa 1969*, Doubleday Publishing: <http://doubleday.knopfdoubleday.com/2011/03/14/your-cell-phone/>

various sources, averaging out to 67 hours per week.<sup>85</sup> This size of volume input is only possible because of multitasking, the relatively new style of media relationship—listening to music while surfing the internet while reading a book while perusing a newspaper while sending and receiving text messages on a mobile device while a television program is being periodically watched nearby.

## **Social Media**

The Internet has also changed the way we as people relate to other people. Rather than waiting for weeks for overseas mail to arrive, email can connect people together instantly. Today is the age of Social Media and its probably here to stay, for better or for worse. On one hand, the world is communicating instantly and frequently through email, text messaging, tweeting and Facebook. But the down side of the trend is that two out of ten drivers admit to reading or sending text-messages while on the road, increasing the potential risk of slowdowns and worse, for automobile accidents that could incur the loss of life.<sup>86</sup>

Moreover it seems that America in particular has become, in George Barna's words, "a nation addicted to media input." He notes that the typical adult allocates more than fifty hours per week to media absorption. In fact, the only activity that takes more time is sleeping. According to Barna and his research team, based on the criteria developed by the American Psychiatric Association, our devotion to media content is an

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<sup>85</sup> George Barna, *Futurecast: What Today's Trends Mean for Tomorrow's World*, (Austin, Fed & Co/ Tyndale/Barna,2011), 84-85.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

addiction, perhaps even the most widespread and insidious addiction to our society today.<sup>87</sup>

The media of today's world is reshaping how we think and how we live. Media today is interactive and participatory, allowing people to participate in the conceptualization, communication, and criticism processes.<sup>88</sup> Because of these criteria, information today is extremely influential, taking on a bigger role in our culture simply due to the feeling of ownership people have when they take part in the information process.

Social media became a trend in 2003 when MySpace was first introduced. It seemed to get everyone's attention, especially those of a younger age. But then came Facebook, the burgeoning social network phenomenon that took the world by storm. Started in a dorm room by four college kids in 2004, Facebook spread to a few college campuses and caught on quickly before experiencing exponential growth in 2006. People now communicate through online media platform communities, sharing recipes, advice and family pictures. No longer can anyone claim that Social Media is merely a fad. On the contrary! It is the biggest shift since the Industrial Revolution. Consider the following facts to note how rapidly the world has been changing through technology:

1. "By 2010 Generation Y (or *Millennials*: those born in the 1980s and 1990s) will outnumber Baby Boomers...96% of them have joined a social network.
2. Social Media has overtaken porn as the #1 activity on the Web.
3. 1 out of 8 couples married in the U.S. last year met via social media.

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<sup>87</sup> George Barna, *Futurecast: What Today's Trends Mean for Tomorrow's World*, (Austin, Fed & Co/ Tyndale/Barna,2011), 11.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

4. The number of years to reach 50 millions Users: Radio (38 years), TV (13 years), Internet (4 years), iPod (3 years)...Facebook added 100 million users in less than 9 months...iPhone applications hit 1 billion in 9 months.
5. If Facebook were a country it would be the world's 4th largest between the United States and Indonesia (note that Facebook is now creeping up – recently announced 300 million users).
6. Yet, some sources say China's QZone (A Chinese social networking website) is larger with over 300 million using their services (Facebook's ban in China plays into this).
7. comScore (a recognized leader in measuring the digital world) indicates that Russia has the most engage social media audience with visitors spending 6.6 hours and viewing 1,307 pages per visitor per month – Vkontakte.ru is the #1 social network.
8. A 2009 US Department of Education study revealed that on average, online students out performed those receiving face-to-face instruction.
9. 1 in 6 higher education students are enrolled in online curriculum.
10. The percentage of companies using LinkedIn as a primary tool to find employees....80%.
11. The fastest growing segment on Facebook is 55-65 year-old females
12. Ashton Kutcher and Ellen Degeneres (combined) have more Twitter followers than the population of Ireland, Norway, or Panama.
13. 80% of Twitter usage is outside of Twitter...people update anywhere,

anytime.

14. Generation Y and Z consider e-mail passé...In 2009 Boston College stopped distributing e-mail addresses to incoming freshmen.
15. What happens in Vegas stays on YouTube, Flickr, Twitter, Facebook...
16. The #2 largest search engine in the world is YouTube
17. Wikipedia has over 13 million articles...some studies show it's more accurate than Encyclopedia Britannica...78% of these articles are non-English.
18. There are over 200,000,000 Blogs.
19. 54% = Percentage of bloggers who post content or tweet daily.
20. Because of the speed in which social media enables communication, "word of mouth" now becomes, "world of mouth."
21. If you were paid a \$1 for every time an article was posted on Wikipedia you would earn \$156.23 per hour
22. Facebook users translated the site from English to Spanish via a Wiki in less than 4 weeks and the cost Facebook was \$0.
23. 25% of search results for the World's Top 20 largest brands are links to user-generated content.
24. 34% of bloggers post opinions about products & brands.
25. People care more about how their social graph ranks products and services than how Google ranks them.

26. 78% of consumers trust peer recommendations.
27. Only 14% of customers trust advertisements.
28. Only 18% of traditional TV campaigns generate a positive ROI (Return on Investment).
29. 90% of people that can TiVo ads do.
30. Hulu has grown from 63 million total streams in April 2008 to 373 million in April 2009.
31. 25% of Americans in the past month said they watched a short video...on their phone.
32. According to Jeff Bezos 35% of book sales on Amazon are for the Kindle when available.
33. 24 of the 25 largest newspapers are experiencing record declines in circulation because we no longer search for the news; the news finds us.
34. In the near future we will no longer search for products and services they will find us via social media.
35. More than 1.5 million pieces of content (web links, news stories, blog-posts, notes, photos, etc.) are shared on Facebook...daily.
36. Successful companies in social media act more like Dale Carnegie and less like David Ogilvy: Listening first, selling second.
37. Successful companies in social media act more like party planners,

aggregators, and content providers than traditional advertiser.”<sup>89</sup>

Facebook claims to have more than 500 million active users (compared to MySpace’s 125 million), 50% of which are active users logging on to the Facebook website in any given day, each user on average having 130 friends. The people of the world in aggregate spend over 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook. And this social network giant isn’t just an English-only site. Perhaps more than any other site on the Internet, Facebook links the world together: There are more than 70 translations available on the website for non-English speaking countries. Over 300,000 users helped translate the site through the translations application. That’s been a good thing for the company since about 70% of Facebook users are outside the United States! And Entrepreneurs and developers from more than 190 countries build with Facebook Platform and install 20 million applications every day. So powerful and pervasive is the Facebook social networking group that every month, more than 250 million people engage with Facebook on external websites and since social plugins were launched in April 2010, an average of 10,000 new websites now integrate with Facebook every day. That means that over 2.5 million websites have integrated with Facebook, including over 80 of comScore’s U.S. Top 100 websites and over half of comScore’s Global Top 100 websites.<sup>90</sup>

Other social-networking applications have driven to the forefront services such as Twitter (more than one-hundred million users) and LinkedIn (more than seventy million

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<sup>89</sup> Socialnomics: *Statistics Show Social Media is Bigger Than You Think*:  
<http://www.socialnomics.net/2009/08/11/statistics-show-social-media-is-bigger-than-you-think/>

<sup>90</sup>: *Statistics: Facebook*: <https://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>

users who rely on it for professional contacts, but clearly as of now, Facebook has garnered the largest share of online users and time logged. Nielsen's research finds that about half of the adult population visited a social networking site in the past year. Social networks and blogs are the fourth most popular online activity and are responsible for ten percent of all time logged on the Internet. Another study, by Arbitron/Edison Research, revealed that 48 percent of all Americans twelve or older have a profile on one or more social networks, doubling the percentage of those who had one two years earlier.<sup>91</sup>

### **Old Media or New Media or Both?**

What's in store for the future may be anyone's guess but it is sure to follow a few predictable patterns: newer media delivery platforms will eclipse older ones. As far as social networking, the Internet will probably move towards a more diverse population of networks, serving ever more targeted niches. But what of traditional media platforms like books, radio, music and television? What is their future and how will it change. Let us consider a few of these media forms and how the world of print and broadcasting is feeling the changes.

**Books:** The world of printed books and newspapers is morphing rapidly due to presently developing technologies-books (digital versions of printed books) enable people to download via the computer the entire volume they are seeking to read within seconds to a digital reading device. In fact the book industry is in utter turmoil over it. It seems that digital versions of books are not expanding the universe of book buyers, but

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<sup>91</sup> George Barna, *Futurecast: What Today's Trends Mean for Tomorrow's World*, (Austin, Fed & Co/ Tyndale/Barna, 2011), 99.

simply rearranging the existing population of bibliophiles. This “reshuffling of the deck” is having a profound effect on publishing houses in America especially. According to USA Today, consumers are increasingly ordering print books online and reading e-books delivered instantly to mobile devices and e-readers such as Amazon’s Kindle and Barnes & Noble’s Nook.<sup>92</sup> This obviously poses a growing risk to those who publish in print only and refuse to “cross-pollinate” the world of communication media with digital formats. Although most people largely still read tangible print media, the winds of change are evident and can be felt by even large superstore book outlets.

Borders, the nation’s second largest book chain with about 500 “superstores,” had delayed payments to its vendors at the time of this writing and faces a potential bankruptcy filing and is widely expected to announce store closings soon. Barnes and Noble, the largest chain, has embarked on what it calls, “consolidation” of its 717 superstores as it pursues an increasingly digital strategy. It has already closed all of its 798 B. Dalton mall outlets. Bookstores are in inevitable decline says Michael Cader, founder of *Publishers Lunch*, a digital newsletter. While Cader concedes that smaller bookstores are still very vibrant and successful, he acknowledges the growing shift in digital publishing and convergence media.<sup>93</sup>

Some less optimistic voices are already giving the eulogy at the funeral of traditional print bookstores and see physical bookstores going the way of record shops and video rental stores. Mike Shatzkin, a publishing consultant predicts that the shelf space devoted to print books in physical stores will decline by 50% during the next five years and 90% during the next decade. More than 1,000 bookstores have closed from

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<sup>92</sup> USA Today—digital iPad edition , Feb10, 2011; Tech Section: Article 4 of 19; pg 1 of 6

<sup>93</sup> USA Today—digital iPad edition, Feb10, 2011; Tech Section: Article 4 of 19; pg 2 of 6

2000 through 2007, leaving about 10,600 according to the latest federal statistics.<sup>94</sup> The bottom line, say most observant experts is the quality offered by the staff and the kind of experience offered when one enters the bookstore. Online shopping experiences give readers a wealth of information that a staff member of a local store may not have. People who are doing the selling in person have to know more than just how to operate the cash register. Either know your product and customers or loose the sales race! Clearly the text, though still a centerpiece of universal cultural life has been radically altered in terms of its delivery to the readers.

Even Hallmark greeting cards has felt the twinge of pain from these changes. Traditionally the company has made its business from text-based greeting cards. Though not dispensing of this traditional “old” media, they have sought to add to their delivery platform of greetings and best wishes. Hallmark has seen the need to reinvent itself to reinforce the brand using recordable cards. One television commercial I’ve seen recently features a soldier serving overseas away from his family. His is given his weekly ration of mail from home and opens his package. Inside is a small book with a device attached that allows this distant dad to hear recorded words from his daughter back home. More than what is written in a card or booklet, this soldier/father is drawn to his daughters voice, something more precious to this overseas father than anything he could read in print.

**Music:** As a church that owns it’s own retail bookstore that offers Christian music as well, we (along with every other book/music outlet) have experienced a dramatic drop in sales of music CDs over the past decade. Most independent music stores are a thing of

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<sup>94</sup> USA Today—digital iPad edition, Feb10, 2011; Tech Section: Article 4 of 19; pg 3 of 6

the past because most music is now offered in more diverse formats than in past years. Another factor to consider, though it shouldn't be this way for the Christian community, is that a large number of music sales have been substituted by illegal music downloads. People want music. In fact Americans are responsible for one thirds of all music sales on earth.<sup>95</sup> But fewer people don't want to pay for it! This could also be applied to the textual community. Available sermons could become liberated so that more people could enjoy them, especially if they were distributed for free. After all, Jesus said, "Freely you have received; freely give" (Matthew 10:8)

### **Where Christians find themselves—surrounded by bits & pixels**

We live in a world of technology that is growing too fast to keep pace with. It is a world where immediate response to emails and texts is rather expected. Most people take their cell phones with them wherever they go and check messages frequently during the day. When was the last time you received a hand written letter? Time and convenience are dictating this eclipse of pen and paper. This certainly has a downside to it, but this is the new reality. The question is, how is the Christian church responding? What is the textual community doing about these trends?

The Barna group is an independent research group that has been conducting and analyzing primary research to understand cultural trends related to values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors since 1984 especially the trends and beliefs of the Christian world. Their researchers conducted telephone interviews with a random sample of 605 senior pastors of Protestant churches. For comparison, similarly drawn samples of senior

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<sup>95</sup> International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, January 3, 2008

pastors were interviewed previously, responding to the same survey questions. In the prior studies, 845 senior pastors were interviewed in 2005, and 610 senior pastors were interviewed in 2000. The maximum margin of sampling error associated with the aggregate sample of 605 pastors spoken to in the most recent survey is  $\pm 4.1$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Denominational stratification was used to ensure a representative presence of the variety of denominations in the United States. Their research shows that churches may be considered *late adapters* to the technological playing field:

Two-thirds of Protestant churches (65%) now have a large screen projection system in their church that they use for services and other events. However, that number is barely higher than the 62% identified in Barna's 2005 study. At that time, growth was still evident, given that only 39% of churches had such a system in 2000. Since 2000, there has been a 67% increase in the number of churches using big-screen systems, but only a 5% increase since 2005.<sup>96</sup> The smaller a church is, the less likely it is to use such tools. Among churches that average less than 100 adults each week, only half (53%) have such systems. The proportion balloons to 76% among churches that attract an average of 100 to 250 adults, and nearly nine out of ten churches (88%) that draw more than 250 adults each week. When Calvary of Albuquerque first put up screens for church services, the change was met with resistance, many stating that we were capitulating to worldly means to get the message out.

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<sup>96</sup> Barna Research: *Technology in Church*: <http://www.preaching.com/resources/preaching-online/11574394/>

Some Christian church communities are advancing beyond the projector screen to more digital-savvy methods. Sending email blasts to large groups of people or to the entire church body is becoming more commonplace with a majority of Protestant churches (56%). Surprisingly, however, the prevalence of this practice has not budged since 2005. Small congregations are less likely to send out such blasts (47%) than are churches with 100 or more adults attending during a typical week (66%).<sup>97</sup>

It should be noted that many churches, especially small churches are less technology-friendly. Finances are part of the reason for this no doubt, however, perhaps keeping such technology away from the church accounts for meager growth of many churches. “Many small churches seem to believe new tools for ministry are outside of their budget range or may not be significant for a church of their size. It may be, though, that such thinking contributes to the continued small size of some of those churches.”<sup>98</sup> Perhaps if digitally resistant churches prayerfully strategized ways of facilitating their vision through the deployment of such tools, their ministry goals could be realized, or in the very least complimented by such available technologies.

## **The Opportunities**

We find ourselves surrounded by bits and pixels. So what is the Christian to do? How can the textual community use what is available as a platform to deliver the gospel and to help mature the members within the textual community? Back to an earlier quote.

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<sup>97</sup> Preaching: *Research on Technology in Church*:  
<http://www.preaching.com/resources/preaching-online/11574394/> p1

<sup>98</sup> Preaching: *Research on Technology in Church*:  
[\(http://www.preaching.com/resources/preaching-online/11574394/\)](http://www.preaching.com/resources/preaching-online/11574394/) p2

“Technology is nothing more than the modification of the environment to serve human ends,” wrote Kerby Anderson of Probe Ministries International and a nationally syndicated columnist based in Dallas, Texas. Andersons helps Christians in the textual community form a *Theology of Technology*:

Genesis 1:28 states the biblical mandate for development and using technology; God gave humankind dominion over the land, and we are obliged to use and manage these resources wisely in serving the Lord. God’s ideal was not necessarily a world composed exclusively of primitive areas; before the Fall, Adam was to cultivate and keep the Garden of Eden (gen. 2:15). After the Fall, the same command pertains to the application of technology to this fallen world, a world that groans in travail (Rom. 8:22). Technology can benefit humankind in exercising our proper dominion, and thus remove some of the effects of the Fall (by curing disease, improved breeding livestock, or growing better crops). Technology is neither good nor evil; rather its characteristic is determined by the worldview behind the particular technology.<sup>99</sup>

History shows that Anderson’s assertion is correct. In ancient times (Old Testament times, technology was used for good (the building of an ark in Genesis 6) as well as for evil (the building of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11). We can consider what opportunities technology affords the textual community simply because technology is a tool and not an end in itself. The real focus is not the technology; it is the philosophical (or spiritual) motivation behind its use.

But crucial to the discussion of utilizing the opportunities afforded by the technological Disneyland we all find ourselves in is the set of values of the individual using the Internet. We must do what Daniel Lohrmann suggests in what he calls “surfing

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<sup>99</sup> Kerby Anderson, *Technology, Spirituality, & Social Trends: Probing the Headlines That Impact Your Family*, (Grand Rapids, Kregal Books, 2002, 15.

our values.”<sup>100</sup> Developing a list of cyber-ethics and examining our actions is a huge step in faithfulness to God and maximizing the opportunities at hand.

We must be cautious and responsible but not afraid. Billy Graham, quoting Werner Von Braun in the aftermath of WWII, “Religion and science are not antagonists. On the contrary they are sisters.”<sup>101</sup> The Internet is like a system of highways, but it includes both roadways as well as destinations. It’s sort of like traveling by car across our country: you can travel over state highways, and interstates, as well as city streets and gravel single lane roads. You can visit museums, libraries and malls and government institutions as well as Uncle Ted’s farmhouse thirty-five miles out of town. You can connect to powerful, life-transforming Bible teaching or you can be entertained by a movie at a theater. But its far wider and deeper than a road trip. On the Internet Superhighway, the whole world is connected. The Internet is one of the most exciting developments that the world has seen. Yet many Christians are both fearful and ignorant of it. We don’t have to be.

What are some of the constructive ways the Internet can be helpful?

***Home Schooling.*** The Internet has been an incredible boon to families with its rich resources providing a way to share common interests. One family may wish to pursue the mutual passion of Astronomy or Civil War History and see pictures and video clips of Ford’s Theater in Washington DC where President Lincoln was shot. Families that home-school have discovered the enormous amount of information available on the Internet that can supplement lessons and provide resources to parents in presenting a

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<sup>100</sup> Daniel Lohrmann, *Virtual Integrity: Faithfully Navigating the Brave New Web*, (Grnad Rapids, Brazos Press, 2008), 14, 139ff.

<sup>101</sup> YouTube, *Billy Graham: Technology, Faith and Human Shortcomings*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90mj79GqWhc>

lesson. Besides these, one can discover forums and support from other home-school families around the country.<sup>102</sup>

***Missionary Connectivity.*** The missionaries within our church as well as the other churches have discovered the blessing be staying connected via the Internet. Radio and satellite links give missionaries in even the remotest outposts access to instant, inexpensive and reliable communications through email with their families, sponsors, sending church and host organizations. The once huge world, separating people by land and sea has grown smaller, helping missionaries to no longer feel alone and isolated but connected and integrated. Prayer requests from missionaries to senders and funding churches can be shared immediately and responses can come in minutes or hours rather than in weeks and months. Pictures and videos can be enjoyed at both ends and real-time accessibility through “Face Time” or “Skype” is now possible.

***Evangelism.*** Though eye-contact and body language are not part of the equation in online communication, computer conversations can include those about Christ. Some who may be naturally introverted and wouldn’t ask certain questions to another face to face may feel emboldened to venture a question or rebuttal online. One group that effectively has harnessed the worldwide web is Global Media Outreach (GMO). I interviewed John Blandford who works with this internet evangelism group. He reports that according to Google, 2 million people per day are looking for God on the Internet. The vision of GMO is to give every person on earth multiple opportunities to receive

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<sup>102</sup> Kerby Anderson, *Technology, Spirituality, & Social Trends: Probing the Headlines That Impact Your Family*, (Grand Rapids, Kregel Books, 2002), 33-34.

Jesus Christ by the year 2020. His strategy is to partner with churches worldwide by training their people to become “online missionaries.”

It was Paul, quoting the Prophet Isaiah, who wrote, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!” (Romans 10:15) Since the feet were people’s primary way of traveling and transporting (i.e. gaining access) in ancient times, perhaps a more up to date way of stating it might be, “How beautiful are the laptops, how beautiful are the iPads, and how beautiful are the mobile devices that preach the gospel of peace.” These technological tools are being used by evangelistic and discipleship organizations to spread God’s gospel, educate the young, connect missionaries to donors and home churches, as well as provide resources online that would be either impossible or at least extremely difficult to get otherwise.

***Christian Resources.*** There are a growing number of Christian resources available online and easily accessed through search-engine (programs that look for any given subject on the Internet) surfing. Subjects from comparative religions and apologetics to Bible Study on specific topics or Bible passages can be instantly perused and enjoyed.

“Faith Comes By Hearing” is an Albuquerque, New Mexico based organization dedicated to getting the Bible in audio format to people around the globe. Understanding that a large percentage of the world’s population is illiterate, this organization seeks to provide God’s Word in the heart language of a variety of people groups for the purpose of disciple-making. This approach of using *orality* to reach people has caused FCBH to offer the largest catalogue of audio Bibles to “people who hunger to hear”<sup>103</sup> A number of

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<sup>103</sup> Faith Comes By Hearing: *What We Do*: <http://www.faithcomesbyhearing.com/what-we-do>

products, including A few of their products include the *MP3 Bible*, *BibleSticks* (Thumb-drives with the entire New Testament loaded onto it), and *Proclaimer* (a digital audio player designed to “speak” out” the Bible in the heart language” of various ethnolinguistic people groups)<sup>104</sup> FCBH hosts a total of 618 New Testament recorded languages, and their recently introduced “Bible.is” App has seen over 50 million streams of the different audio Bible broadcasts with an average listening time of 30 minutes per hit! Jerry Jackson, the FCBH founder and president recently presented Pope Benedict XVI with iPod Touch loaded with the Latin Neo-Vulgate recording and the Latin Bible App, *Bibulum.is*.<sup>105</sup>

In the world of mobile connectivity, the Bible text has a preeminent presence. Perhaps the most popular is the online Bible, *YouVersion.com*. Adapted for mobile devices including phones and tablets, the Bible App is a free mobile Bible allowing users to read the Bible, share verses with their social networks, and bookmark their favorite passages, all in a format that keeps up with their increasingly mobile lifestyle.<sup>106</sup> This unique approach to pumping out the text of scripture has seen enormous success. In three years, *YouVersion* has exploded to be one of the world’s most popular apps with over 10 million users. Every 2.8 seconds someone new installs the app and during that same period 12 other people are using it to read the Bible.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Faith Comes By Hearing: *The Proclaimer* <http://www.faithcomesbyhearing.com/proclaimer>

<sup>105</sup> PR Web, Online Visibility from Vocus: Latin Bible App: <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2012/1/prweb9106622.htm>

<sup>106</sup> You Version, Press Area: <http://www.youversion.com/press>

<sup>107</sup> Liberty University Online: LifeChurch.tv: YouVersion Bible App Users Grow to 10.7 Million: <http://www.christianpost.com/news/lifechurchtvyouversion-bible-app-users-grow-to-107-million-47672/>

I had an interview with Morgan Jackson, son of founder Jerry Jackson, and key leader at Faith Comes by Hearing, at their headquarters in Albuquerque. FCBH hearing has partnered with Bible societies and Christian mission groups worldwide so that languages around the globe can hear the scriptures. Morgan told me that part of their disciple-making process includes the establishment of “listening groups” established in multiple cultures worldwide soon after evangelistic events are staged. The organization has noticed that in many African and Asian cultures, the results in the lives of listening group members is dramatic. The trend, according to Jackson is that, after a short period of time in listening to the oral rendering of the New Testament, is that 1) Men stop beating their wives, 2) Community members cease a previous pattern of drunkenness, and 3) The people stop going to local Shamans for advice and influence. A fourth consequence that often follows, said Morgan, was that these communities eventually become self sufficient and are able to support the pastors. All of these are a direct result of hearing the text of *only scripture* read to them in their heart language, a phenomenon FCBH has seen over the forty years of its existence.

Besides these advantages, computers and the Internet provide the user with access to literature and reference works from a multitude of libraries across the globe. The textual community can be strengthened by the application of this media. On Internet site features a “Guide to Christian Literature on the Net,” where you can browse various Bibles, articles, classic essays, creeds and confessions, sermons, and reference works. This site also offers the Guide to Early Church Documents on the Net,” for the church

history buffs.<sup>108</sup> Making books, magazines, articles and sermon transcripts available to people anywhere saves on mailing costs as well as printing costs to anyone in the world with Internet access.

Also one can listen to audio clips of favorite Bible teachers and video clips of the same. If you've recently moved to another location in the world often you can tune into the local Christian radio station you enjoyed while you lived in your previous location as these stations often broadcast simultaneously on the Internet. One email I received from Patricia, a Calvary of Albuquerque congregant who recently moved from our area to another state because of a work situation read, "I will keep up with 'Expond' (The Wednesday night consecutive and interactive Bible Study), and finishing the book of John (The then-current teaching series on weekends). Thank goodness for the technology of internet!"

With each successive generation, the opportunities to impact online listeners and viewers using multiple media platforms increases. Eventually there won't be the same kind of squabble between early adapters and late adapters to technology, where people are resistant to using computers, email and mobile devices. Soon there will not be anyone around who *does not* integrate such technology into their lives and at multiple levels.

That makes evangelistic efforts on this front an imperative.

According to USA today, more and more people are opting out of faith and live in the realm of a "so what!" spirituality. Fewer people are thinking about the ultimate questions of life and fewer people are sensing a need to do anything about it. Some

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<sup>108</sup> Kerby Anderson, *Technology, Spirituality, & Social Trends: Probing the Headlines That Impact Your Family*, (Grand Rapids, Kregel Books, 2002), 40.

conjecture that this apathetic worldview has been partially fostered by the glut of available information and philosophical viewpoints made available with the advent of the Worldwide Web. According to the same USA today article, a growing number of people are uninterested in trying to talk a diverse set of friends into a shared viewpoint in a culture that celebrates an idea that all truths are equally valid. Personal experience and personal authority matter most. Hence Scripture and tradition are quaint, irrelevant artifacts. Instead of followers of Jesus, they're followers of 5,000 unseen "friends" on Facebook or Twitter; and perhaps Jesus is getting lost in the "data stream."<sup>109</sup>

This should signal to the church that there are new frontiers for doing church and evangelism.

The ways in which churches are reaching out to people over the Internet are expanding. Back in 2000, just one-third of Protestant churches (34%) had a church website. That exploded to 57% in 2005, and has inched upward since then to 62%. About half of the small churches (48% of those drawing less than 100 adults) have a church website, compared to three-quarter of the mid-sized churches (75% of the congregations attracting 100 to 250 adults per week) and nine out of ten larger churches (91% of the churches with more than 250 adults attending). One out of every four Protestant churches (26%) now has some presence on one or more social networking sites (such as MySpace). Again, church size was a factor in this with larger churches being more than twice as likely to have such a presence (20% vs. 47%). Charismatic churches were notably more likely (38%) than either mainline or evangelical congregations to use such

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<sup>109</sup> For Many, 'Losing My Religion' Isn't Just a Song: It's Life Cathy Lynn Grossman, USA Today Online: <http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/story/2011-12-25/religion-god-atheism-so-what/52195274/1>

pages in their ministry efforts. Podcasting has been adopted by one out of every six churches (16%). Again, larger churches stood out in their embrace of this communications tool, with half of the churches attracting more than 250 adults (47%) utilizing podcast technology. Blogging is also invading the ministry world. One-eighth of Protestant churches (13%) now have blog sites or pages through which people can interact with the thoughts posted by church leaders.<sup>110</sup>

## **The Dark side of Media**

Not everyone shares a positive perspective of media nor sees its benefits. Nor does everyone agree that the textual community of the church can benefit from it. Voices of dissent abound when it comes to the harmful effects of media and rightfully so. Much harm has certainly come to our society in the way of pornography, child coercion and a number of other temptations that one faces in cyberspace. What has always been a part of our society (seductions cleverly packaged as opportunities) abound on the Internet. Not everything on the Web is informational and edifying. Some is downright dangerous.

But going even deeper than these obvious dangers are concerns posed by the ecclesiastical community itself. One voice is that of Michael Budde, a teacher of political science at DePaul Catholic University in Chicago. Budde looks with favor on the practice of the early church before Constantine, in particular Christian formation practiced in the early church (becoming a Christian as being formed into a radical disciple of Jesus Christ). Budde sees this process as seriously hindered in a contemporary media-saturated world. Though Budde hints that this may be more significant for Catholics who have

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<sup>110</sup> Preaching: *Research on Technology in Church*:  
<http://www.preaching.com/resources/preaching-online/11574394/>) p2

always paid special attention to symbols, imagery and sacrament, he believes that outside forces (of media) threaten to overwhelm, undermine, or drown out the communicative functions of religious symbols and images.<sup>111</sup>

Media has built in hazards. One is the *time bandit factor*: time spent with television, movies, radio or the internet could be time not being used for practices that conform to the gospel we preach. It can even take away time that would be used for sleeping or working, if the practice becomes an addiction, as is already becoming the case with many Americans.

Western cultures seem to have a love affair with technology. I mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation that I loved gadgets. But I must never let my affinity for gadgetry eclipse my love for God and His Word. Western culture looks to science, engineering and technology to solve problems that are result of human sinfulness (war, prejudice, and greed). We tend to believe that technology will save us from our problems. Thus we use technology as a substitute for God. Therefore technology must be applied appropriately. Too often it is not.

Shane Hips is the lead pastor of Trinity Mennonite Church in Phoenix Arizona and at one time had a career in advertising has grave concerns about what the Internet is doing to human intimacy and genuine connectivity. Believing that the Internet has a bias towards exhibitionism and thus the erosion of real intimacy,<sup>112</sup> Hips feels that digital media can create an illusory of intimacy with people we never meet in person—a felling of a relationship, but one that hasn't been, and likely never will be, face to face, providing

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<sup>111</sup> Samuel Wells, *Christian Ethics: An Introductory Reader*, (Chichester, West Sussex, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 235.

<sup>112</sup> Shane Hips, *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your faith*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2009), 113.

just enough contact to keep us from pursuing real intimacy. This *virtual community* could be much more virtual than it is communal, spoiling out appetite for the real thing. We no longer feel the need to participate in authentic community, which requires a high degree of intimacy, permanence and proximity.

Certainly it can be acknowledged that social networking could inoculate people against the desire to be physically present with others in a real social-network (such as a church, a home group or a club that requires personal involvement and real participation). Hipps believes that our digital addictions are laying the groundwork for worshipping at the altar of convenience. We love the efficiency of our interactions on the Internet, which allow us to be “in touch” more often. However, there is a big difference between being “in touch” and truly connecting with others. Hipps research and business experience leads him to underscore this potential communication problem:

Intonation, body language, context, the rules of civil discourse, and the opportunity for midstream clarification are all stripped away, despite our best efforts to create a never-ending stream of emoticons. Given the limitations of email, the chances of miscommunication are near certain.<sup>113</sup>

When Dr. Billy Graham addressed the Technology, Entertainment and Design Conference (TED) in 1998, he mused about the amazing impact of technology on the world but he also warned of its limitations and potential failure. Graham noted that today is not the first time we’ve had a technological revolution—there have been others before. He cited the ancient Israelites’ second national king, David, who introduced iron into his country, a technology which changed their military advantage. Two centuries before the

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<sup>113</sup> Shane Hipps, *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your faith*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2009), 118.

Hittites had mastered the art of smelting iron and slowly that skill spread, but these Cananite foes had kept Israel from acquiring it. (1 Chronicles 22:3 accounts David's large stores of iron). Now instead of crude tools of wood and stone, Israel could enjoy the latest in cutting edge technology such as hoes, cycles and military weapons. And in the course on one generation Israel was completely changed. Graham stated that this introduction of iron had an impact similar to the way the microchip has had an impact on our generation. But Graham warned there were many problems technology could not solve. In his speech, Dr. Graham then directed his poignant comments to the crowd of scientists and said, "And you haven't solved them" either. The problems Graham was thinking of were problems of the heart that are played out in violence, war, poverty and racism around the world. Graham also mentioned that he had once met Albert Einstein who told him, "It's easier to de-nature plutonium than it is to denature evil in the heart of man." Graham's synopsis was captured in a single example:

Technology projects the myth of our control over our mortality. We see people on the television screen who are not really there in real life. Marilyn Monroe looks just a beautiful on the screen today as she did when she was alive. Some young people think she is still alive. These [Hollywood] stars come to life via technology.<sup>114</sup>

It is this "myth of control" that is perhaps the greatest downside of the contemporary technological tools as we can enter almost any realm of knowledge immediately and access information and imagery at will. A new kind of vigilance is called for while this new e-morality is emerging. At its core, the church must be careful to use but never replace the keys values of "the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, the

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<sup>114</sup> YouTube, *Billy Graham: Technology, Faith and Human Shortcomings*:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90mj79GqWhc>

breaking of bread and prayers” (Acts 2:42) with a technological crutch. The *textual community* must never become just the *technical community*. The balancing act will be to carefully integrate technology into church life so as to augment and enhance the faith of the textual community.

### **Convergence and Transmedia:**

All media is *not* created equal. It is changing so rapidly that the types of media that were once considered new and cutting edge are relegated to the bone yards of a feared and loathsome category—*old media*. So what is considered to be “new media”? New Media can be described as any media, the audience of which is based online. In the universe of old media, one had to prove to producers and business executives that his/her idea would be profitable. In the new media world the only one that needs to believe that your idea is a good one is you! This lowers the threshold for opportunity. What is the result of this? It is simply that countless people, whose ideas would have been immediately discarded, can now put those ideas online to see what happens. Many (probably even most) of these ideas go nowhere. But this is not always the case. According to online media techie Dan Brown, a 17 y/o kid who posted a tutorial online on how to solve the Rubik’s Cube suddenly found himself with millions of views and a new career on his hands! <sup>115</sup>

But what is the actual difference between the old and new media paradigms when it comes to the media itself? At the root of all media is the relationship between the entertainer (or the host, the teacher) and the audience. If the host is an ensemble of

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<sup>115</sup> Youtube *What is New Media*: Dan Brown:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXdVa87CKXY>

fictional characters and the audience interacts with them through reading, then the media is a novel. If the host is a filmmaker and the audience interacts with them through sitting in a theater and watching a real life exposé, the media would be a documentary. But think of the difference between an established technology like television and the online-based

platform of YouTube. With television, the entertainer broadcasts and the audience interacts by sitting at home and watching on a pixelated portal of a bright screen. With Youtube, the entertainer/host is a person and the audience interacts with them by watching them on a pixelated portal of a bright screen. They both seem strikingly similar. But there is a difference. The difference is *options*. TV is trying to offer more options by simply offering more prepackaged programming on a variety of subjects that would interest an audience. But new media offers the ability to go online, watch whatever you want, post comments on the video, and upload your own videos. In short one can interact on a level not just possible with old media.<sup>116</sup>

And what we are seeing today is just the beginning. In the future, not only will the interaction between entertainer and audience become more involved, but the interaction between audience members is going to become more involved. New media won't have to have a linear entertainer to audience interaction like old media but powerful network relationships that involve an entire community surrounding that video or video channel. The focus is now becoming how to create "online communities" that have relationship and interaction within that community. Like it or not, its all here and will consume how people related to each other in the future. As I was listening to one online purveyor of Youtube content, it felt like listening to a preacher as he was telling his online community to become more involved by not only posting comments on his broadcasted content via new media but to become more involved with each other. It felt like I was listening to a pastor telling his congregation to have fellowship in more meaningful ways. Such "viewer-to-viewer" relationships are to be fostered by clicking the links provided by the

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<sup>116</sup> Youtube *What is New Media*: Dan Brown:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXdVa87CKXY>

online broadcaster, sometimes asking the audience to subscribe, add content and interrelate via new media platforms. It's a bold new world!

## **Transmedia**

*Transmedia storytelling* is a recent descriptor that expresses the process of telling a story across multiple media platforms using current digital technologies. From a production standpoint, it involves creating content that engages the audience using various techniques to permeate their daily lives. These pieces of content are linked together and are in synch with one another. Such a method allows for participation from the audience and sharing of multiple audience members. Also this method engages consumers through different means, shifting from the traditional linear story, to a more complex, multi-dimensional "story world." In transmedia, elements of a story are dispersed systematically across multiple media platforms, each making their own unique contribution to the whole.

A recent story, at the time of this writing, which employed this style of storytelling, was *Seven Days in Utopia*, about a disastrous debut of a young golfer on the pro circuit. The hot tempered golfer finds himself stranded in Utopia, Texas and is welcomed and mentored by an eccentric rancher who helps the young golfer not only find his game but also find the meaning of life. The story was first told in book form and then made into a movie with actor Robert Duvall playing the part of Johnny, the eccentric rancher who was also once a pro golfer. The end of the film creatively directs the viewer to a website to finish the story, enable participation and interaction of audience members

via social community engagement, and offers further community-building activities as well as decision points outlines in both the books and the film.

Transmedia allows gifted storytellers to expand their canvas and share more of their vision with their most dedicated fans while inviting participation in a way previously not known nor experienced in previous decades of communication technology. Last year, the Producer's Guild announced a new job title, Transmedia Producer, a decision that has more or less established the term as an industry standard. More and more companies are laying claim to expertise in producing transmedia content.<sup>117</sup>

How Americans get their news has dramatically shifted in the past decade. A study by Pew Research has found that most Americans (92 percent) now get their news from multiple platforms of delivery (a combination of television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and online) Half of all adults (46 percent) rely on at least four different sources and six out of ten adults (59 percent) turn to a combination of online and offline sources.<sup>118</sup>

Additional research shows that many Americans sense a bias in news reporting and hesitate to trust the objectivity of the journalist or network providing the news they dispense. This growing concern about media spins has caused people to seek out sources they perceive to be objective or that better reflect their own ideological perspectives, resulting in a fragmentation of the news universe. This is forcing down sales of newspapers and forcing news agencies to seek alternate platforms of news delivery, such

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<sup>117</sup> Fast Company: *Seven Myths About Transmedia Storytelling Debunked*:  
<http://www.fastcompany.com/1745746/seven-myths-about-transmedia-storytelling-debunked>

<sup>118</sup> George Barna, *Futurecast: What Today's Trends Mean for Tomorrow's World*, (Austin, Fed & Co/ Tyndale/Barna,2011), 110-111.

as the Internet. A convergence is taking place where people want the breadth of awareness of news without the traditional depth they experienced in newspaper articles. Consequently, many people now use Twitter and RSS feeds to alert them to headlines—tidbits about new and emerging events—rather than taking the time to drill deeper in order to comprehend the substance of those events. Information is now being assimilated from a plethora of sources rather than one. The trend is towards news being *portable* (accessible through a variety of tech mobile devices); *personalized* (providing users with the ability to identify the types of news they want, without having to wade through reportage they deem irrelevant); and *participatory* (giving users the ability to respond through comments and blogs).<sup>119</sup> Convergence culture has arrived!

## **Convergence Culture**

As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, Convergence Culture is wholly a modern phenomenon. But it is fast becoming the standard *modus operandi* of modern communication. The term, proposed by Dr. Henry Jenkins, the DeFlorz Professor of Humanities and the Founder and Director of the Comparative Media Studies Program at MIT, describes the flow of content across multiple media platforms. It describes how people interact, participate and communicate through transmedia hardware and software. Convergence Culture is, in Jenkins own words, “the place where old and new media collide.”<sup>120</sup> The old media might in some case be a book or 70mm filmed documentary while the new media may be an MP3 file or a clip on YouTube. Convergence culture

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<sup>119</sup> George Barna, *Futurecast: What Today's Trends Mean for Tomorrow's World*, (Austin, Fed & Co/ Tyndale/Barna, 2011), 110-112-113.

<sup>120</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, (New York and London, New York University Press, 2006), 2.

creates a social intersection of sorts. An easily understood example of old media and new can be seen in how we view image content. Rather than watching television productions via legitimate media such as broadcast cable television (including on-demand viewing) or purchasing DVD or Blue-Ray disks, now authorized websites (Hulu, iTunes and other proprietary network sites) are emerging to compete and even overshadow it “old school” predecessors. Convergence culture is the intersection of grassroots media and corporate media, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways. Convergence culture seems to be the future but is taking shape right now.

The participatory culture that Jenkins describes is in sharp contrast to older practices and notions of passive media spectatorship. Rather than speaking of media producers and consumers taking on different roles, we can now see them as participants who interact with each other in the media event. This convergence, then happens within the brains of individual consumers through their social interactions with others.<sup>121</sup>

An example of this participatory media convergence is with a project known as the Wikipedia—a grassroots multinational effort to build a free encyclopedia on the Internet written collaboratively from an army of volunteers, working in roughly two hundred different languages and contains more than 1.6 million articles and receives around 60 million hits per day. This controversial project understands that its collaborators will not all agree on what constitutes human knowledge but they trust reader’s competence to form their own opinions while holding an accountability through

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<sup>121</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, (New York and London, New York University Press, 2006), 3.

citations that can be appended. The process seems to work. Henry Jenkins believes this is due to more and more people taking seriously their obligations as participants to the community as a whole.<sup>122</sup>

There was a time when companies published newspapers or magazines or books and did very little else besides those monolithic media activities. Their involvement with other media was very slight. Each media had its own distinctive functions and markets and each was regulated by different laws and governmental conventions and regimes. Convergence culture is a total paradigm shift. The old way was primarily a one-to-many media dispersion. We're talking about a many-to-many media dispersion followed in some cases by interaction. With convergence media, certain tools die (or stall by the wayside), like the 8-track tape, the Beta tape, or the cassette tape. These *delivery technologies* become obsolete and get replaced. But the media evolves: recorded sound is the medium while CDs, MP3 files and 8-tracks are the delivery technologies. A medium's content may shift (as occurred when television displaced radio as a storytelling medium, freeing radio to become the primary showcase for rock and roll), its audience may change (as occurs when comics move from a mainstream medium in the 1950s to a niche medium today), and its social status may rise or fall (as occurs when theater moves from a popular form to an elite one), but once a medium established itself as satisfying some core human demand, it continues to function within the larger system of communication options.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, (New York and London, New York University Press, 2006), 255.

<sup>123</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, (New York and London, New York University Press, 2006), 13-14.

Media companies are now learning how to push the flow of media content across delivery channels to expand revenue opportunities, broaden markets, and strengthen viewer commitments. At the same time consumers are learning how to use these different media technologies to bring the flow of media more fully under their control and to interact with both producers as well as other consumers. When this is placed inside the Christian community where goals are not driven as much by profits, users of the information can also have greater control of both content and the deliverability of it to a number of delivery devices.

The television blockbuster, *American Idol* is a case in point where audience viewers of the television program, text in to vote for their favorite performer. But that is just the beginning. Viewers of the show often make the shift from broadcast TV as the “anchor medium” and more towards an “experienced-based, access-driven” viewer base. The sponsoring mega-company Coke has helped in this convergence. Cokemusic.com aligns the soft drink company with people’s enjoyment of popular music, allowing for a range of participatory and interactive options. Members can pay for downloads of popular songs or redeem coupons that let them download songs they choose for free. Also members can create their own music mixes, share them with one another within this “musical community,” and even receive ratings from other site visitors.<sup>124</sup> This is convergence culture going mainstream!

Where this is all going is anyone’s guess. Citing Ashley Highfield, director of BBC New Media & Technology, Jenkins perhaps gives us a peek into the future:

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<sup>124</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, (New York and London, New York University Press, 2006), 71-72.

Future TV may be unrecognizable from today, dinned not just by linear TV channels, packaged and scheduled by television executives, but instead will resemble more of a kaleidoscope, thousands of streams of content, some across indistinguishable as actual channels. These streams will mix together broadcasters' content and programs, and our viewer's contributions.<sup>125</sup>

What is clear, however, reinforced by Highfield's comments is that multiple delivery devices and audience participation rank high as future commodities in the convergence universe. Convergence doesn't depend on any specific delivery mechanism but represents the paradigm shift outlines in the previous pages. This involves a move from medium-specific content toward content that flows across multiple media channels, toward increased interdependence of communication systems, towards multiple ways of accessing media content, and toward ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture. What is also clear is that media industries are quickly embracing convergence to create multiple ways of either selling their products or getting their message out to a larger audience.<sup>126</sup> This last part of that equation is where the textual community can find opportunity. Calvary of Albuquerque is poised to do exactly that.

### **Calvary of Albuquerque Media Trajectory:**

From print media to tape recordings on audiocassettes and early AM radio talk show in the 1980s, the journey through the media jungle has been diverse and replete

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>126</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, (New York and London, New York University Press, 2006), 243.

with newer media delivery systems as technology provided. An overview of ministry activity of the Albuquerque textual community will be helpful.

***Pulpit Focus.*** Though Calvary of Albuquerque's has 13 core ministries (a "core" ministry is designated as being within essential purview to the Church body and remains a constant) and over 70 auxiliary ministries, for the sake of specific assessment, this dissertation is confined to the pulpit ministry and its relation to convergent culture. Auxiliary staff had being set in place and developed departmentally for the purpose of the expansion of the Textual Community. The pulpit, figuratively speaking, is at the very heart of the ministry of Calvary of Albuquerque. I represents a central presence both literally and philosophically to the existence of the church. With the unwavering process of scriptural exposition, virtually every book of the Bible has been taught from the pulpit for the textual community to derive its form and practice. One through-the-bible series, lasting eleven years was packages as "The 729" series representing seven hundred and twenty nine separate hour long sermons that covered the entire scope of scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, verse by verse. The current through-the-bible series will prove to be even longer and more in depth.

***Media Distribution.*** As part of its outreach, Calvary of Albuquerque produces the following media and technology outreaches, cumulating in creating and employing convergence culture:

- 1. Television.*** The Connection Television Broadcast: Edited thirty minute Bible teachings from the pulpit are aired locally, statewide and other markets around the world. The Connection TV Broadcast is also available locally and

worldwide through the broadcast-based ministry, HisChannel TV<sup>127</sup> as a tool to encourage spiritual growth through verse by verse and topical Bible studies. Services can also be watched live on the Calvary of Albuquerque services page during service times as well as through an archived retrievable sermon database.<sup>128</sup> DVD Documentaries: Various topics, including extensive interviews on a variety of issues for enhances learning purposes have been produced. Some of these include: *Epicenter*--a look at the issues in the modern Middle East through interviews with government, military and business leaders daling with the question, “Are we living in the last days?”, *Shattered*: a documentary that examines the influence of music, movies and interactive media and the role they are playing on cultural shifts, *The Long Road to Rome*—The spread of the gospel through the life of the Apostle Paul on his missionary journeys, and *Riptide*: An exploration of the Jesus Movement and the impact that this modern revival has had on the United States.

2. **Audio.** With a professional recording studio on Calvary of Albuquerque campus with industry standard equipment, audio production can be maintained at the highest level. This had enabled quality audio fabrication and delivery through:

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<sup>127</sup> <http://www.hischannel.com/>

<sup>128</sup> <http://www.connectionradio.org/connectiontv.asp>

- CD Packages: Numerous teaching series available on compact disc collections are available for every teaching series and every book of the Bible.
- Women at Calvary CD Packages: Several Women at Calvary speakers teaching various Bible studies are recorded and made available through this medium
- Music: Collections of contemporary and classic Christian worship songs have been recorded and released.
- MP3 Packages: Topical series and individual messages available in MP3 format via downloadable thumb-drive stations located in the foyer and on compact disc for playing on MP3 devices.

**3. Radio and Internet:** Radio continues to play a large role in the expansion of the textual community at Calvary of Albuquerque both locally and nationally. The advents of the Internet has taken the communication possibilities to another level.

- Podcasts: These are available online downloads at iTunes for the public to automatically receive the audio and video versions of the daily Connection Broadcast. This subscription delivers each message in the form of a MP3 or MP4 file, which can be played on your computer or MP3 player.<sup>129</sup><sup>130</sup> Every teaching series, along with key art is displayed and retrievable.
- Teaching Library: All the in-depth teachings through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, as well as the messages from topical series are

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<sup>129</sup> <http://www.connectionradio.org/podcast.asp>

<sup>130</sup> [http://www.calvaryabq.org/services\\_podcasts.asp](http://www.calvaryabq.org/services_podcasts.asp)

available to listen to or download for free online or by purchasing a CD from The Connection store.<sup>131</sup>

- Hot Spots: Sixty seconds of salient and distilled biblical truths comprise these short media bursts. Short and to the point, these blazing coals of Scripture give a taste of what God's Word adamantly says about culturally relevant topics.<sup>132</sup>
- DevoMail: With words of encouragement, stories with application, and insight into the Word of God, the public can sign up for our weekly devotional email.<sup>133</sup>
- First Friday: These are interviews with a variety of world-renowned authors, speakers, and scholars and aired on the first Friday of every month on the Connection Radio Program. All interviews are available at The Connection website as well.
- Skip's Blog<sup>134</sup>: My personal blog site where I occasionally deal with a theme, personal issue or Christian living topic.
- KNKT Radio (107.1FM): This is a full power Class B, FM station that serves the Albuquerque and central New Mexico region. It is the main local radio ministry arm of Calvary of Albuquerque and features a variety of teaching by renowned Bible teachers, as well as music, and talk shows intended to strengthen the believer's faith and reach out to the local

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<sup>131</sup> <http://www.connectionradio.org/teachinglibrary.asp>

<sup>132</sup> <http://www.connectionradio.org/hotspots.asp>

<sup>133</sup> <http://www.connectionradio.org/devomail.asp>

<sup>134</sup> <http://skipheitzig.blogspot.com/>

community. The station can be heard in the Albuquerque area at 107.1 FM or online through live streaming.<sup>135</sup>

- “Static” Radio: This FM, non commercial radio station is a unique, Christian rock and pop radio station that targets a global youth and young adult audience. Audiences can listen in seventeen different cities in New Mexico and Colorado via local transmitters (translators) or live streaming online.<sup>136</sup>
- Twitter: The ability to stay connected through social networking of those who listen to the radio networks is available both with Static Radio,<sup>137</sup> as well as with KNKT.<sup>138</sup> Besides the community of radio listeners, the church itself has its own twitter feed to send messages to those who desire. (Follow Calvary of Albuquerque.<sup>139</sup>)
- ABQ Connect with Peter Benson: This local radio program is Albuquerque's live, local talk and call-in show for the Christian Community. This weekday one-hour program airs Monday through Friday from 1:00 to 2:00 PM and is hosted by long-time radio veteran Peter Benson. With a variety of guests and topics, ABQ Connect continues to bring the Christian community together for challenging and uplifting

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<sup>135</sup> <http://www.knkt.com/>

<sup>136</sup> <http://www.MyStaticRadio.org/aboutinfo.asp>

<sup>137</sup> <http://twitter.com/MyStaticRadio>

<sup>138</sup> <http://twitter.com/knkt1071>

<sup>139</sup> <http://twitter.com/calvaryabq>

discussion each day. Program archives are available online.<sup>140</sup> Where this particular show becomes important in the issue of convergence is the daily referencing and/or highlighting of other media platforms (books, radio programs, television, CDs, MP3s, MP4s, and websites) since notable Christians who produce them are interviewed by Mr. Benson.

- YouTube: Features weekend and midweek service re-caps, interviews, and more (Artists' Fellowship instructional clips, and guest spotlights)<sup>141</sup>

**4. *Print*:** print media has long been a tradition of the Christian church and continues to have a significant presence in the ministry of Calvary of Albuquerque.

- *Connection: the magazine*: This is a free magazine from Connection Communications for church members and radio listeners around the country sent by direct-mail. Prominent Christian leaders and authors contribute articles to each edition. This quarterly magazine also has its “online counterpart,” made available to view and download current editions and the magazine archive.<sup>142</sup> Those who desire can also keep in touch via Facebook and be directed to other articles of interest.<sup>143</sup>
- *Frequency Magazine*: *Frequency Magazine* is the print arm of KNKT Radio and includes special articles from authors and pastors, as well as an updated KNKT Program Guide, a business directory of local radio

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<sup>140</sup> <http://www.knkt.com/abqconnect.asp>

<sup>141</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/user/CalvaryABQ?recommended=1>

<sup>142</sup> <http://www.connectionradio.org/connectionmagazine.asp>

<sup>143</sup> <http://www.facebook.com/home.php?tab=3#/pages/Connection-The-Magazine/154766708781?ref=mf>

ministry supporters, and information on some of the exciting upcoming events at Calvary of Albuquerque.<sup>144</sup>

- *Static Paper*: This print publication is a large format magazine (newspaper folio style) and is the print arm of Static Radio, the youth radio station. Distributed in the Albuquerque area at various locations, including all the city's Wal-Mart's, it is the print portal for the youth-driven Static Radio. Where convergence culture happens in this print platform is through the display of website addresses and the frequent use of QR codes (a matrix barcode, which initials mean Quick Response code),<sup>145</sup> directing readers to the websites or to functions within the larger church life.
- *Study Guides*: Helpful and in-depth information to instruct believers on a variety of meaningful topics and books of the Bible, available both at the physical bookstore and the virtual online bookstore.
- *Lifestyle Booklets*: Short booklets exploring practical topics applicable to leading a positive life and witness for Christ. Topics Include Prayer, Spiritual Warfare, The Resurrection, Intelligent Design, Divorce and Remarriage, Christians' relationship to government, and What Happens When Children die). *Freshlife Pamphlets* are similar styled booklets but

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<sup>144</sup> <http://www.knkt.com/frequency.asp>

<sup>145</sup> A "QR" code consists of black modules arranged in a square pattern on a white background. Such codes can store addresses and Uniform Resource Locators (URLs). They now frequently can be found in magazines, on signs, on buses, on business cards, and even television or on almost any object about which users might need information. Cell phone users with a camera on the phone and equipped with the correct reader application can scan the image of the QR code to display text, contact information, connect to a wireless network, or open a web page in the telephone's browser. This act of linking from physical world objects is termed *hardlinking*.

targeted towards women in particular (topics include forgiveness, gossip, temptation and trials)

- *Books*: A number of books have been published both by nationally known publishers as well as some in-house works that equip believers to grow in their personal faith and corporate church experience including a recent book, “*Church: Who Needs It?*” that addresses needs that are particular to the contemporary textual community.<sup>146</sup>
- *Coloring Books*: Designed especially to help kids learn interactively, these coloring books feature *Barnabas the Bear* as he takes children through stories of scripture.<sup>147</sup>
- *Calendars*: From time to time, yearly calendars featuring photographic images of Bible lands are printed and distributed to radio listeners to further enhance their learning experience of the biblical text through the photographic imagery of places many believers read about in their bibles.

**5. Auxiliary Media Outlets:** Besides these media formats, there are other a few other notable media delivery systems to consider.

- *E-Books*: Since the publishing world has dramatically changed and much of that which was once related solely to the print world is now offered electronically, Calvary of Albuquerque, as a textual community, has sought to

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<sup>146</sup> <http://www.bridgelogosfoundation.com/ItemPage/4810/Church-Who-Needs-It.html>

<sup>147</sup> [https://calvaryabq.org/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=CTGY&Store\\_Code=CALVARY&Category\\_Code=A7\\_BOOKS](https://calvaryabq.org/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=CTGY&Store_Code=CALVARY&Category_Code=A7_BOOKS)

- expand its message and resources in a similar manner. E-books are produced on, published through, and accessed on either a computer or a mobile device (tablet, phone etc). These books are essentially electronic versions of printed books. Using both the Amazon platform for the *Kindle* and the Apple *iBooks* for the *iPad*, books are offered for sale and distribution via these popular formats.
- Studio 150: This is a unique feature of the main campus at Calvary of Albuquerque, which provides a full-orbed recording studio capable of producing, engineering and mastering professional level recordings and has been used by recording artists from around the world. The vast array of the best microphones and processors in the business and the finest amplification and instrumentation devices, Studio 150 can cater to a discriminating clientele of Christian and secular artists. Besides the production of musical projects, the audio-recording studio is frequently used to re-master older audio messages of sermons for radio play as well as maintaining consistent control over the audio quality of television programs and documentary films.
- Cyber Pastor: This position, unique to the ministry of Calvary of Albuquerque, provides an online chat room that is monitored by a staff pastor who greets those who come to listen and interact during the live services at provided through Calvary of Albuquerque. This online pastor is able to minister and interact with the live audience in any of the five

aforementioned services. He is also able to direct those who need more specialized ministry to further resources.

- Satellite Campus: Calvary of Albuquerque has become a multi-site fellowship with campuses in Albuquerque's north side (considered to be the main campus) and another campus is Santa Fe (an hour north of Albuquerque) plus another at a downtown Albuquerque theater, close to the University of New Mexico. These added sites have the core ministries of the main campus, including Bible teaching, worship, children's ministry, men's and woman's ministry and a café/bookstore. This "one-church-with-many-campus" approach is solving a growth imperative. The least expensive way to manage growth for Calvary of Albuquerque has been to aggressively retire the current debt while at the same time to actively expand into newer locations. Each campus has its own resident campus pastor who runs the services and ministers to that local community. He also shares the teaching ministry though not as demandingly as the Senior Pastor. The pastor's message, captured at the Albuquerque north campus is used at the other locations via on screen presentation while the worship teams, ushers, classroom teachers and campus pastors are visibly and actively on site. This enables the ability for the textual community to replicate itself miles away from the epicenter of originating activity while maintaining core values and practices.
- Bookstore: A full service bookstore is on site at the main campus and scaled down versions are at the other campus sites. This provides

resources (print, CD, MP3, and other digital programs) that can help members of the church deepen their understanding of many given subjects and further their understanding of the biblical text.

- *Social Networking*: A recently-articulated value of Calvary of Albuquerque is that online opportunities can provide a “discourse community” to serve the needs of those within the “textual community.” Simply put, social networking can provide an efficient method for interaction of members who wish to weigh in on a topic or section of scripture. Such social networking can allow for a level of interface communication, permitting participants to share personal insights and applications they may have to friends in an online fellowship. One significant development for this is with the midweek study known as *Expound*. This through-the-Bible expositional event is augmented by two Apps (Apple and Android formats currently available) to enhance the Bible study experience. Using tweets (via Twitter), texts, emails, QR codes and online outlines, the experience of learning scripture is brought to an entirely different level for those who wish it. Featured on the stand-alone website for *Expound* is this encouragement: “Enjoy the fellowship as we connect, study, and meditate on a daily basis with other believers, following the same text of Scripture alongside one another throughout the week with the common goal to *come prepared* to church each week.”<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, participation is encouraged for those who attend the

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<sup>148</sup> <http://www.expoundabq.org/about.html>

midweek *Expound* Bible study through either text-messaging a question about the assigned text during the teaching itself. A number is provided on the front projecting screens in the church so that the audience can engage in the learning process, asking questions that are received and discussed during the service itself. Beyond this the *Expound* website encourages visitors to “Join the Discussion” through the social networking, explaining, “Become a participant! Join the **expound** discourse community on Facebook (or Twitter),” and invites those who visit the website to “Get the App” for *Expound* by either going to the Apple App store or the Android marketplace.<sup>149</sup>

## **Community Practices**

### *How the Textual Community Utilizes Media Resources*

To examine the practices of the textual community of Calvary of Albuquerque in regards to media usage, three research methods were applied. *First*, Internal dialogue and interviews with key staff and media department heads was garnered. For two months, several of the media outlets were tracked for their use. Media department heads were consulted and interviewed as to development and research with the needs/requests of users. *Second*, a congregational survey of media practices was conducted. A *Congregational Questionnaire*, using basic survey techniques, was prepared and then distributed to poll the congregation at Calvary of Albuquerque as to their knowledge and use of the various convergent media outlets. Besides these, a series of ten interviews were

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

conducted with several media users regarding various media outlets. The interviews were concentrated on “users” for the sole purpose of determining how a media user accesses the various media, and therefore linking their use with a convergent understanding and use of media. *Third*, a city-wide biblical literary poll conducted by an outside polling organization was hired.

**#1 Internal Media Support Staff Questionnaire:** Because Calvary of Albuquerque does have multiple media industries, (internet, print, radio, and television) a general understanding of how these industries interact can be gauged through a series of internal surveys and interviews. The following questions were asked to media “stakeholders” (department heads and key staff in each media department)

1. How often do you spend on the following media productions per week? Please use hours per week, assuming a 40-hour week.

- A. Connection Radio \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Weekend service video: creation and maintenance \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Web production and maintenance \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Radio: adds, voice over, etc. \_\_\_\_\_
- E. T.V: production, art, etc \_\_\_\_\_
- F. Print- magazine, books, booklets \_\_\_\_\_
- G. Video (non- weekend service related) \_\_\_\_\_
- H. You Tube: production, uploads, etc. \_\_\_\_\_
- I. Twitter \_\_\_\_\_
- J. My Space \_\_\_\_\_
- K. Music production: recording, CD’s, artwork, etc. \_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you have any contact (meetings, emails, etc.) with other media departments?
  - A. Yes
  - B. No
3. Do you meet regularly (minimum monthly) with two or more media departments?
  - A. Yes
  - B. No
4. Is your department using more than one media outlet? As an example, is your department on both You Tube and has a Webpage?
  - A. Yes
  - B. No
5. Does the media department you have oversight of abide by the three mission statements outlined in the Employee manual? Upreach, Outreach, and Inreach?
  - A. Yes
  - B. No

*The Internal Survey Findings:* The findings of the Internal Media Support Staff Questionnaire reflect that there is good interaction between the various media departments (totals given in Appendix C). Overall, 80% of the media departments have contact with other media departments within the organization. However, only 55% have contact with more than one media department. 63% of the media departments use multiple media outlets, and 90% feel that they fulfill Calvary of Albuquerque's mission statement of Upreach, Inreach, and Outreach. The media outlet given the greatest of work-based hours is T.V. production at 96.5 hours, video production at 60.25 hours, and Web services at 35.5 hours, of

which two (T.V and video) represent hours exceeding a 40 hour work week. Of side interest is the common agreement (per more current dialogue with the same support staff) that there is a media shift both in society at large as well as the church in particular away from old media and towards new media.

**#2 Congregational Survey of Media Practices:** Through the use of weekly print media of the church bulletin, a questionnaire/survey was distributed containing the following language:

“To help equip Calvary of Albuquerque in better ministering to your needs, please take a few moments and answer the following questions. The answers will reflect your use and knowledge of media offerings (internet, television, radio, and print) sponsored by Calvary of Albuquerque.

“Please circle the letter or letters from each question that best fit your personal use and understanding of the media stated.

“Please drop off your questionnaire in the tithe boxes or at the main desk. Thank you!

1. How often do you watch Calvary of Albuquerque church services online?
  - A. Weekly
  - B. Monthly
  - C. Seldom
  - D. Never
  
2. Do you know how to download a Calvary of Albuquerque Internet message (sermon or teaching) on your computer or MP3 player?
  - A. Yes

- B. No
3. Have you ever downloaded one of Calvary of Albuquerque's Podcasts?
- Currently there are 16 different Podcasts available.
- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. I don't know what a Podcast is
4. Have you ever ordered a product (book, music CD, magazine, sermon, DVD) online from the Connection ministries?
- A. Yes
- B. No
5. Do you currently follow Calvary of Albuquerque sponsored events on one of the following internet-related devices? Circle all letters that apply:
- A. Twitter
- B. Facebook (Skip Heitzig and/or Connection Magazine)
- C. YouTube
- D. Pastor Skip's Blog
- E. Websites (Calvary of Albuquerque or Connection Radio)
- F. Online radio (KNKT and/or M88)<sup>150</sup>
6. Have you ever watched a Calvary of Albuquerque sponsored YouTube video?
- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. I didn't know the church uploaded videos to YouTube

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<sup>150</sup> Note: AT the time of this survey the Radio Newtwork, "Static Radio" was branded as M88 Radio.

7. Circle the following internet-based service that you currently use or plan on using. Circle all letters that apply:
- A. HULU
  - B. Podcast
  - C. MP3 download (from the calvaryabq.org or connectionradio.org)
  - D. Calvary-sponsored Websites (calvaryabq.org, connectionradio.org, etc)
  - E. You Tube
  - F. Blip
  - G. Facebook
  - H. My Space
  - I. Twitter
8. How often do you listen to the following radio stations: KNKT and/or M88?
- A. Daily
  - B. Weekly
  - C. Every-now-and-then (monthly)
  - D. Seldom (seasonally)
  - E. Never
9. Have you purchased one of the following DVD's? Circle all letters that apply:
- A. Epicenter
  - B. The Road to Rome
  - C. The Jesus Boat
  - D. The Bible from 30 Thousand Feet

- E. Specialty Videos (Prophesy conference, Men’s conference, Women’s conference, etc.)
  - F. Learning from the Land—Israel
  - G. Never purchased a DVD video from the Connection
10. Have you ever purchased one of the Connection’s music CD’s such as Nick Crespo, or *As Stars Shine Bright: A Christmas Collection*?<sup>151</sup>
- A. Yes
  - B. No
11. Do you currently read the free, quarterly Connection Magazine?
- A. Yes
  - B. No
12. If yes, what section(s) do you like best in the Connection Magazine? Circle the letter(s) that apply:
- A. Feature Articles (by Skip and Lenya)
  - B. Guest Articles (Greg Laurie, Chuck Smith, Bob Coy, etc)
  - C. Dead Pastor’s Society (Articles from Pastor’s of yesteryear)
  - D. Off the Cuff (Interviews)
  - E. From the Blog (Question and Answers)
  - F. Truth Connect (Weekly devotion)
  - G. Hot Spots (“hot topics”)

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<sup>151</sup> Nick Crespo was at the time of the Survey, the pastor of Worship Arts at Calvary of Albuquerque. The Project, *As Stars Shine Bright: A Christmas Collection* was an in-house collaboration of musicians produced by Studio 150.

13. Have you ever read or purchased one of Pastor Skip's books, Lifestyle Booklets, or study guides?
- A. Yes
  - B. No
14. How often do you watch Calvary Connection T.V.?
- A. Daily
  - B. Weekly
  - C. Every-now-and-then (monthly)
  - D. Seldom (seasonally)
  - E. Never
  - F. I didn't know Calvary-sponsored broadcasts were on T.V
15. Have you used one of the following church-sponsored ministries? Circle all the letters that apply:
- A. Cyber Pastor (online pastor answering questions during the weekend church service)
  - B. Satellite Campus (*Metro Calvary*: Meeting at the El Rey Theatre in downtown Albuquerque)
  - C. Pastor Skip's daily Connection Radio broadcast
  - D. Online Prayer Request Ministry
  - E. Online DevoMail
  - F. None
  - G. I didn't know Calvary of Albuquerque offered these ministries"

## ***The Congregational Survey Findings***

The findings of the survey reflect that there is significant utilization of the various media outlets presented at Calvary of Albuquerque. The radio stations, KNKT and M88 (Now *Static Radio*), dominate with an overwhelming 62% of the congregation listening *on a daily basis*. Use of the Internet is also considerable. 35% watch Calvary of Albuquerque church services online either weekly or monthly. 16% follow Pastor Skip Heitzig's personal blog. Interestingly, although 54% said they did know how to download an Internet message, only 24% had actually done so. And although Calvary of Albuquerque has a bookstore and resource room on campus, 23% of Connection products were still purchased online.

Moreover, 44% follow Calvary of Albuquerque sponsored events on either the Calvary of Albuquerque or Connection Radio websites. 45% of those polled stated that they watched *The Connection* television broadcast on either a weekly or monthly basis.

As for print publications, 62% currently read *Connection—the magazine* and 60% have read or purchased one of Pastor Skip Heitzig's books, booklets, or study guides. 40% stated that they had never purchased a DVD video from the Connection. In addition, only 33% had ever purchased one of the Connection's music CDs.

Questions were also posed regarding the future of Calvary of Albuquerque's convergent media resources. Internet-based services which those polled plan on using include: Facebook (14%), YouTube (13%), Podcast (12%),

MP3 download (12%), Twitter (5%), and Hulu (3%). 37% of respondents listen to Pastor Skip Heitzig's daily Connection Radio broadcast, 14% use the online prayer request ministry, and 13% received online DevoMail.

In light of the poll, it is clear that the Calvary of Albuquerque congregation will need to be further informed and trained about both presently used and upcoming media outlets. For example, 22% stated they do not know what a Podcast is, 39% do not know the church uploads videos to YouTube, 6% did not know Calvary sponsored broadcasts were televised, and 9% did not know Calvary of Albuquerque offered various other convergent media ministries.

**#3 Biblical Literacy Poll.** To help Calvary of Albuquerque determine the knowledge base of the people it seeks to reach, a survey was conducted by national polling agency, McLaulign Inc. as to the knowledge base of the city of Albuquerque in regards to basic Biblical questions. This city-wide Biblical Literacy Questionnaire was to demonstrate how biblical literacy is both perceived and practiced in our own community of Albuquerque. The following represents the findings:

The poll of 300 adults (48 males and 52 females) in Albuquerque was conducted on May 27th, 2009. All interviews were conducted via telephone by professional interviewers. Interview selection was random. The poll of 300 adults has an accuracy of  $\pm 5.7\%$  at a 95% confidence interval.

- 77% of respondents knew that Genesis was the first book in the Old Testament.

- 90% of respondents knew that Moses was the man that God gave the Ten Commandment to.
- 74% of respondents knew that Israel was the “nation that God promised to establish, protect and bless.”
- 61% of respondents knew that Jesus is “who gave the Sermon on the Mount.
- 51.7% answered incorrectly when asked “Which book of the Bible records the missionary journeys of Paul the Apostle?”
- 52% of respondents answered incorrectly when asked, “Which son of King David also became a famous & wealthy king?” 48% answered correctly with Solomon
- 94% of respondents answered correctly when answering true to, “The Bible claims Jesus died on the cross for the sins of all mankind.”
- 97 respondents answered that they attend religious services regularly, 99 respondents answered that they attend not regularly and 60 respondents answered that they attend services once a week
- 98 respondents answered that they read the Bible regularly, 101 respondents answered that they read the Bible not regularly

## **The Media Future of Our Textual Community: Key Insights**

Apart from key literature being reviewed, and history being framed, and data being collected, determining the integration of convergence culture into the growth schema of the textual community must involve insight from vanguards in the fields of media and its application to the gospel cause. I decided to conduct three key interviews, one with Sam Garcia, a one-time web developer for Intel Corporation, who is currently working as department head of web team development at Calvary of Albuquerque. The second and third involve two leaders of a cutting edge computer based evangelistic group, Gospel Media Outreach. Walt Wilson, an early executive of Apple Corporation was the founder and John Blandford is one of GMOs ambassadors to churches.

### ***Sam Garcia: The Textual Community and Technology***

As the Web Team Administrator for Calvary of Albuquerque, Sam and his team understand the importance of engaging participants of the textual community into application of biblical truths. Sam's staff has developed much of the online content for the ministry for the textual community at Calvary of Albuquerque and they share the common desire to develop this community with the integration of convergence culture. I conducted an interview with Sam to discuss the current thinking and future planning of the media developers of our organization. I asked Sam first about where he sees technology fitting into the contemporary Christian community. His answer was extremely revealing. He believes most Christians *comprehend* the reality of technology but do not *apprehend* it. In other words, most Christians know that technologies exist—that the world has personal computers and mobile devices (and many of them do as well), but

most don't take control of it for their own personal benefit. An almost unlimited number of resources are now available and if Christians wanted to, they could easily harness it and learn from it. Garcia's example was that of Gamaliel, the noted Jewish Rabbi at whose feet Paul the Apostle once learned from "sitting at his feet" as a pupil. Paul had to sit at Gamaliel's feet in "real time" being confined to a specific time and place in disciplined study. "Today there are so many options: bible teachers with their teachings available online", Garcia insisted. "These 'virtual Gamaliels' are accessible with their teachings on virtual any passage of the bible available, many free of charge. Most Christians believers are either ignorant that this exists or ignorant as to the ease of accessibility."

Of course Sam has the kind of high tech experience to make the digital superhighway seem like a single-track road than for most of us do. He took a series of audio teachings, made a file format conversion making them into an audiobook format, and then placed it on his mobile device so it's built in indexing would always keep track of where he stopped listening. But Sam's contention is that though the garden-variety believer may not be able to do this, he or she could harness the computer power they already have to grow spiritually in leaps and bounds. This is where Sam sees his purpose and calling in life.

Knowing that the Body of Christ has many members (1 Corinthians 12), Sam Garcia believes that Webmasters, IT (Information Technology) personnel and web designers are also part of this spiritual equation: placed into the Body of Christ to enable members of the textual community achieve maximum results through the integration of extant technology. Sam sees his role as a technological facilitator, taking the *one-to-many*

relationship of a textual teacher to a congregation and making it a *many-to-many* relationship where the members of the congregation have a discussion. This greatly augments the learning experience, Garcia says, since everyone involved is looking at the same truth from the different angles of his/her own perspective, life experience and scriptural knowledge. When members of the textual community practice this and come prepared to the actual teaching event of *Expound*, the event becomes the icing on the cake, tying up the loose ends and reinforcing the text already explored, discussed and applied. Thus through the sanctified utilization of convergence culture, the textual community is further developed.

I probed Sam Garcia about this particular issue, asking him how media can enhance and compliment the core ministry of teaching through the biblical text. I wanted to get the nuts and bolts of the integration aspect of digital tools in the life of the church. Sam aptly noted that through creative use of media one can take what happens at a certain place and time and stretch it far beyond those parameters: One can live anywhere, or even live years after a teaching event, access the teaching of the Word and then play it over and over. One can also take an entire sermon series and compress time in listening to it. Instead of waiting 24 weeks to hear a real-time teaching series, it can be accessed after the fact and listened to in 2-4 hours while working out in the gym! Or a truck driver can listen to an entire book of the bible while driving from Amarillo to Albuquerque. Convergence media makes information available in a way that it is accessible and wraps it around with other media (booklets, e-books, screen readers for the deaf etc).

Why is all this important? Simply because of the sociological changes we can all see around us. People are time-shifting and place-shifting today, demanding options and

more so as options are made available. Rather than just relying on old media that demands the consumer/listener be at one place at one time (like in front of a television or tuned into a radio for a broadcast), new media transforms a linear event into a anywhere/anytime event. With technology one doesn't have to be present for it but can access it and listen or watch anytime and anywhere. The advantage to allowing technology to serve the textual community is simply *delivery*: technology can process data and access data faster than we can recall it.

## **Where Can We Go in the Future?**

I asked Garcia to talk about the future of media platform delivery and what role the church can take. "It's all about content! Information has always wanted to be liberated. Just as water always finds a way to flow out from a source, so does informational content. We have all of the world's knowledge in our pocket: thousands of terabytes, thousands of pedabytes are all available." The challenge to all of this is twofold: *First* to make sure all the available information is properly categorized and processed by inputting the correct metadata so that it is retrievable, and *second* to train people (members of the textual community) how to benefit from it.

As to the future of new media and convergence culture for the textual community, Garcia spoke of the advantages we face, saying that new media "disintermediates," allowing multiple levels of involvement, or several people interacting together over any given point, topic, or text. This is something Sam and his staff have worked aggressively to capitalize on in their development of a discourse community attached to the textual community. Why is this so important? The Calvary of Albuquerque web team cites a

biblical mandate for this: 2Corinthians 1:3-4, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, Who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” Taking from this verse that God has made people as a complete package, having a life of joy, of suffering, of wisdom etc., Garcia maintains that media can facilitate the expression and the exchange of these attributes. Since everyone is uniquely gifted by God (Romans 12:5-6) and intended to be a blessing to others, not only can truth derived from the text of the Bible be consumed, but people’s own application of it and experiences with it can be interacted with.

But what about community? Is it really possible to have community that virtual rather than tangible by the interaction of an online community? With the loss of eye contact, voice tone and body language, can individuals really *connect* socially and spiritually? Though there are voices of dissent, they are not found among the web development team at Calvary of Albuquerque. They assert that it is not only possible but helpful to connect through online technology, facilitating community rather than mitigating against it. Online communities can bring like-minded people together to discuss topics and share ideas in an image-neutral environment. Sure there are things lost in this type of communication (voice, eyes, tone etc) but there is a trade off, even a gain. Technology can bring and whole new level of relationship. Once example is a person who would normally be introverted and self-conscious in an *actual* group may become unafraid and even emboldened in a *virtual* group. Such a person could find the former type of relationship attractive and stimulating spiritually and socially.

## **Expanding the Textual Community—Getting Missional with Technology**

As explained in this dissertation, the textual community has been used as a synonym for a New Testament church that clearly and systematically teaches through the text of Scripture. The possibilities of developing the textual community has been at issue and the advantages of furthering a Christian believer's knowledge base and forming meaningful relationships through multiple platforms of media delivery is undeniable. But what about expansion of the community? Can evangelism (the proclamation of the textual truths of God that lead to the transformation of souls on mankind) be significantly furthered and managed utilizing digital capabilities? I hope to give a resounding, "yes!"

According to WorldChristian.com, a Colorado Springs based organization dedicated to increase the awareness and understanding of the Great Commission, the possibilities of outreach through new media are limitless. This group, which began as an offshoot of Youth With a Mission, wants believers to prayerfully adapt its strategies in a contemporary and globalized world. Every year, this evangelistic group prints and distributes a prayer booklet called, "30 Days of Prayer for the Muslim World" calling Christian believers to engage in prayer for Muslims worldwide during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. In December 2010, a man working with the Facebook social network worked up a graphic representation of just Facebook connections in the countries of North Africa, Turkey, Lebanon, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the North India Plain as well as users in Malaysia, Indonesia and the southern Philippine Islands. His research demonstrated the enormous interactivity and interconnectivity with media users of these regions. While most of these connections are local (confined to the immediate aforementioned geographical areas), the most dramatic find is that Muslims are now

integrating themselves more and more into the world community. This represents a noteworthy shift culturally and socially from isolation to integration. Many younger Muslims especially are becoming globally more informed about international cultural trends. The world, even the Muslim world is changing due to the rapid incursion and ready availability of media. Convergence culture is penetrating the Muslim World!<sup>152</sup>

What does this mean for the church as the “textual Community” and its evangelistic endeavors? Certainly Muslims have their own set of texts that bind them together as a community and would regard themselves as the true “textual community,” based upon the authentic revelation (their belief) of the Koran. But that bias aside, certainly Christians have the call to go into the entire world and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ—even to *Muslims*. Though Islamic tradition regards Christ as merely a great prophet who preached an earlier form of Islam, and though Muslims believe, based on Koranic texts, that Jesus is God’s Messiah, most have no real idea what that means. This has left many Muslims wondering and questioning their own faith. Newer generations of Muslims, those who are more socially engaged in larger cities and those who swim in the ponds of social networking, convergence culture and media profusion, are especially perplexed that some leaders of their own religion espouse aggression and violence to bring “submission” to the rest of the world. What do these well-connected, educated young Muslims do? Where do they go to talk about this? They cannot readily converse in

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<sup>152</sup> 30 Days of Prayer for the Muslim World, Calling Christians to Pray for the Muslim World, with Faith Hope and Love, 20<sup>th</sup> Edition, August 1-30, 2011, Colorado Springs, 3.

local coffee shops about their doubts of Islam in their own countries without fear of reprisal. So they turn to the Internet.

## **Global Media Outreach**

### **An Interview with John Blandford and Walt Wilson:**

In a conversations and interviews I had with John Blandford, who works with the San Jose based media evangelism group, Global Media Outreach, their organization is already poised for such inquiries as the ones mentioned above. Blandford reports that according to Google, 2 million people per day are looking for God on the Internet, and John believes that number is far too modest, and that in his estimation, upward of 5 million per day is the real number of Internet seekers. In other words, that number represents the cumulative amount of persons typing in keywords like, “Heaven”, “hell,” “God,” “eternity,” etc into the Google search engine on their computers to get results every single day. He showed me a “live mapping” online that displays in real time the evangelistic activity tracked by his group, Global Media Outreach at the company’s website,<sup>153</sup> displaying various colors of those who have made inquiries, those who have prayed to receive Christ and those who prayed to receive Christ and have asked for follow-up materials. The day I was Online with John, he showed me that by 11:20 a.m. MST already 120, 000 people heard the gospel that morning around the world through online missionary evangelism. More staggering was that 16,367 people prayed that day to receive Jesus Christ. Moreover on March 23, 2011, GMO reached their previously stated goal of reaching out to one million people in one day, and have even done so on other

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<sup>153</sup> Global Media Outreach: <http://greatcommission2020.com>

days since then. According to their data, in 2010, Global Media Outreach had 119,444,072 visitors, 15,507,537 people who indicated that they prayed to receive Christ via the web, and 2,468,662 people who requested follow-up afterwards, including the acquisition of Bible Study materials.

Global Media Outreach is a Christian Media think-tank and action group that was founded by Walt Wilson, an early executive of Apple Computers, who worked with Steve Jobs to launch the first Macintosh. Using his technological savvy and business sense combined with his love for the Gospel, Walt's vision is to give every person on earth multiple opportunities to receive Jesus Christ by the year 2020. His strategy is to partner with churches worldwide by training their people to become "online missionaries." These can be identified, screened, trained and engaged locally and begin "teaching all nations" from their living rooms or laptops while sitting in Starbucks!

I met with Walt Wilson at a The Issachar Initiative, a think-tank meeting of over 250 Christian leaders from around the world in Southern California recently and asked him some pointed questions about his strategy. Walt firmly believes that the church has arrived at a strategic moment in its history and bemoans that Christians can sometimes be too resistant to the toolbox God has enabled us to utilize. Noting that much of the church is still confined to an older paradigm of being a "paper world," he cited different stages (or media) that have marked Christianity's recent history. Walt told me, "The gospel tent was the model of American Evangelism for decades. Then it was the stadium event of large scale mass evangelism. But I believe we are in the 'Internet Moment' in human history, able to use bits, the smallest unit of data, to reach the largest amount of people." When I pressed Walt as to why older forms of media like print, radio and television

aren't enough to reach people, he explained that the answer lies in old media's inability to be interactive. With new media delivery platforms, which are highly interactive, and the participatory culture that flourishes there, a real relationship of honesty can be created. The computer, said Wilson, can enable a sort of "anonymous intimacy," in which people with deep issues will say things (or text things) they wouldn't anywhere else. He insisted, "There's nothing impersonal about technology! Put a person in front of a keyboard at two in the morning, and they'll tell you anything." Through GMO's 8000 online missionaries, people are being reached globally and, in many cases, to dialogue about the gospel from countries openly hostile to it.

What struck me when I first heard about this endeavor was the goal itself: *To redeem technology for the glory of God!* What becomes fascinating is the idea that one of the important qualifications of such potential "missionaries" is having a media outlet. John Blandford said, "If you can send and receive email you can do this ministry". The organization mitigates against ill-equipped personnel by offering other website links that aid the online missionary in finding solid answers and apologetic material (such as [gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org)) to present a cogent evangelical dialogue to people around the globe. Conceivably one can now go around the globe by the click of a mouse, and in so doing, present the truth of Christ, as substantiated by the text of Holy Scripture to people worldwide. According to GMO, over 50% of those who are inquiring about the gospel worldwide are doing so with cell phones. Even remote peoples are gaining more and more access to these devices via low cost availability in many countries. GMO's statistics reveal that 90% of the world's population lives within range of a cellular transmission tower, 5.3 billion people use cell phones and 2.4 billion have access to the Internet.

This forward think Christian organization is even positioning itself to take advantage of the 03B networking vision to offer technology to the other 3 billion (thus 03b) people on earth by ubiquitous satellite positioning purported to be supported by emerging markets. This represents at present the “cutting edge” of integrating convergence culture into the great commission by the textual community worldwide. Said its founder, Walt Wilson, “We didn’t invent *bits*, but we discovered them a few decades ago.” He continued with the pressing question, “Why did God create *bits*?” The GMO Chairman/founder suggests is for this very reason of their utilization towards world evangelization. “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, *visible and invisible*, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.” (Col1:16 NIV, italics mine).

## **Logical Presentation of Findings:**

### **Overview Summary**

The preceding material began as a look backwards, through the lens of history. From Israel’s earliest days of wandering in the desert of Sinai as they gathered around the “text of God” that He Himself inscribed on tablets of stone, they formed a textual community as national identity. I have considered the formation of that ancient people of God through its history with the media of the voices of prophets as well as the exacting work of scribes faithfully copying and transmitting the text by hand to future generations. Following the historical thread, I briefly examined the postexilic Jewish communities which sought to live their newly liberated lives “by the Book,” after learning the harsh lessons of the Babylonian Captivity. I then followed this thread into the New Testament

with the strong affirmation of the Savior Himself of the solidarity and integrity of the inerrant text revealed by God through the ages in the writings of the Law and the Prophets. The textual legacy that Jesus affirmed, Paul the Apostle, a son of the Judaistic biblical tradition, then reaffirmed in his writings and practice.

I then considered the Medieval Christian “textual communities” as described by Brian Stock, which became, in this dissertation, the moniker for the recently burgeoning Christian community within the immediate purview of this document: Calvary of Albuquerque. After examining Stock’s original model of a textual community, I have refined it, acknowledging its usefulness but expanding upon his premises. Calvary of Albuquerque, who’s spiritual DNA derives from the example and mentorship of Chuck Smith and his approach to textual exposition fits this category aptly. Through the original influence and scholastic treatment of this subject by Dr. Charles Fromm, I have argued throughout the preceding chapters that Calvary of Albuquerque fits all the criteria of a modern day textual community, fitting the descriptive model outlined by Stock.

But how a community of people that are formed around the exposition of the scriptural text can be developed and deepened in their faith by mass media is quite another issue. And thus this dissertation has not only looked backwards but it has also considered the present social and technological landscape with its media delivery systems and how they can be maximized to fit the goals of the textual community. I have even dared to peak into the future as to how the church can be poised to take advantage of developing systems of technology including the application of new media, transmedia and convergence culture. In this rapidly moving multimedia age when the Word of God is packaged and distributed through an increasing number of delivery platforms that were

not even imagined a few years ago, and when virtual communities of shared interest in biblical exposition exist and are growing through the power of the Internet, an inevitable conclusion becomes clear through the fog of history and technology: The integration of media (and in particular convergence culture) can and does help the development of the textual community. This cannot be easily denied nor can it be marginalized.

The textual community at Calvary of Albuquerque has at its heart the Scripture itself, which provides the basis of its being and the resource for its education. As the community first developed through evangelism and teaching, the same community enjoyed the enhancement of these two activities by media employed. At first a variety of different bible studies provided to meet multiple needs were offered. Anyone who wished to study scripture or a topic addressed by the scripture could attend a weeknight class or secure a tape from the cassette tape lending library. Information papers, leaflets or booklets were printed to further one's education and deepen one's understanding. If an individual showed aptitude or interest in further equipping and ministry, he/she could attend the School of Ministry provided by the textual community. Later on, radio programs and television programs brought biblical messages into cars, homes and hospital rooms to those interested in a deeper understanding of practical Christian living. Now, one may go through multiple portals via the Internet by a computer or mobile device and gain access to resources pertaining to virtually any text of Scripture. Per my research via interviews of key employees and ministry leaders, a church survey and a community poll, a significant amount of people in the congregation of Calvary of Albuquerque are integrating convergence media into their lifestyles to strengthen their own spiritual lives.

I have come to discover, as Shane Hipps' own journey reveals, that media and technology matter to God.<sup>154</sup> His instructions to Israel for the construction of the wilderness tabernacle and its implements demonstrate that He intended the Ark of the Covenant to become a medium intended to carry the presence of God on earth. There sheer volume of words in Scripture dedicated to the details of this special medium show us that God was serious about this communication platform. It took God over 6 chapters and 200 verses to detail to Moses the technologies to be used for worship.

The times we live in are historic in the sense that the twenty-first century presents new challenges with technology. These challenges are not for the fainthearted and we must bring a tough-minded Christianity into the twenty-first century.<sup>155</sup> An often-used example, but one that is particularly apropos here, is that of the men of Issachar who, “understood their times and knew what Israel should do.” (1Chronicles 12:32). The stark challenges notwithstanding, we, too, must understand our times and know what to do in them since these new challenges await a biblical perspective and a Christian application strategy.

## **New Media Supporting Old Reality**

Through the centuries, God has had a hand in inspiring people to invent tools that facilitate the spreading of His gospel and the teaching of His truths. Historically the church has adopted and embraced those tools, including print, broadcast media, and now

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<sup>154</sup> Shane Hipps, *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your faith*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2009), 162.

<sup>155</sup> Kerby Anderson, *Technology, Spirituality, & Social Trends: Probing the Headlines That Impact Your Family*, (Grand Rapids, Kregel Books, 2002), 14.

the Internet with multiple delivery formats. While fraught with hazards, the Internet offers many advantages, allowing everyone to be a publisher and to have their voice heard. Before the advent of the Internet, there were enormous barriers to printing. It took considerable money, power, or influence and a great amount of time to publish. But today, because of the emergence of New Media, made possible by the Internet, many of those barriers have been removed. New Media provides tools that make it possible for nearly anyone to publish or broadcast to either a large or a niche audience. What can this do for a church congregation?

- ***It Can Provide Resources.*** An enormous amount of information resides on the Internet capable of being accessed or downloaded that can strengthen faith. Any mobile device is your seat in any congregation! Now one can hear and see great Bible teachers, past or present (within reasonable parameters), and read virtually anything ever written by church fathers, church historians or apologetic authors throughout history. With the availability of online libraries, anyone can have the sort of *information that leads to transformation*. This transformation can be then shared with a platform of social media sparking conversations and discussions than can linger through the week and redirect members to further resources.
- ***It Can Enhance Community.*** Because everyone has a voice with New Media, everyone can be heard. This “disintermediation” creates an equality which serves to equalize participants. Technology can also help strengthen relationships with other members within the textual community. New groups can be formed and meet together through asynchronous meeting forums (platforms created where people can participate over the same material but not

driven by time) provided by social media to inform, discuss, argue, and engender prayer and encouragement. Though not face-to-face, and not providing the intimacy of that kind of fellowship, this is still a contemporary communication language, and everyone is learning it. Christians can too. By capitalizing on it one can further engage members and keep them connected to the community. At its core, the church is one giant social network—it exists as an intricate, interconnected community. It could even be argued that this has its basis in God Himself, Whom is the ultimate “Networker,” beginning, of course, with the inter-Trinitarian communication of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As social beings, Christians shouldn’t be afraid of social media. Because it transcends geography, these tools extend fellowship beyond the walls of the church and can stretch it around the world (something missionaries appreciate). Online relationships can also spark offline community. Social media do not replace personal relationships but can supplement them and cultivate new ones. Ideally, online social networking leads to offline social networking, meeting “face to face, that our joy may be full” (2John 12). I have reconnected with friends whom I encountered through Facebook. Even 10 years ago, these relationships would not have materialized.

- ***It Can Facilitate Communication.*** Rather than budgeting time and resources for sending out invitations, newsletters, receipts, and thank-you letters via the postal service, a less time consuming and a more cost-saving way is now available. Technology can provide a solution that allows churches to communicate more effectively. Email “blasts” that report upcoming events, “DevoMail”

(devotional emails) or texts can great encourage people in a church community. A church can have a Facebook page that communicates salient core values and biblical thoughts efficiently and with a greater degree of learning if other forms of media (like QR redirecting or Youtube clips) are used to buttress the messaging.

- ***It Can Personalize Leadership.*** Technology can help congregants know their leadership. Building and fostering relationships with church members can be difficult with a small staff and a large congregation. It is nearly impossible to create a meaningful, personalized experience for each person. And for the potential congregant who wants to learn about the pastoral staff and church activities, a special appointment and a drive to the physical property isn't required. A picture or introduction video by a leader posted on the church's website followed by a written bio and vision statement and then a Facebook link can enable access for people. Furthermore, by creating an online community for your congregation, you can keep your members connected to each other with leadership as the forum monitor. If a tightly integrated website that includes data from your member management system; a leader can greet each member by name, target messages for upcoming events, and share news about groups or programs that a member is involved in right on your home page. Members can also update their profiles so information is always up-to-date. The bottom line is that ministry is all about people. Websites, connecting links, videos, QR Codes, Twitter feeds and Facebook pages aren't just cool social networking platforms. They are ways of connecting with people. Technology should serve the Textual

Community. It can and should improve one's daily processes and aid efficiency within the community itself. Technology is an investment that can help ensure the textual community's resources are liberated, distributed, and replicated.

## **A Case for Convergence**

We are living in the aftermath of the digital revolution, a communication milestone as significant as Guttenberg's moveable type press was to his generation. It is a time in which the opportunity for telling the greatest story ever could reach new heights and have greater impact than ever. Transmedia storytelling could be the stitches that lead to presenting that story as a seamless garment—a convergence of mediums and platforms working together to create an experience accessible to multiple generations and cultures. And what better story can be told than the one we are living—a life in Christ!

Calvary of Albuquerque is currently using this convergence in its weekly presentation of *Expound*—the *lectio continuum*, the continuous study and interpretation of the Bible in sequence. First the leadership team meets to discuss textual purview and interactive elements offered for the night. Then appropriate video clips are produced to tie in the chronology of past events, present textual treatment and future study. Study guides, outlines both printed and digital are prepared by the web team. Through Twitter, Facebook and email links, the follower is reminded of salient truths covered in the study, asked questions pertaining to its application and directed to further resources online. Downloadable study guides and “teaser” videos further the learning experience. A convenient QR code is placed and updated on the *Expound* website allowing for the review of the previous message so as to keep the forum member current. The *Expound*

App in two platforms is also offered on the website making the experience easier and more accessible on mobile devices. Finally community is encouraged and offered on several levels: personal invitations are given to group that meet before the actual midweek study for face-to-face prayer and discussion, and invitations to join the online communities of Twitter and Facebook to join the discussion of the biblical text. All the information is available for personal computers and/or mobile devices. Thus a discourse community is built around the textual community and convergence culture is making it all happen.

Another example is with Bridgeway Church in Oklahoma City, a church that has facilitated two expansive transmedia projects—Brand New Mountain Speeches and Adventous<sup>156</sup> over the past few years. These transmedia projects have sought to motivate area artists to create and collaborate with each other in response to a passage of Scripture. One of these church projects was designed to invite and include writers, painters, metalworkers, photographers, poets, musicians, videographers, tap dancers, and clothing designers to respond to Jesus' words in Matthew 5-7. The project spanned four months and included gatherings in which time was spent in reading of the text and in collaborative workshops. The project culminated with a four-hour program of original songs, poetry readings, and monologues in a room whose walls were adorned with the work of painters, metalworkers, photographers, and sculptors.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> [www.adventusokc.com](http://www.adventusokc.com)

<sup>157</sup> *When Church Meets Transmedia: A Convergence of Community*

March 17, 2011 | By Sam Duregger <http://echohub.com/posts/design/when-church-meets-transmedia-a-convergence-of-community/>

## VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

### ***The Textual Community Gone Digital: A New Paradigm with Ancient Roots***

We can only wonder at the sheer speed of technological innovations being made available in our culture, which is sure to escalate dramatically with the passing of time. Such innovations can either be ignored, being relegated to just a part of the evil world system or they can be redeemed and used for God's glory. I have listed three ways to do the later. If you are a church leader in particular, these recommendations may serve to revolutionize the way you have come to think about church.

- ***Textualize Your Community:*** Whatever house of worship any church may occupy, be it a hut or a cathedral, the church should be a textual community. The New Testament church had at the top of its "core value" list, "The Apostles' Doctrine (Acts 2:42). Thus every biblical church should be one that reads and explains the biblical text. As believers, more that two thousand years removed from the origination of the text of scripture, we should still take our cues for faith and practice from these ancient records. When Henry Hampton Halley wrote his celebrated *Halley's Bible Handbook* he deliberately included an opening note which read, "The Most Important Page in This Book Is 814" which served as a literary link to direct readers to a section of the book where Halley clearly suggested to pastors that they take their people through the entire bible through a congregational plan of Bible reading and that the pastor's sermon be part of the text read the past week, thus connecting the pastor's preaching with the people's

reading. "If this plan is followed," wrote Halley, "it will produce a revitalized church and bring about a grand revival." Almost every pastor and Christian leader I have ever met wants that. So if you have any influence in your community of faith, bring it back to a systematic exposition of Scripture.

- ***Digitize Your Theology:*** In most every congregation there exist men and women who are specially gifted members of the Body of Christ, able to weave the story of "Christ in us" through media platforms. Perhaps they are equipped with the spiritual "gift of wisdom" to apply both knowledge and understanding of the world of the technical to the world of the spiritual. Or perhaps theirs is the "gift of administration" to supervise or manage the output of media to serve the textual community. Whatever your budgetary and visionary considerations are for the church you serve, why not include the mobilization of such gifted ones to allow the truth considered within the four walls of the building to escape and run rampant on the superhighway of digital deliver platforms? Years ago, before cable television, there were four main television stations broadcasting to the American audience, and only a few book publishers existed. The movie theater augmented that media for special features. People consumed media in the ways it was given to them. With today's playing field, people consume media the same—in the ways it is given to them. Today its about options and immediacy. One has to deliver media in a number of levels because people want to consume it on a number of levels. The appetite, already created in our culture, isn't going away and to refuse to engage is to ensure you will not be heard.

- ***Strategize Your Policy:*** Since we have the greatest message ever broadcast to mankind, I suggest some guidelines for the strategy policy of media output:

***#1—Make it Available on Multiple Platforms.*** People today take in media differently than in the past simply because media is available differently than in the past. Question: How do most people get news? Answer: In multiple ways: by radio, television, newspaper, RSS feed and podcast, and sometimes all the above are integrated by single individuals. People today are “time-shifting” and “place-shifting,” that is rather than having to be at a certain place at a certain time, they want to hear and see what they want, when they want to. It is commonplace to record (or “Tevo”) a televised event for more convenient viewing at a later time. With a live event, everything is linear—confined in both time and space. A policy which provides media on multiple delivery platforms serves the media practices of most people.

***#2—Make it Accessible.*** make sure every piece of content is metatagged correctly with keywords, topics, illustrations, and statistics, so that the information is retrievable. One can go to the Calvary of Albuquerque website or to Google and type in key search words and find the transcribed sermon where that idea was conveyed. This takes the treasure house of truth, revered by the textual community and formats it like a well organized library that anyone can access from anywhere at any time.

**#3—*Make it Available Freely.*** I have a friend who often would say, “*If its for free, then it’s for me!*” That’s true for most people. In the mass-media jungle, with billions of voices, it’s all about getting heard. When churches and organizations can create policy that gives truth away freely via media downloads, chances are that voice will be heard more readily. In the spacious foyer of Calvary of Albuquerque are digital kiosks that enable anyone to plug in a thumb drive and download a single message or a series free of charge. The web sites do the same. Though one may still purchase actual CDs and DVDs of the message, they may just as easily (and freely) download outlines, notes, messages or recap videos of any previous message. Jesus said, “*Freely you have received; freely give*” (Matthew 10:8), and as much as possible, a policy to liberate the flow of truth that digital media affords is a step in the right direction. When salient teachings of a textual community are shareable and replicable, they can live far beyond a live event.

**#4—*Make it Known.*** Cross promotion of other media delivery platforms you utilize helps build repeat users to websites, broadcasts and podcasts, especially when listeners/participants can receive resources. Let radio listeners know about the cache of sermons on your website available for free download, the latest magazine with pertinent articles or a special podcast about a particular issue. Allow participants to share the sermon messages or transcript notes with friends or the message itself via Facebook. Cross promotion allows one media form serve other media

forms. With a “digitized vision” for their churches, pastors could get much more mileage from their work. Dr. Vernon Grounds, chancellor of Denver Seminary<sup>158</sup> once gave me this idea when he told me, “Every sermon you preach could become a radio broadcast and a pamphlet, and perhaps some day a book!” But with new media and convergence, why stop there? It could become a you-tube clip, an article with a QR code that leads a person to a website complete with links to other resources to direct the seeker to plumb the depths of the biblical text through a few clicks of a mouse.

Sure, the untamed jungle of the World-wide-web with offers a passport to both good and bad places. But, like any tool in an unpracticed or undisciplined hand, it can be dangerous and at the same time it can be glorious. The Internet can be used to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and can just as easily be used to market the filth and sleaze of pornography. iTunes can be used to download uplifting and stirring music and sermons by gifted textual expositors or the worst kind of anti-social lyrics, full of profanity. Social networks on the Web can be used to expand healthy friendships as easily as they can be used by predators trying to trap the unwary. That is no different from how people choose to use television or movies or even a public library. Satan is always quick to exploit the negative power of new inventions, to spoil and to degrade and to neutralize any effect for good. The key is the choices one makes when sitting behind the flickering screen of the computer. If, as a believer, you “surf your values,” then new media and convergence

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<sup>158</sup> <http://www.denverseminary.edu/contact-us/denver-seminary-staff-and-faculty/dr-vernon-c-grounds/>

culture will be integrated to expand your mind, increase your opportunities, and feed your soul.

Henry Jenkins observed that, “Convergence involves both a change in the way media is produced and a change in the way media is consumed.”<sup>159</sup> If Jenkins is correct, the Church has an opportunity to forge ahead in new and profound ways. Leaving behind the stigma of being a static and unchanging institution, the Church can move toward its calling as an incarnational organism in which participants and facilitators move as one in the communication of the gospel.

Jesus Christ is the supreme “Text.” He is the Word Incarnate and our community as Christians finds its greatest meaning as we converge around Him in vital, personal, and ongoing relationship. The question remains, *how will we get the WORD out?*

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<sup>159</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, (New York and London, New York University Press, 2006), 16.

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