religions

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E-Word? McLuhan, Baudrillard, and Verisimilitude in Preaching

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Abstract: Electronic communication of the Christian message—online preaching—raises distinct theological challenges. Notwithstanding the undeniable convenience and unlimited geographical reach of "virtual church", electronic media have the potential to separate preacher from congregants, congregants from one another, and—potentially of greatest concern—the church from God, even while appearing to accomplish the opposite. Communication theorist Marshall McLuhan (1911–1980) argues provocatively that virtual representation is at the cost of authentic human identity (in which case it is inimical to community), while French sociologist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007) warns of substituting representation for reality, especially in matters of theology and the identity of God. The paradigm of Jesus' Incarnation, by contrast, mandates un-mediated divine-human and human-to-human communication, requiring engagement between persons themselves rather than their avatars or provisional simulacra. With respect to electronically mediated communication itself, acknowledging divine initiative in the formation of identity (as a feature of soteriology) and of understanding (under the category of revelation) countermands the more dehumanizing and anti-theological influences that McLuhan and Baudrillard both identify, encouraging direct engagement with God in the person of the Holy Spirit rather than resorting to technological mediation.

Keywords: homiletics; online preaching; McLuhan; Baudrillard; simulacra; media theory; Incarnation; pneumatology

Citation: Knowles, Michael P.. 2022. E-Word? McLuhan, Baudrillard, and Verisimilitude in Preaching. *Religions* 13: 1131. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13121131

Academic Editor: Sunggu Yang

Received: 7 October 2022
Accepted: 19 November 2022
Published: 23 November 2022

> "We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning".
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> (Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 79)

1. Introduction

The fact that, in recent years, pastors on the technology-rich side of the digital divide have had to adapt their preaching to online modes of presentation calls for renewed consideration of the specifically theological implications of virtual proclamation. The critical issue is whether or not the content of the Christian message mandates a distinct form of communication or, conversely, whether online proclamation conforms to the theological constraints of Christian faith. In one sense, the problem is hardly new: if the preacher is nothing more than magnetic or optical coding on a tape or disc, re-broadcast at a suitably convenient hour, has the gospel truly been proclaimed? To what are viewers responding? Need they respond at all? The same questions apply to earlier forms of technology: can a sound recording, or the combination of sound recording with a series of silver halide images creating the illusion of movement convey a true representation of gospel truth?

Not all situations involving electronic representation are equivalent. There are differences between a sermon pre-recorded in an empty church or studio for later playback, live preaching re-broadcast for a subsequent audience, and virtual participation on the part of viewers via live streaming. The categories themselves overlap: live-streamed sermons containing pre-recorded video segments may be re-broadcast on YouTube or Facebook. But while these three situations entail different degrees of separation between preacher and

audience, the challenge they represent remains the same: does preaching normally require personal, and not merely virtual presence?

A simple answer might be that the Christian gospel is in essence a verbal message: its content is conceptual, its challenge volitional and existential, no matter what the medium. So long as the intellectual content is coherent, perhaps God can be trusted to do the rest. Martin Luther, for example, avers that "God the creator of heaven and earth speaks to you through his preachers .... These are the words of God, not of Plato or Aristotle. It is God Himself who speaks."[1] Likewise John Calvin: "Among the many excellent gifts with which God has adorned the human race, it is a singular privilege that he deigns to consecrate to himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that His voice may resound in them" (*Institutes* 4.1.5).[2] Yet quoting Reformers on this point is not ultimately instructive, if for no other reason than that they could not have envisaged the nuances of our current technological dilemma. Granted, the Reformers' affirmation of verbal proclamation could be interpreted as a rejection of technological innovation, privileging the spoken word over popular reading of Scripture, with the latter having recently been facilitated by the invention of the printing press (Aichele 2003, p. 12; O'Leary 2004, pp. 41–44). Yet despite its initial promise to make the problem disappear, an emphasis on verbal verisimilitude is theologically inadequate because it ignores significant dimensions both of the divine-human dynamic and of electronic media as distinctive means of communication. The conceptual content of the Christian message is not separate from the manner in which it is conveyed.

The key issue is that of discerning an appropriate theological framework by which to understand the communication of Christian faith. This is not the same as, for example, making an *a priori* claim regarding the uniqueness of Christian truth; it is to ask whether the nature and content of Christian doctrine implies (even requires) a particular communicative form. Exploring this question involves (at a minimum) three critical issues: the character of divine-human communication (hence, Christology); the rôle of the Holy Spirit in that process (pneumatology); and the nature of electronic media, in principle. Beginning with the last of these categories, Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan (1911–1980) and French philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007)—one an ardent Catholic and the other an avowed nihilist—offer particularly trenchant assessments of what is at stake for human and divine identity in the realm of virtual communication.[3]

2. Marshall McLuhan: Media and Mediation

Best known today for his slogan, "The Medium is the Message," McLuhan has been deemed "the founder and figurehead of modern media theory" (Margreiter 2006, in Friesen 2010, p. 6). As a theorist, however, McLuhan tends to be experimental and diffuse rather than systematic or even linear. Since this is not the place for a comprehensive account of his wide-ranging oeuvre, the following summary focuses on McLuhan's assessment of virtual—which is to say, electronic—representation, in particular the nature of electronically mediated communication.

Foundational to his thinking is McLuhan's observation that different forms of technology create significantly different forms of perception, such that a printed text, for instance, conveys meaning differently than do the same letters on a phosphorescent screen. Physical texts are, to all appearances, fixed and final, even should we attempt to smudge the ink. From this characteristic derives their authority: particularly in an age of limited literacy, the non-literate have no means by which to refute the assertion that "It is written" (Matt 4:4–10; Rom 1:17, etc.). By contrast, electronic images (even more so in the case of computer screens than the early televisions that McLuhan had in view) are not images at all, but rather representations of images, "discontinuous and nonlinear patterns captured and *transformed into images* in the eye of the beholder" (Gordon 2010, p. 8; emphasis original).[4] Subtly but importantly, this process accords the viewer epistemological autocracy: meaning is in the eye of the beholder because it is the beholder who must construct the images from which meaning itself may be derived.[5] At a more basic level, the viewer also maintains

control simply by virtue of the ability to turn off the screen: in either case, the principle of hermeneutical command remains the same. Texts themselves—even historically "sacred" texts—are thus rendered fluid, easily overwritten and therefore implicitly impermanent (Aichele 2003, pp. 19–21). It is no longer possible to claim "It is written" when the very letters die at the flick of a switch.

The principle of an implicit (usually invisible) link between technologies and their users is the essential insight of McLuhan's familiar aphorism, "The medium is the message." He is not proposing that content is unimportant, simply alerting us to the clandestine effects of communicative media, since "any technology gradually creates a totally new human environment" (McLuhan 2003, p. 12). Focusing on content alone, he contends, blinds users to the effects of the medium by which it is conveyed, a point he makes in characteristically provocative fashion:

> Our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they are used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological idiot. For the "content" of a medium is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind. (McLuhan 2003, p. 31)

More precisely, according to McLuhan, technology (like language itself) serves as an extension of human identity by mandating the manner in which we express ourselves and interact with others: "technologies function both as physical extensions of human bodies and as invisible environments" (Marchessault 2005, pp. 202–3).

On the one hand, McLuhan is optimistic that electronic media serve to reduce distance between interlocutors, creating (at a minimum) the potential for universal community. Instantaneous and mutual awareness, made possible by electronic means, creates a new global (even "cosmic") consciousness, effectively transcending our sense of individual identity (Marchessault 2005, pp. 122–23, 218–21). Yet the cost of this transformation is, paradoxically, our human identity: "While electric media link us to each other in depth, practically eliminating space and time from our lives, these same media strip away what we had considered for centuries as our individuality and private identity" (McLuhan 2010, p. 147). A screen image, after all, is "a voice with a face and a body but no substance" (Levinson 1999, p. 39). For McLuhan, the electronic virtualization of human identity is a specifically theological problem:

> When you are on the air you are, in a way, everywhere at once. Electric man is a "super angel." When you are on the telephone you have no body. And, while your voice is there, you and the people you speak to are here, at the same time. Electric man has no bodily being. He is literally *dis*-carnate. But a discarnate world, like the one we now live in, is a tremendous menace to an incarnate Church, and its theologians haven't even deemed it worthwhile to examine the fact. (McLuhan 2010, p. 50; emphasis original)

Of course, the user is still physically seated in front of (for McLuhan) the television or (today) the computer screen. The problem is not simply a dissipated sense of identity and self but, more precisely, an unwitting distanciation whereby representation replaces true human interaction. In place of the tangible engagement implied by personal presence, we become spectators and "virtual tourists," objectifying (even commodifying) the subjects—people, places, situations—that we contemplate on our screens (so Marchessault 2005, pp. 211–12). His point is well illustrated by a group of family members sitting together in the same room yet each fixated on a separate electronic device, having all discovered that "screen time" is a good deal less messy and demanding than dealing with one another face to face. While promising to bridge geographical and temporal divides, electronic (including archival) representation has the opposite effect, reinforcing disconnection by internalizing it. Personal interaction—interpersonal community—is replaced by its representation: "Thus, it is with some irony that McLuhan will write in the opening pages of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*: 'The new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of the global village'" (Marchessault 2005, p. 213, citing McLuhan 1962, p. 31). As Marchessault observes—and

other commentators tend to overlook—McLuhan's point is that the "global village" of electronic media is simply an image, nothing more.

McLuhan presses his argument further with a series of reflections, so to speak, on the myth of Narcissus, the Greek youth who, enamored of his own beauty, fell into the pool of water that reflected it back to him, and drowned (McLuhan 2003, pp. 63–70). In McLuhan's view, Narcissus' chief error was not an eponymous narcissism, or self-preoccupation *per se*, but rather that the image on which he gazed was only a representation of himself. In effect, he dotes on his projection of an idealized self, seeing himself only as he wishes to be seen and thereby losing touch with his actual self. McLuhan is careful to point out that "Narcissus" derives "from the Greek word *narcosis*, or numbness" (McLuhan 2003, p. 63). As Terrence Gordon explains, "In fact, it was his inability to recognize his image that brought him to grief. He succumbed to the same numbing effect that all technologies produce, if the user does not scrutinize their operation. Technologies create new environments, the new environments create pain, and the body's nervous system shuts down to block the pain" (Gordon 2010, p. 109).[6] The epistemological problem McLuhan addresses is directly analogous to that of pornography, which is not that sexual desire is intrinsically disordered, but rather that the images involved are unreal: they are only as thick as the paper they are printed on, only as alive as the phosphorescent pixels on a video screen. Their apparent vivacity is simply an act of imagination, itself no more than a projection of desire. The irony is that Narcissus in fact *fails* to love himself in all his dimensions, all his depth. Instead, he worships a one-dimensional aspiration that he does not in fact embody, because doing so relieves him of the pain of self-awareness, self-realization. As with all forms of idolatry, representation (electronic or otherwise) thus supplants reality; indeed, McLuhan insists, "Self-amputation forbids self-recognition" (McLuhan 2003, p. 64).[7] Or, more ominously still, "All media exist to invest our lives with artificial perception and arbitrary values" (McLuhan 2003, p. 269).

This assessment leads McLuhan to a radical, almost unthinkable conclusion: that by successively re-scripting society in its image and according to its demands, each new technology (however ostensibly benign) deprives us of our collective human identity, enticing us to surrender our freedom via an apparent exercise of it: "Once we have surrendered our senses and nervous systems to the private manipulation of those who would try to benefit from taking a lease on our eyes and ears and nerves, we don't really have any rights left" (McLuhan 2003, p. 99). We become enslaved to the latest technological advances (and the corporations that market them) because we cannot imagine life without their configuration of it. While such a conclusion may initially seem shocking, McLuhan's point is as obvious as our addiction to constantly upgrading our hardware and updating our software.

Whereas McLuhan investigates the relationship between specific communicative media and those who employ them, Jean Baudrillard—building directly on McLuhan—focuses on the nature of signs and signification. In contrast, that is, to McLuhan's interest in *means* of communication, Baudrillard addresses questions of *meaning*. More particularly, where McLuhan is concerned for the impact of electronic media on human identity, Baudrillard warns that over-reliance on signs (and the technologies that produce them) entails the erasure of divine identity.

3. Jean Baudrillard: Signs in Place of Substance

To explain his concern, Baudrillard recalls the image from a short story by Jorge Luis Borges ("Del rigor en la ciencia [On Exactitude in Science]") of a map so precise that its proportions and details are identical to those of the landscape it depicts. In Baudrillard's vision, the map comes eventually not simply to represent, but to replace the terrain itself. This, he argues, is how signs ultimately function in an "age of simulation." His complaint is not against artifice or signification per se, but rather, he insists, that in the subtle and inconspicuous process whereby a sign gradually substitutes for its epistemological referent, "all of metaphysics . . . is lost":

> By crossing into a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth, the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials—worse: with their artificial resurrection in the systems of signs, a material more malleable than meaning, in that it lends itself to all systems of equivalences . . . It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real. . . . (Baudrillard 1994, p. 2)

Expressing a particular interest in "religion and the simulacrum of divinity" (unusual, perhaps, for a nihilist), Baudrillard affirms the Judaeo-Christian rejection of idolatry because of "the faculty simulacra have of effacing God . . . [thereby implying] that deep down God never existed, that only the simulacrum ever existed, even that God himself was never anything but his own image" (Baudrillard 1994, p. 4)[8]. Although with a primary focus on visual and sacramental rather than verbal representation (as in preaching), Baudrillard asks,

> What if God himself can be simulated, that is to say can be reduced to the signs that constitute faith? Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacrum—not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference. (Baudrillard 1994, pp. 5–6)

Once replaced by a sign, he concludes, "God is not dead, he has become hyper-real" (Baudrillard 1994, p. 159).

Baudrillard does not reject the use of signs in principle, but insists on their epistemological subordination to that which they are intended to signify, thus making a critical distinction between "representation" and "simulation." His assessment, while doubtless provocative and extreme, is nonetheless disturbingly prescient of a culture fascinated by electronic imagery, in which one's personal "image," online presence, or persona comes to predominate over the more complex and flawed characters that we are in real life. Baudrillard is even more pessimistic in his disparagement of television (along with, by extension, electronic imagery in principle) than is McLuhan, whose influence he acknowledges throughout. As Andreas Huyssen explains, television for Baudrillard "ultimately drains the real out of commodities and out of events, reducing them to so many images on the screen that refer only to other images" (Huyssen 1989, p. 13). Such is the artificiality of the televised image "that *it is no longer an image*," not even an attempt at authentic representation or true signification.

This is McLuhan's insight into the epistemic hegemony of the viewer carried to its logical extreme. Indeed, for Baudrillard, McLuhan's formula, "The medium is the message," presages the ultimate collapse (or "implosion") not only of the message itself, but of communicative media as well.[9] By virtue of the fact that they are intrinsically linked, the demise of one necessitates the eventual dissolution of the other:

> *The medium is the message* not only signifies the end of the message, but also the end of the medium. There are no more media in the literal sense of the word (I'm speaking particularly of electronic mass media)—that is, of a mediating power between one reality and another, between one state of the real and another. Neither in content, nor in form . . . the medium and the real are now in a single nebula whose truth is indecipherable. (Baudrillard 1994, pp. 82–83)[10]

Baudrillard's assessment of electronic media is thus even more radical than that of McLuhan: at its ultimate extreme, to borrow the language of Baudrillard's compatriot Jacques Ellul, representation collapses into propaganda, which is the manufacture of "fake news"—knowing falsehood—as an intentional replacement for more uncomfortable truth.[11]

To be sure, this is an extreme assessment, one that far exceeds any potential for harm in merely posting the Sunday sermon online. Nonetheless, McLuhan and Baudrillard alike raise an appropriate caution as to the effects of technology both on human identity (as least in terms of self-perception/self-construction) and on the relationship between mediated communication and the content of the Christian gospel. Each consideration must be weighed against the character of divine communication implied by or contained within the gospel itself.

4. Preaching and Electronic Media: Assessing the Challenges

Although not all of its elements will prove equally serviceable, Baudrillard's account of the successive stages of mediated (mis-)representation can serve as a general framework for assessing the operational implications of—in this case—electronic rendition in Christian preaching. First, and least insidious, is what Baudrillard terms a "sacramental" order of representation, which serves as "the reflection of a profound reality." Second, the order of "evil appearance . . . masks and denatures a profound reality." In other words, the signifier begins—however subtly—to replace the signified: "Transcendent, symbolic reference is gradually evacuated as the sign becomes pure commodity" (Walters 2012, p. 29). At a further remove, representation of a sort that Baudrillard designates the "order of sorcery . . . masks the *absence* of a profound reality." Finally, the sign becomes self-referential, since it is "no longer the order of appearances, but of simulation . . . it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (Baudrillard 1994, p. 6). At this ultimate stage (which Baudrillard coins the "hyperreal"), "representation is entirely replaced by simulation. Signs have become simulacra because they no longer have any reference to reality but generate their meaning . . . through their relation to one another" (Walters 2012, p. 29). Much as McLuhan contends that users are typically unaware of how technology transforms their worldview—even their sense of self—so Baudrillard implies that electronic representation is intrinsically deceptive, beguiling the user by means of its visual appeal and essential malleability until all that remains is the image alone. In Baudrillard's telling phrase, the attempt at representation devolves into a "nullité spectaculaire" (Baudrillard 1976, p. 103). In the hyperreal, that is, where signification does not truly signify, "illusion is the fundamental rule" (Baudrillard 2001, p. 6, cited in Walters 2012, p. 57).[12]

How might such an assessment (however stark) apply in the present case? Perhaps unexpectedly, the critique of unwarranted epistemological substitution applies as much to preaching generally as to electronic forms of proclamation in particular. The danger of substituting verbal or sacramental instruments, or even knowledge *about* God, for actual knowledge *of* God applies to preaching of all sorts; allowing, that is, theology or "bible knowledge" to take the place of direct submission to God. Intellect or emotion or ritual participation alone cannot serve in place of existential encounter, since each is rightly no more than an adjunct to or expression of deeper spirituality. In the context of the sermon, hearing and knowing "the word of God" may and should invite us into God's presence, but the invitation is not to be confused with its acceptance. The verbal sign cannot be substituted for its intended substance.

As a second general proviso (although without necessarily yielding to their more alarmist proposals), McLuhan and Baudrillard both alert us to the possibility that electronic media are neither neutral nor innocent. Fascination with the latest technological innovation (or impatience for the latest upgrade) is characteristic of a wired society. Yet the church is always called, in principle, to stand at least adjacent to cultural norms, even while unavoidably embedded within them. At the very least, subservience to theological priorities invites a rigorous interrogation of every cultural mandate, all the more so those that seem congenial or convenient. In this case, we will want to investigate the possible impact or implications of electronically mediated communication as they apply to the content of the Christian message in principle, the nature of Christian community in particular, and the formation of Christian identity more specifically.

4.1. Incarnation and Divine Communication

The foundational paradigm for the presentation of Christian truth is the Incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth. This, after all, is the claim of John 1:1: ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος . . . καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. As Raymond Brown observes, "The very title 'Word' implies a revelation—not so much a divine idea, but a divine communication" (Brown 1981, p. 24). More precisely, the term λόγος (for all its conceptual overtones and philosophical implications) is in this instance not a concept at all but a living human being: "the λόγος became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). As the prologue to the letter to the Hebrews insists, "In many and

various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb 1:1–2 RSV). Thus, according to Augustine of Hippo (354–430), God does not communicate primarily by means of auditions or dreams or apparitions, but rather, "by means of truth itself [*loquitur ipsa veritate*]." Expanding further, he highlights the paradox of Incarnation: "truth itself, God the son of God, put on manhood . . . so that man might find a path to the God of man through the god-man [*ipsa veritas, Deus Dei filius, homine adsumpto . . . ut ad hominis Deum iter esset homini per hominem Deum*]" (*City of God* III. xi.2 [Augustine 1968, p. 430]). As a species of communication (and the epitome of divine communication in particular), the Incarnation is thus holistic, internally coherent, and unitive. As McLuhan observes, "In Jesus Christ, there is no distance or separation between the medium and the message: it is the one case where we can say that the medium and the message are fully one and the same" (McLuhan 2010, p. 103). That is to say, the self-revelation of the eternal Father, Creator of heaven and earth, does not come in the form of abstract concepts, moral truisms, incentives to political action, or pixilated images, but concretely embodied in a single and singular human life. Notwithstanding the fact that the historical specificity of this formulation—the "scandal of particularity"—in one sense precludes access to the originally enfleshed Jesus for all subsequent audiences, the fact of *inhomination* implies in principle that the mode of access to divine truth is not simply intuitive or intellectual, but essentially relational. Jesus the Christ is encountered most authentically not as an idea or moral ideal, a verbal message or visual panorama, but as a flesh-and-blood individual whose reception or rejection is intrinsically inter-personal.[13]

While this conviction does not set a direct ontological precedent for the life of the later Christian community (the Incarnation of Jesus being *sui generis*), it does suggest itself as an epistemological paradigm: subsequent to Jesus' earthly presence, in the eschatological interim, the Word of God is encountered and abides "wherever two or three are gathered together" (Matt 18:20). However little recognized, this assertion has radical implications for preaching. It is one of three parallel statements in Matthew's gospel that define the nature of Jesus' past and future presence in the life of the church. First, and most familiar, is the designation of Mary's child as "Emmanuel (which means, God with us)" (Matt 1:23). More than a simple fulfilment citation (paraphrasing Isa 8:8 and 8:10), this quotation invokes the long history of God's presence with Israel as that which sets it apart from other nations (Kupp 1996, pp. 109–55). Jesus himself, says Matthew, is the full and final manifestation of the divine commitment to self-manifestation in the midst of humanity. No less momentous are the final words of Matthew's gospel, with Jesus promising, "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20). Absent a fully developed Matthean pneumatology, Jesus here assures his disciples that in future he will remain as vitally present and active in their midst as has been the case throughout his ministry to this point—even if less visibly so.

Jesus has already explained the precise mechanism of this ongoing accompaniment in what is (in its present context) his discourse for the gathered church from Matthew 18: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them [ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν]" (Matt 18:20). This, the third affirmation of his presence, is in some ways the most practical, because it alerts the church both to the preconditions for a continued encounter with the risen Lord and to its exact nature. More to the point for our purposes, it explains the proper relationship between human action—in this case, preaching—and divine favor. Whatever our notional theological convictions, we often act as though God graciously acquiesces to be present (for example, in the course of corporate worship) largely in response to our bidding, that God shows mercy if and when we pray for it, and, most pertinently, that divine revelation takes place as a result of faithful proclamation. On such a view, grace is manifest in response to pious human initiative. But the history of God's people indicates the opposite. God deigns to be present in Jerusalem not because Solomon and his successors build temples for that purpose, but because God has promised to be present if they do build, and indeed has already been present in the ark of the covenant, in the pillar of cloud

and fire, in the acts of deliverance from Egypt, and earlier still. Divine presence is without exception the consequence of divine promise, not of human piety, pleading, or preaching.

Matthew 18:20 offers a more precise exegetical ground for this enduring theological principle, in Jesus' stipulation that he will accompany the gathering of "two or three" disciples. As with so much of his teaching, his choice of wording (at least as the evangelist presents it) invokes a specific Scriptural precedent, in this case the provision that in order to be legally binding, "A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses" (Deut 19:15 NIV; cf. Deut 17:6). Jesus' pronouncement is less a direct quotation than an appeal to an operative theological principle: it positions disciples as witnesses rather than as direct agents, mediators, or instruments of his presence in their midst. Whether as worship leaders, pastoral care-givers, or preachers, our task is not somehow to "make Jesus real" to our hearers, but rather to testify to a reality immeasurably greater than ourselves and thus beyond our best-intentioned efforts at facilitating it. As Karl Barth trenchantly observes, "Under no circumstances and in no sense ought we to desire to be *creatores Creatoris*. Ours is not to give birth to God but to give testimony of him" (Barth 1957, p. 131). This assertion offers an important qualification to Barth's oft-cited triad of the Word of God Incarnate, written, and preached. The latter two, in short, bear witness to the former, and not the other way around; "Preaching," he insists, "must conform to revelation" (Barth 1991, p. 47; cf. Barth 2010, pp. 88–124; Yang 2021, pp. 76–77).

If the foregoing interpretation is correct, there is a certain irony—very nearly a contradiction—in Jesus' promise that wherever "two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." While Jesus establishes a requisite quorum as precondition for his presence, the minimum numerical requirement is testimonial in nature rather than causative; as witnesses, their function is one of response and acknowledgment rather than directly causing or creating the presence of the Messiah. Joining McLuhan's basic insight that the message concerning Jesus is not separate from the person of Jesus himself, along with Barth's insistence that Jesus reveals the meaning of words about him rather than those words revealing him, to Jesus' own insistence on the communal character of testimony, constitutes an important principle for the communication of Christian truth. The substance of the Christian message, in short, does not consist of words, concepts, or convictions, much less moving pixels, but the living, active, unsubstitutable person of Jesus himself. Jesus does not simply offer words or ideas about himself (in whatever form); that is the task of those who testify to him. Rather, he offers his own person and presence as the source and unsubstitutable subject of such words. Just so, the prologue of John declares not that humanity should receive a message (λόγος) *about* the Messiah (including, therefore, the prologue itself), but that "to all who received *him*, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (John 1:12).

The apostle Paul provides an apt illustration of this principle. Notwithstanding the obligation he is under to proclaim the Christian message (1 Cor 9:16–17), he has few illusions about his own ability to sway his hearers, much less transform them into children of God: "I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling," he declares, "My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God" (1 Cor 2:3–5). In his second (canonical) letter to the church at Corinth, he explains the hermeneutical basis of this conviction in greater detail:

> We do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor 4:5–6)

"New creation," in other words (so 2 Cor 5:17), is directly akin to old: both are formally dependent on divine initiative and sustained by divine illumination. But as the Apostle goes on to explain, divine action is likewise integral to further transformation and growth in faith:

> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Cor 3:17–18)

Although this passage is an exegetical minefield, its general intent is clear: the development of mature Christian identity is not simply the result of careful pedagogy, pastoral nurture, or impassioned preaching. Rather, in keeping with (at a minimum) John 1:1 and Matthew 18:20, the Apostle insists that spiritual transformation is primarily the consequence of contemplation—by definition a passive submission, both epistemic and ontological, to the object of one's regard. Whether, then, with reference to content or communicative means (i.e., "media"), the Christian gospel is predicated on divine initiative (or "grace"), even when human agency is invited or allowed to play a secondary rôle.

Baudrillard's framework (from "sacrament" to "simulation") serves to underscore this foundational theological premise: in whatever degree, neither our words about the Messiah, nor even the Messiah's words about himself, can be thought of as substitutes for the person and presence of the Messiah himself (however intangible or ungovernable that presence may be). More finely, if neither the church nor its individual members—preachers among them—can replace the agency of Jesus via the power of the Spirit of God, much less so will this be the case for electronic sounds and images that operate at yet a further remove. This is precisely what McLuhan warns against with his observation, cited earlier, that "a discarnate world, like the one we now live in, is a tremendous menace to an incarnate Church" (McLuhan 2010, p. 50). Likewise it is Baudrillard's point about God being "reduced to the signs that constitute faith" (Baudrillard 1994, p. 5), even in the very attempt to communicate divine realities. And it is what he intends by the distinction between representation that serves as "the reflection of a profound reality" and simulation that—however unintentionally—"masks and denatures a profound reality," precisely by virtue of its attempt at an unachievable representation (Baudrillard 1994, p. 6).

4.2. Incarnation and Christian Identity

Still, such critique appears liable to a significant rejoinder: if God, as Calvin avers, "deigns to consecrate to himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that His voice may resound in them" (*Institutes* 4.1.5), why should the same not be true for electronically mediated voices and images? Barth offers a witty (if pointed) response:

> God may speak to us through Russian Communism, a flute concerto, a blossoming shrub, or a dead dog. We do well to listen to Him if He really does. But, unless we regard ourselves as the prophets and founders of a new Church, we cannot say that we are commissioned to pass on what we have heard as independent proclamation. (*Church Dogmatics I.1* (Barth 2010, p. 55))

At least when it comes to Christian truth claims, according to Barth, the medium neither validates the message nor relieves us of responsibility for careful examination of media and messaging alike.

As indicated already, a more substantive response is implied both by the inescapably embodied nature of all human experience (Leder 1990, p. 1; cf. Leder 1992, pp. 24–27) and, more specifically, by the incarnational character of the Christian message. In the words of Deborah Creamer,

> Christianity's earliest and most persistent doctrines focus on embodiment. From the Incarnation (*the Word made flesh*) and Christology (*Christ was fully human*) to the Eucharist (*this is my body, this is my blood*), the resurrection of the body, and the church (*the body of Christ who is the head*), Christianity has been a religion *of the body*. We relate to God as corporeal bodies, and in our relations with other human bodies, we experience God. (Creamer 2008, p. 63; emphasis original)

As Karen O'Donnell (who also quotes Creamer) observes,

> One cannot "do" theology without taking the embodied nature of such "doing" into account. Theology comes from bodies in material contexts. Such an exploration reveals the need for a holistic approach to theology—one in which bodies of theology, the Trinitarian Body, the Body of Christ, and human bodies, are not separated out in an atomistic fashion, but are interconnected by one another. (O'Donnell 2018, p. 12)

For followers of Jesus, divine revelation and theological reflection both take place in the context of—and not apart from—fully embodied human community, as bodies within the "body of Christ." The implication of the Incarnation, surely, is that the community in question should be real, substantive, and personal, rather than merely virtual. To state the matter in more ironic fashion, whereas our communion with the Savior may be to all appearances "virtual"—He is, after all, no longer visible among us—our communion with one another is normally, normatively, in the flesh. Christian community is best lived face-to-face, with real people, rather than virtually or at a distance. In turn, communication and reception of the Christian gospel seem likewise best suited to flesh-and-blood presence on the part of believers. Feminist perspectives, for example, emphasize that preaching is an intrinsically embodied activity; the women whom Amy McCullough interviewed in the course of her ethnographic research "affirmed that the body is essential to preaching and that every preacher preaches in and through her body" (McCullough 2013, p. 5; cf. McCullough 2018).

Admittedly, the point may be moot for congregations that either consciously choose or are forced by circumstance to meet online: all that remains is to assess the strengths and weaknesses of virtual interaction. Building on the characteristics of Barth's threefold schema, Sunggu Yang proposes that digitalization entails seven key benefits: fluidity, usability, cross-cultural ubiquity, connectivity, instant communication, holistic artistry, and shareability; different forms of online preaching emphasize one or another of these characteristics (Yang 2021, pp. 78–89). Such benefits depend, of course, on access to appropriate technological resources and infrastructure, which will not be the case in all parts of the world (or even in West countries; O'Lynn 2021, p. 25). Yang acknowledges, in any event, that "the most challenging conflict is between immutability/reliability and fluidity/usability" (Yang 2021, p. 82). Although he upholds the traditional authority and immutability of Scripture (78), increased autonomy by virtue of online participation implies greater freedom of interpretation on the part of viewers. Appropriately so, democratization facilitated by technology forces the question of whether homiletical authority is properly vested in the preacher, the preached word, or the living Word to whom both bear witness. In his own assessment of the interface between preaching and technology, Luke A. Powery identifies significant advantages (enhanced cultural knowledge; addressing a wider range of learning styles; broader dissemination of the Christian message) as well as potential dangers inherent within electronic forms of communication (Brown and Powery 2016, pp. 224–28; followed by O'Lynn 2021, pp. 10–14). First among the latter, as also proposed here, is the "loss of incarnational preaching." Given the precedent of Jesus' Incarnation, which is "God's sermon in Jesus Christ . . . Real human bodies, as opposed to virtual realities and bodies, are essential for the preaching ministry . . . Jesus was the Word incarnate, a person, an enfleshed sermon, not a text" (Brown and Powery 2016, p. 215). More precisely, he writes, electronic media potentially entail "loss of humanity." Although Powery warns of digital "voyeurism without compassion," a more subtle dimension of this loss is failure to recognize that virtual representation is just that, and no more (Brown and Powery 2016, p. 218). Either aspect represents a form of depersonalization, for the simple reason that in electronically mediated communication we are interacting with representations rather than real persons (however much the technology encourages us to ignore this fact). Just as Baudrillard warns, visual representation implicitly replaces the (personally) real.

Here, we may be more precise. On a personal level, electronic participation tends to foster self-consciousness, but at the expense of self-awareness. Most communication apps present an image of ourselves back at us even as we view the images of others. Thus we are

conscious of the image that we are projecting more keenly than might otherwise be the case. At the very least, un-self-consciousness seems more elusive, as we fret over the quality, fitness, or simple tidiness of the personal image that we project to others. Ironically, our electronic avatar is no more personally real than those of anyone else on the screen, but we obsess with it anyway. This is precisely the problem that McLuhan—and Baudrillard in his turn[14]—identifies by appeal to Narcissus: in practice, we are persuaded that the pixilated or virtual image is our most "presentable" self, an improvement on the complexities of everyday embodiment.

Apart from journalism or documentary research, it is in the nature of electronic media to present an edited, idealized image of human experience: meticulously timed, perfectly lit, with hardly a hair out of place. In one of his own sermons, Henry Mitchell describes our day as "an age of image projection and prophets cosmetically concealed and camera conscious" (Mitchell 1998, p. 17). Deep down, we know that neither television presenters nor television preachers really look that good in the flesh, yet precisely because they portray such an appealing image we aspire to emulate them, sharing what seems to be their flaw-free experience—including their experience of God. Recalling McLuhan's contrast between "hot" and "cool" media—so distinguished by the degree of epistemological labor required of the viewer—it is precisely the artificiality of the projected image that encourages us to invest it with greater value, thereby accelerating the replacement of the real by its idealized representation. Baudrillard allows us to see, especially with reference to theological identity (whether that of God or human persons), that idealized (in this case, visual) representations in fact work against any possibility of their concrete realization, distancing both ourselves and (in our eyes) God from the reality of each. To grant "virtual" identity a status equivalent to lived experience—live streaming as good as live—is in any event implicitly gnostic, substituting knowledge about persons for persons themselves. Indeed, denial of the body amounts to what Hyung Rak Kim aptly terms "digital docetism" (Kim 2021), reinforcing dualist notions of human identity (Brown and Strawn 2012, pp. 14–27). At either extreme, idealization and erasure alike are affronts to our common humanity.

Along the same lines, but in more directly pastoral terms, Powery warns that a third danger with over-reliance on electronically-mediated forms of communication is the loss of a sense of community: "Through technological means we may have the illusion of companionship or friendship but it is just that—an illusion." This premise entails two distinct concerns: a posture of (apparent) control on the part of the viewer or congregant, and the loss of intimacy, vulnerability, and mutuality to which it can lead: "Technology provides the illusion that we are sovereign, immutable gods in control of ourselves and others, which undercuts genuine dialogue in community." By contrast, he insists, "A genuine homiletical community experiences mutual vulnerability in the presence of a God who became vulnerable for us" (Brown and Powery 2016, p. 219).

A fourth and final danger is "loss of spiritual growth and depth." "Technology," Powery explains, "has rewired our brains to such an extent that people are less capable of reading and reflecting beyond a shallow level"; the danger is that in an era of sound bites and quick answers, preachers and congregations alike become "skillful at superficiality" (Brown and Powery 2016, p. 223). Electronic media represent the "tyranny of the convenient": we use them because they demand so little of us, which is quite different from being guided or governed by the demands of virtue and grace. On this point, Powery's concluding observation is perhaps his most trenchant: "The Spirit is poured out on *all flesh* (Acts 2) and not all technology" (Brown and Powery 2016, p. 233; emphasis added).

5. Preaching and Electronic Media: Some Possible Ways Forward

Although its benefits are undeniable, we cannot ignore the theological challenge that technology presents. While electronically mediated preaching promotes the message and content of the gospel (by facilitating its dissemination), it also encourages subtle forms of idolatry, in three senses[15]. First, and most obviously, images (whether of the preacher and sermon, the congregational setting, or God) replace their intended referents (which is

Baudrillard's key contention). Second, virtual viewing reiterates the audience's effective control over reception and interpretation of the message (as McLuhan insists). Third, the medium itself (rather than the preached word) becomes the vehicle of access to God, which constitutes idolatry in its most technical sense. Deliberative and practical responses to these concerns can be loosely grouped under the headings of identity, community, and spirituality.

5.1. Personal Identity

Whether from the perspective of the online preacher or her virtual viewers, we tend to overlook the fact (even in the case of pre-recorded material) that the images we see onscreen are not, most immediately, actual persons or situations. In other words, we too easily accept the sign as a sufficient representation of its referent, and in so doing overlook what is lost in the process. This calls for more conscious theological deliberation on the nature of Christian identity and the axiomatic rôle of inter-personal engagement. McLuhan's point about consumers being largely unaware of the effect that technology has on them is key. Preachers have a responsibility to stir up a kind of holy discontent with any form of understanding or interaction that fails to acknowledge—all the more so anything that obscures or impairs—the full (and fully embodied) humanity of their congregants. Given Jesus' validation of human identity in principle and his goal of providing "life abundant" (John 10:10) in particular, resistance to the de-humanizing implications of electronic avatars and simulacra has a theological and not merely anthropological ground.

The blurred boundaries of online representation highlight Baudrillard's concern for the difference between simulation and dissimulation, in whatever degree. Whereas the latter merely entails pretense (and is thus more easily unmasked), "simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false,' the 'real' and the 'imaginary'" (Baudrillard 1994, p. 3). Once we concede the epistemological—or theological—sufficiency of virtual representation, we are faced with difficult decisions as to what constitutes the "real" as distinct from what is virtual or "hyperreal," As O'Leary notes, "the relationship between the physical sign and the spiritual signified . . . is the crux of the issue that will have to be debated and resolved by those who wish to lead a significant portion of their religious lives online" (O'Leary 2005, p. 45).

This observation is relevant both to preachers, insofar as electronic media and the entertainment industry encourage cults of personality, and to congregants, especially when negotiating online identity in iconic form (Hutchings 2014, pp. 50–52). Admitting a growing pessimism on this point, O'Leary contends that the boundaries between embodied and machine-mediated aspects of identity are sufficiently fluid "that we are all, in one way or another, becoming cyborgs" (O'Leary 2005, p. 38; cf. 47–48). Conversely, the anonymity afforded by online participation has the potential to moderate bias or prejudice occasioned by gender, ethnicity, economic status, and the like (Dawson 2004, p. 80).

It is likewise critical for users of technology (pastors and preachers among them) to distinguish between construction of meaning on the part of the viewer and the priority of grace in determining Christian identity. Which aspects of personal identity are intrinsic to human experience (as a reflection of the created order) and which are negotiable is currently a matter of intense debate. But what is not negotiable for Christian faith is the priority of divine grace in the processes of salvation, whereby identity itself (and not merely our forensic status) is transformed by the work of God, both historically in the ministry of Christ and via the present agency of the Holy Spirit. As a subset of this concern (or included within it) are questions of revelation and illumination, both in the original formulation of Scripture and in human experience today. If the priority of divine initiative is to be maintained, the appropriate posture for a viewer or reader is one of submission rather than epistemic autocracy, no matter how much technology encourages the latter stance. "For we are his [i.e., God's] workmanship [αὐτοῦ γάρ ἐσμεν ποίημα]," insists the letter to the Ephesians, "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph 2:10 RSV). Rather than being left to fashion the images by which we know ourselves and make ourselves known, our task is to assume

an identity already prepared for us; hence we are admonished to "*put on* the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:24 RSV).

5.2. Community

The danger of substituting words for divine encounter (that is, reducing encounter to the words themselves) or, at a further remove, of allowing electronic communication to replace personal communion, both seem particularly germane to classic Protestantism, with its heavy emphasis on verbal proclamation and doctrinal abstraction. Post-pandemic, intentionally re-appropriating baptism and the Lord's Supper can help to counterbalance these more impersonal dimensions of our common life. A major thrust of the Protestant Reformation was on re-valorizing sacramental signs that had been largely reduced to mechanisms of exchange.[16] Even though the Eucharist remains liable to a similar devaluation, a robust emphasis on personal communion, whether in terms of baptism, Eucharistic participation, or in-person community, is needed to counteract the more depersonalizing effects of interaction in virtual form (Potgieter 2019, pp. 569–71).

Maintaining a theologically appropriate balance between individualist and collectivist constructions of identity is a separate concern. Hutchings observes that "the key shift made possible by new media is a centring of connective power on the individual, who gains new freedom to gather and shed resources, allegiances and relationships" (Hutchings 2014, pp. 45–46). In global perspective, however, collectivist cultures may see this as a weakness rather than a strength, since Christian identity—the identity of a church "in Christ"—is more properly construed in corporate terms.Yet here, too, electronic representation poses a subtle challenge, at least in the sense that it reduces genuine community—complete with people whispering, babies crying, and the person in front blocking your view—to the *image* of a community. All the more so when the recording of a sermon, praise song, or worship service has been edited prior to posting, electronic media yield an intentionally idealized representation of experience. While there is no virtue in celebrating missed cues or other minor errors, neither can an electronic church be allowed to resemble the third-order machineries of entertainment and spectacle that Baudrillard dissects with such compelling insight, whether Disneyland, Enchanted Village, Marine World, or others of their kind. Each he terms "a space of the regeneration of the imaginary" (Baudrillard 1994, p. 13) that reflects back to us an image of the world as we wish it could be, thereby masking our failure to realize these very aspirations.[17] On the contrary, the threat of false idealization ("keeping up the image") should encourage congregations to embrace simplicity, imperfection, and repentance, contrary to the fascination with spectacle that is characteristic of contemporary Western cultures.

5.3. Spirituality

Implicit within the whole of the foregoing discussion, and critical to it, are questions of spirituality and the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt that the Spirit of God can adopt even the most unusual instruments to communicate divine truth. That was the point of Barth's comment about blossoming shrubs and dead dogs. But these are outliers: embodied, *im-mediate*, and verbal forms of communication remain a theologically mandated norm. To state the matter more finely: if, as McLuhan insists, Jesus "is the one case where we can say that the medium and the message are fully one and the same" (McLuhan 2010, p. 103)—if Jesus is the definitive medium of communication between God and humanity—there is no place for any other communicative intermediary. Other, that is, than the Holy Spirit who is also "the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:19). As Jesus himself says of the Paraclete in John 16:14, "He will take what is mine and declare it to you" (NRSV). Without getting too tangled in the details of Trinitarian theology, we may summarize by saying that in the eschatological interim, communication of Christian truth, whether in the mouths of preachers or by other means, relies absolutely on the agency of the Spirit of God.

Attention to pneumatology and Christian spirituality must therefore be at the forefront of the church's appropriation of technology in general and online forms of preaching in

particular. This is not to suggest that the operations of the Holy Spirit obviate concern over "substituting the signs of the real for the real" (Baudrillard 1994, p. 2). On the contrary, personal reliance on the Spirit is necessary to forestall any such substitution and the attendant erasure of divine identity, even in their earliest stages. As the counterpoint to electronic narcissism, it is the Spirit who fashions us into the image of Christ (both individually and corporately), as Paul argues in Second Corinthians 3:18. But since the work of the Spirit is neither automatic nor autocratic, emancipation from the more deleterious effects of technology awaits a willing turn to the Paraclete on the part of preachers and congregants alike (so 1 Cor 3:6–7). In this regard, notwithstanding the limitations of the digital divide (Aichele 2003, p. 16; O'Leary 2005, p. 46), online connectivity can foster awareness of preaching in cultures other than our own, thereby reminding us of the global reach and diversity of the Spirit's work (Matsen Neal 2018, p. 10). Conversely, over-reliance on second- or third-hand representations of God—signs and simulacra in place of divinity (so Matt 16:1–4; Mark 8:11–12, etc.)—is clear evidence of failure to rely on the mediatorial immediacy of the Holy Spirit. Such a situation cannot be remedied simply by recalibrating media usage (which would merely reinscribe its pivotal rôle), but only by direct recourse to the Spirit, which is the essential purpose and domain of Christian spirituality itself.

There is no doubt that employing technology to make ourselves look good is considerably less hazardous and demanding than relying on the Holy Spirit to give our sermons life. Yet McLuhan and Baudrillard indicate that what is potentially at stake in our use of electronic media is nothing less than direct engagement with, and transformation by, the God who is the object of our faith. While the benefits of technology may well outweigh the risks, theological acuity must predominate over technological convenience, lest technology supplant theology, as McLuhan and Baudrillard both fear.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 "Deus, Creator coeli et terrae, tecum loquitur per praedicatores suos . . . Illa Dei verba non sunt Platonis, Aristotelis, sed Deus ipse loquitur" (Luther 1916, p. 531 §4812; ET Wood 1969, p. 93).

2 "Inter tot praeclaras dotes quibus ornavit Deus humanum genus, haec praerogativa singularis est, quod dignatur ora et linguas hominum sibi consecrare, ut in illis sua vox personet" (Calvin 1974, p. 9; ET Calvin 1960, p. 1018).

3 On the influence of Catholic intellectual and devotional tradition on McLuhan's thought, see (Marchessault 2005, pp. 35–42) ("While McLuhan's religious devotion was never a part of his public persona and was never revealed in his cultural theories, it was deeply present in his thinking" (Marchessault 2005, p. 35)).

4 "The TV image offers some three million dots per second to the receiver . . . the viewer of the TV mosaic, with technical control of the image, unconsciously reconfigures the dots into an abstract work of art on the pattern of a Seurat or Rouault" (McLuhan 2003, p. 418; emphasis original); further, (Levinson 1999, pp. 101–3).

5 The hermeneutical labor required of the viewer is key to McLuhan's complex distinction between "hot" and "cool" media, on which see (McLuhan 2003, pp. 39–50, 425; cf. Levinson 1999, pp. 105–18).

6 "All technological extensions of ourselves must be numb and subliminal, else we could not endure the leverage exerted upon us by such extension" (McLuhan 2003, p. 404).

7 McLuhan explicitly compares the myth of Narcissus with the idolatry described in Hebrew Scripture: "They that make them shall be like unto them" (Ps 115:8 ASV, identified, however, as "the 113th Psalm"; McLuhan 2003, p. 67).

8 Acknowledgment of the surreptitious power of images, he avers, is what motivated the Byzantine Iconoclasts: "their metaphysical despair came from the idea that the image didn't conceal anything at all, and that these images were in essence not images, as an original model would have made them, but perfect simulacra, forever radiant with their own fascination" (Baudrillard 1994, p. 5).

9 On Baudrillard's critique of television/telecommunication and the concept of "implosion" (both ideas building on McLuhan), see (Genosko 1999, pp. 92–95).

10 Similarly, from an earlier discussion, "there comes into being a manifold universe of media that are homogeneous in their capacity as media and which mutually signify each other and refer back to each other. Each one is reciprocally the content of another; indeed, this ultimately is their message—the totalitarian message of a consumer society" (Baudrillard 1967, p. 230, cited in Huyssen 1989, p. 13).

[11] On Ellul's concept of "propaganda," see (Greenman et al. 2012, pp. 40–46); for Baudrillard's discussion of propaganda (exemplified by the advertising industry), see (Baudrillard 1994, pp. 87–94 (esp. 87–88)).

[12] As Walters notes (Walters 2012, pp. 57–58), Baudrillard turns this critique against Christianity itself.

[13] McLuhan describes this distinction as "the great contrast between perceptual and conceptual confrontation." As he explains, "The revelation is of *thing*, not theory. And where revelation reveals actual thing-ness you are not dealing with concept. The thing-ness revealed in Christianity has always been a scandal to the conceptualist: it has always been incredible" (McLuhan 2010, p. 81).

[14] Baudrillard invokes Narcissus to introduce his discussion of holographic representation, which he takes to be an extension of "propaganda" into the visible realm (Baudrillard 1994, pp. 105–9).

[15] This insight originates with Seán McGuire, to whom I am indebted for corrections to an earlier draft of this article.

[16] As noted by (Walters 2012, p. 72), in discussing appropriation of Baudrillard's categories by French sacramental theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet (b. 1942). Fittingly, Calvin's critique of transubstantiation was that it "destroys the analogy between the sign and the thing signified [everti analogiam signi et rei signatae]" (Calvin 1870, p. 231; ET Calvin 1958, p. 467).

[17] Hence, "the imaginary of Disneyland is neither true nor false, it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate the fiction of the real in the opposite camp"! (Baudrillard 1994, p. 13).

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