

Spring 2019

# TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT IN THE CHURCH: ITS EFFECTIVENESS IN IMPROVING WORSHIP AND CHURCH FUNCTIONS

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TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT IN THE CHURCH:  
ITS EFFECTIVENESS IN IMPROVING WORSHIP AND CHURCH FUNCTIONS

by

Aaron Janzen

Submitted to the School of Honors Committee

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for University Honors Scholars

Southeastern University  
2019

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2019

**Acknowledgement**

To God, all thanks be unto you. If it were not for you my mind would have crumbled and my stress would have killed me. Thank you for keeping me physically, mentally, and spiritually healthy. To my parents, thank you for always believing in my academic abilities and supporting me in all my endeavors. To the Assemblies of God New York District, thank you for your continued support through my undergraduate career and believing in me enough to invest in my future. To Dr. Zachary Tackett, thank you for your guidance, support, and patience throughout this entire process. To Dr. Gordon Miller and the School of Honors, thank you for challenging me and giving me a place to push to be my very best and giving me the opportunity to write a thesis, something I did not think I was capable of until later in life. To my friends, thank you for putting up with my frantic mania as time came close to the end. Last but not least, thank you to my loving girlfriend for believing in me, encouraging me, and yelling at me to stop being distracted and to start writing.

### **Abstract**

This paper provides an objective look at the subjective topic of technological advancement in the ministry setting. The first step of this literary work is to identify what constitutes as technology and how has it either improved or complicated life as a whole. From the worship service to productivity in the office, technology has permeated the church world. Through literary research and interviews of technical directors in churches, this paper will be able to analyze the positive and negative components of technology adoption. This includes ease of process and spiritual potency. How technology has changed the church dynamic in the past to the present will be displayed to show the long-term effects. From there the paper will make an educated guess to what the future will look like, as well as whether the tradeoffs of technology are a worthy price to pay.

**KEY WORDS:** Technology, church, Spirituality

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### **Introduction:**

Technology is defined as “the use of science in industry, engineering, etc., to invent useful things or to solve problems” or “a machine, piece of equipment, method, etc., that is created by technology.”<sup>1</sup> The whole purpose of technology is to help create solutions to problems and enhance life. Humanity is always trying to improve quality of life and to lessen the burdens that weigh upon it. As such technology is always advancing with human ingenuity. Technology is an expansive theme that is intertwined in every area of human life. Technology is seen in each and every life path to varying degrees. It has permeated the human condition and thus changed it. Life is no longer confined to specific morality issues, nor has religious beliefs gone unaffected. Technology comes in many forms and is both seen and goes unseen in everyday life. When used correctly it becomes a natural part of the scenery of life. Technology at its base function can create brand new levels of productivity and quality of life.

One of the ways technology reaches into our lives is through its influence on culture as a whole. Culture is the overarching theme that plays into communities and the individual lives of people. Culture transcends the church environment. Culture is “the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time,” including “the way of life of a particular people, esp. as shown in their ordinary behavior and habits, their attitudes toward each other, and their moral and religious beliefs.”<sup>2</sup> As such particular groups with shared interests, with the same culture are the basis for the formation of communities.

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1. “Definition of Technology,” accessed April 24, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/technology>.

2. “Culture | Definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary,” accessed March 20, 2019, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/culture>.

The Church is just one small population of people amongst many different populations and people groups. The Church itself can be called a community because of the shared interests between its people. In cultures there are both main cultures, subcultures, and countercultures. The way that communities function is in conjunction with other communities and within them. The Church itself is placed among these different communities and as such has two choices: the Church can decide to reflect or reject the dominant culture. What is meant by this is that the Church is able to choose whether they will begin to adapt to culture and embrace it, or they can decide to become countercultural and reject it completely.

Given these two complex realities – Christ and culture – an infinite dialogue must develop in the Christian conscience and the Christian community. In his single-minded direction toward god, Christ leads men away from the temporality and pluralism of culture. In its concern for the conservation of the many values of the past, culture rejects the Christ who bids men rely on grace. Yet the Son of God is himself child of a religious culture, and sends his disciples to tend his lambs and sheep, who cannot be guarded without cultural work.<sup>3</sup>

The question is what is the better option? Individual churches have each taken stances on what to do with the cultural shifts brought on with technology, so it is in the best interest of this paper to look at what each has done. It is important to note that this subject extends far beyond the 10 am worship service, however the worship experience is the focus of this paper. The focus will be on the significance or insignificance of media technologies and social media, while also addressing and exploring the use of technologies within the week-in-week-out processes of church offices.

In order for this paper to have a strong starting, research questions will be established to direct the search for information. These research questions will be considered. Technology has permeated into most churches, so how has technology prompted progress within the Church?

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3. H. Richard Nieghbur, *Christ and Culture*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), 39.



How has the church adopted technology in comparison to the rest of society? In order to fully understand how much the church has progressed there is also the subset question of how much is technology used in the day-to-day functioning of the church? So, inversely, how has technology been a hindrance for the gospel? Lastly, it must be considered whether the Church should adopt technology more wholeheartedly?

Each of these questions comes with an impact on the Catholic Church (the Christian community, denominations, individual churches, and the individual sitting in the sanctuary/auditorium). The Holy Catholic Church is the entire Christian body of believers across all denominations and as such will be referred to from now on as “the Church” with a capital “C” and individual churches will be referred to as “churches or the church” with a lowercase “c.” The first question is asking if technology has caused the Church to become more progressive, and in an age of relevancy what is the impact? Also, where the Church is in comparison to the rest of society explores this same idea of utilizing tools for an expanded influence. One of the most important questions that was listed was how has technology been a hindrance? In order to get a true litmus test the spotlight must be shined on the detractors to ministry as well as the positives that technology brings.

The exploration into these questions does not begin with the present but through history. In order to find the answer to how the Church has been prompted to create changes and progress through the use of technology, the past must be addressed. When the past history of the Church’s use of technology has been examined, it is time to look toward the present to predict the possible future of what Church inclusion of technology could possibly resemble. What must be considered to properly diagnose what the future could possibly resemble is how far behind the

church is in adopting technology in comparison to the rest of society that find itself outside of the Church realm.

The final result of the thesis is to determine should the Church adopt technology more wholeheartedly? It is the conviction of this research project that technology has and continues to leave a great impact on the Church. The use of advanced instruments, media technology, both audio and visual improvements, and social media have left a footprint in the Church's history from the past, to the present, and soon the future. The impact has been both positive and negative, but technology should be more forthrightly represented in the church setting because the pros of technology greatly outweigh the cons.

How the researcher plans to answer the aforementioned research questions is through personal research into the reports of experts within the fields of technology and in ministry. The opinions formed by the experts are expressed pretty explicitly within their papers and research. The sources that I have gathered come from an array of authors from different professors at widespread universities and backgrounds. Some of the research that I have discovered comes from pastors who are in the fray of ministry. Through the input of these specialists an accurate decision can be made about the main question of whether technology has been more of an improvement or detractor of ministry. Along the way to the main question, this thesis will be able to answer the other research questions that create the pathway to the main question's answer.

### **Methodology:**

Since the topic of media technology within church walls is a relatively new there is not much to explore other than the written medium. As such the research into the subject matter is limited to the recent discoveries written. In order to fully arrive at the conclusion to the questions posed there must be an in-depth literature review. The in-depth literature review is best used to compile large quantities of information from various solutions and as such form conclusions. With the greater access to data the findings can be considered as having greater reliability.

One of the greatest advantages of this approach is limiting the negative impact of bias. Each and every source is going to be embedded with some form of bias that the writer has. This course of action brings a more neutral viewpoint through the confirmation of multiple writers. Other forms of data collection and research come with biases as well. In cases of interviews there is the bias that the interviewee has as well as the interviewer. The individual who is being interviewed has their own opinion. So, the response is already colored with an outlook and when being reported by the interviewer gets a second filtration. Bias is also present in the use of observable evidence. Whatever looking-glass is used to interpret evidence is just that, interpreted with a level of distortion in whatever way the observer is tilted towards. In order to get an accurate read on the entirety of the subject, it is best to get a broad view. Thus, the use of an extended literature review is the best option to get multiple sources of information to provide the most clarity.

When approaching research, it is important to make the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research methods. In the literature that is cited throughout this paper is a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative research and data. Most of the research found within literature reviews are qualitative in nature with a small percentage of quantitative research.

Research can be related to a painting or how a house is constructed. Qualitative research is the outline of a painting or the structure of the house, the quantitative research is the color/shading of the painting or the interior decorating of the home. The qualitative research provides impressions and outlines of generalized information. It is the desire of qualitative research to dig deep into the concepts of a topic, and discover the motivations, thoughts, and attitudes related to it. Quantitative data is used to provide facts and brings a measurable component to the argument.

The majority of the research provided is of a qualitative nature and as such will provide a deep look into the subject matter of technological advancement and adaptation within the church environment. The qualitative research will provide the large conceptual ideas and thoughts behind this new phenomenon of technological equipment in a ministerial platform. The multiple sources will give a broad-spectrum view into the utilization of media technology and validate the findings. This research endeavor gives real-life information that is practical. The authors of the sources used come from a ministerial background and atmosphere, thus giving a primary viewpoint for the sources. Among the research there is data of a quantitative origin as well, which brings a more solidified less arguable value to the table. The quantitative data provided in this thesis provides the numbers behind the ideological points from the qualitative data. The quantitative data moves this thesis from theory into reality.

It is in the best interest of this research endeavor to conduct itself on the basis of using primary and secondary sources of information. The primary sources will allow for as closely related information as possible to bring a more secure sense of credibility to the information. The primary sources will be used to provide a broad framework for the information being sought but must be supplemented by the secondary sources. The primary sources are very useful to the

research topic, however in the case of the subject being studied for this thesis, are updated far less than the secondary sources.

As such the secondary sources provide much more updated information that brings a certain relevance of its own. Secondary sources allow for a sense of interpretation from other experts in the field. These types of sources allow for a critique of the originally published work or word of someone present. Secondary sources are specifically of import for the reason that they can compare primary sources against one another. The application of secondary sources takes away the simplicity of he said she said and thus provides a contemporary analysis of the original data.

The type of sources being utilized are journal articles, online sources, and literary works. The works are cited within the thesis can be split into two main categories, then split further into overarching subcategories: primary and secondary sources, then into qualitative and quantitative. The majority of the journal articles that are referenced within this work are categorized as primary sources. They come with some of the most respected viewpoints in the subject and are a great basis for this thesis. They will outline the majority of the information provided and allow for a clear opening into the world of technological study, specifically from a church background. From here a more in-depth view can be taken and thus focus on the more modernized takes on the situation.

The next step is to take a look at secondary sources. The majority of the secondary sources are books written about the broad subject of technology and the narrower subject of Church technology. The selected books give a more contemporary worldview and information on the interaction between the church and technological inclusion. From here the case is fairly settled but it can be even further expanded with more secondary sources, such as online

resources: websites and online magazines. These resources may not be peer reviewed, but they do offer the most up-to-date information on the subject. Therefore, the use of journal articles, books, and online resources will all be incorporated in the review.

## Review of Literature

### Church History and Technology

Lisa Allen-McLaurin gives a brief overview of what technology has looked like in the recent past.

The use of digital technology has become standard in worship services. For decades now, churches have played CDs and MP3 recordings in worship, to enhance music, dance, and drama ministries, and to fill in when musicians are not available. Video clips and PowerPoint presentations are used to help ministers drive home the sermonic focus, especially for those who may be visual learners. They are also used to lend a contemporary feeling to worship, saving us from using hymnbooks or worship bulletins. Services are recorded and made available on CD and DVD for those who might want to view it again, and now, some churches are using digital technology to live-stream their services. If you can't get to the church, the church comes to you. Many, if not most of us, would agree that the use of digital technology in worship has positive aspects and results.<sup>4</sup>

Other technologies that evolved during the recent past are the use of CD players, microphones, PA systems, and other audio technologies.<sup>5</sup>

The oldest, most utilized media was print, but then expanded quickly from there.<sup>6</sup> This medium was one of the most influential of its time and spread across the globe with its use. The invention of the printing press brought with it the expansion of access of the written word. The

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4. Lisa M. Allen-McLaurin, "Let Me Post This Praise on Facebook: Questioning the Use of Digital and Social Media in Worship.," *Liturgy* 30, no. 2 (April 2015): 45, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=100936363&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

5. Doug Gay and Ron Rienstra, "Veering Off the Via Media: Emerging Church, Alternative Worship, and New Media Technologies in the United States and United Kingdom.," *Liturgy* 23, no. 3 (August 2008): 39–41, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=32744919&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

6. Lovemore Togarasei, "Broadcasting the Word: Modern Pentecostal Churches' Use of Media Technologies.," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 129 (November 2007): 73, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001637551&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

written word no longer was something solely for the rich. The modern printing press was created around 1450 by Johannes Gutenberg in Europe with the adaptation of current industrial marvels.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 1: Glencairn's "Fenix Press," a replica Gutenberg-era printing press.

(Appendix A)

Source: Glencairn Museum

Before the printing press was able to be used for what the times considered mass production of text, the Bible was considered one of the greatest most sacred commodities. At the time the church would chain the Bibles to their respective pulpits in order to prevent its theft. With Gutenberg's invention came a whole new world for the world of God. In 1455 Gutenberg began to print Bibles, something that was once solely copied, painstakingly, by hand. The process originally could have taken months or years depending on the size, was now able to be completed in a fraction of the time, thus making the word much more accessible.<sup>8</sup> As the law of economics dictates, supply and demand greatly affect the price-point of a product. Since the supply has become greater the Bible would now become more affordable for the common people.

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7. S. H. Steinberg and Beatrice Warde, *Five Hundred Years of Printing*, 3d ed., Pelican books ; A343 (Harmondsworth, Eng. ; Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1974).

8. "The Gutenberg Bible," accessed March 27, 2019, <https://www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/permanent/gutenbergbible/>.



Printing is still greatly influential today. It is used in churches in the United States commonly with the use of church bulletins and notes. This technology holds even more weight in the other countries such as ones from the continent of Africa. Missionary churches rely most heavily on this media technology. “Taking advantage of the high levels of literacy of their membership, the leaders produce booklets, tracts and magazines full of church doctrine. Zimbabwean MPCs, like the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God, Africa (ZAOGA) and Hear the Word Ministries (HWM) even have their own publishing houses.”<sup>9</sup>

One of the next great waves of technology to sweep across the introduction of the radio. Radio began to be used commercially in the early 1900’s. In the following years radio began to be utilized as a viable way for evangelism. An example of the style of ministry could be found in Australia. “One of the earliest outside broadcasts in Australia had been of a service from the Congregational Church in Pitt Street, Sydney, in about 1924. Shortly before Christmas that year, the Salvation Army band was heard over 5DN; the following year the station commenced regular broadcasts of church services.”<sup>10</sup> Radio ministry allowed for people who were unable to attend a ministry service to experience it from afar. This technology is still around today. There are still Christian radio stations that send Christian music and messages through the airwaves, expanding the reach of Christianity to those who would never step in a church and giving current Christians an opportunity to feed their spirit.

The same can be said about television. The television began to be widely utilized around the 1930s, however the influence of Christian television networks did not come until about

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9. Togarasei, “Broadcasting the Word: Modern Pentecostal Churches’ Use of Media Technologies,” 73.

10. Bridget Griffen-Foley, “Radio Ministries: Religion on Australian Commercial Radio from the 1920s to the 1960s.,” *Journal of Religious History* 32, no. 1 (March 2008): 33, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=30010337&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

twenty years later. Time Magazine branded Bishop Fulton Sheen as the first “Televangelist.”<sup>11</sup> These networks sprouted up, bringing in a wave of televangelism with the likes of Oral Roberts and Billy Graham taking over the scene.

The greatest change for technology came with the wave of the 1990’s and 2000’s. From here came other technologies that entered the church. During this time period brought a change from A to AV. What is meant by this is that the concern transferred from solely audio within the church to audio and visual.<sup>12</sup> The Church was no longer concerned with just sounding good in a service but began to want to assist with visual aspect of a worship experience. Technologies such as overhead projectors (OHPs), slide projectors, and advanced instruments began to reshape the way that worship was experienced for church congregations.



Figure 2: An early adopting Lutheran Church in Texas (Covenant ELCA) worshipping with an overhead projector, 1996. (Appendix B)

Source: Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, Chapter 5.

The way that music was being done began to change. The style of music began to change and as such so does the technology.

Into the 1980s the sound systems used in congregations were often just speakers, a few microphones, and a small sound mixer in the pulpit. In the late 1980s and

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11. “Bishop Fulton Sheen: The First ‘Televangelist,’” *Time*, April 14, 1952, accessed April 3, 2019, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,857161,00.html>.

12. Swee-Hong Lim and Lester Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017), 47.

early 1990s, developing sound systems in movie theaters began to shape how sound could be done in worship spaces. Moreover, in the late 1990s the increasing number of worship bands with their electronically amplified sound and multiple vocalists made necessary a more complex sound board (or mixing console)...Since then a good sound system has become foundational and the mixing console – now more likely to be digital and not analog- has become a spatial fixture across contemporary worship.<sup>13</sup>

In-ear monitors began to become widespread in order to help further the endeavor of making sound quality even more professional-grade. With technological advancement came the use of tracks. Now prerecorded music can be inserted into the live worship set to fill in where certain instruments are missing. Now laptop computers have become a crucial part of the music-making process.

On the side of visual arts came new technologies never before seen in the church walls. In a dictated interview of Quentin Schultze, a professor of Communication Arts and Sciences for Calvin college, and DJ Chuang, Developer of Worship Leader magazine and consultant for churches, they mention how worship has changed. They say how it began with worship leaders leading with a guitar and another person running an overhead projector.<sup>14</sup> The first overhead projector was created as early as 1853, but later became mass produced in the 1950's where they began to be used in education and by extension ministry much later.<sup>15</sup> OHPs were used to help the congregation make a change from a lectionary and hymnals by shining the words of the songs selected for the worship service held. This technology made a way for a transition into a

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13. Swee-Hong Lim and Lester Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017), 47.

14. Robb Redman, Robb Redman, "Worship, Technology, and the Church: A Discussion with Quentin Schultze and DJ Chuang," *Cultural Encounters* 8, no. 1 (2012): 100, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0001909359&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

15 "Projector," accessed March 28, 2019, <http://physics.kenyon.edu/EarlyApparatus/Optics/Projector/Projector.html>.

new form of corporate worship through song. This technology did not remove the lectionary and hymnal from the Church completely but rather created another option. Slide projectors were an alternative competing technology with OHP, providing more automation and chances to provide greater artistic possibilities. It was not uncommon for churches to utilize both technologies either. Now these projection technologies have been greatly surpassed and replaced with new projectors that use digital pixels. The clarity and image quality is astounding and improves every few months to every year. There is room for greater utility and artistic ability now through presentation software like PowerPoint and ProPresenter.

With each new iteration of technology came a similar pattern in which they were introduced into the Church setting. The majority of the time each of these technologies listed went through same steps: The technology is created, becomes mass produced and utilized by the general public, then much later is introduced into the church. Beyond the technologies that were outlined there are many more that are influential to the Church's functioning. Alfredo Vergel expands on this idea in his article, that multiple technologies are put to use in the Church to provide for the best functionality. Of the technologies that are described are church management software, email and desktop publishing, visual technologies, church websites, webcasting/podcasting, and web 2.0 applications.<sup>16</sup>

It is not only in the church walls on a Sunday that technology is beginning to permeate but also in the training of the Church's future ministers. For example, Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California prepares its future ministers and theologians for technological

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16. Alfredo Vergel, "Using Technology for Ministry: Trends, Principles, and Applications," *Theological Librarianship* 3, no. 2 (2010), <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0001819722&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

advancements. Beginning in the 1990s, they decided to embrace the newfound resource of the internet to help improve the functioning of the school. They received a grant of \$200,000 to be able to fully adopt technology into their teaching. Their curriculum was adjusted to teach their students how to perform theological research and presentation through the use of the world wide web.<sup>17</sup> On the same page of the *Christianity Today* article that highlights Fuller contains an advertisement that markets a new device, an electronic hymnal.

### **The Church's Duty**

The history of technology, and specifically its use in the church setting is important to observe, after all how can you judge, better yet observe the present or future without first looking at the context founded in the past. The context of the Church is found in the charges left to them by the Jesus to his followers. The Church is bound to the laws that the Lord gives them. As such there are questions that go beyond practicality that they are concerned about.

The Church's origin is found in two separate areas, the synagogue and in the gathering places of the followers of "the way" as it would be called by the disciples. The origins of the Church began with the disciples' instructions left to them by Jesus in the Great Commission.

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

- Matthew 28:16-20 New International Version

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17. Scott Swanson, "Fuller Integrates Theology, Technology.," *Christianity Today* 41, no. 11 (October 6, 1997): 79, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=9711156135&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

The same responsibility left to the disciples falls to the followers of Christ. Christians' duty is to make disciples and to baptize them in the name of the Lord. As the Church community has grown and metamorphized the way that the Great Commission is brought to fruition has changed. The Church is a key part in helping the spiritual growth of its congregants. The Church is a place for newcomers to have an honest experience with the Lord and a place for continual spiritual feeding for those who have been followers for an extended period of time. The Church's duty is first and foremost to honor God and usher in His presence. The way that this is done has changed throughout the years and it is in the best interest of God's people to move in the right direction for the Church.

As such the inclusion of technology into the Church sphere goes beyond just the ease of its use. It must be determined if technology is harmful to the calling of the Church. So, this thesis must outline the theology, philosophy, and morality behind using technology as a part of services and week-in-week-out processes. The most important thing is that technology does not get in the way of mission God left to His people.

### **Theology and Technology**

Alan G. Padgett in *God Versus Technology? Science, Secularity, and the Theology of Technology* states, "Modern technology is a great blessing, but, as many scholars have rightly remarked, it also creates serious problems."<sup>18</sup> His worries stem from the idea that there is a risk that comes through use of technology. Padgett wonders if once technology burrows its way into the lives of everyone in the world and begins to dominate culture, will it ever be able to become

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18. Alan G Padgett, "God versus Technology?: Science, Secularity, and the Theology of Technology," *Zygon* 40, no. 3 (September 2005): 578, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0001475019&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

corralled and used for good? There is a risk that technology could become secular by the definition that it is against or opposed to religion.<sup>19</sup> However, technology can stem from good.

One of the greatest representations of technology stemming from good intentions is the clock. The clock was one of the earliest mechanical contraptions and were created with religious intentions behind them. The first wooden clocks in England were created by monks who wanted to keep prayer hours at night.<sup>20</sup> This technological advancement was invented with the pure goal of assisting in the worship and connection with the Lord.

Graham Baker reviews a book by Paul C. Heidebrecht, *Beyond the Cutting Edge?: Yoder, Technology, and the Practices of the Church*, and makes a comment that, “Jesus did not ask what kind of world we want, or how we can get it, he asked how we can recognize the new world that has already been born in our midst.”<sup>21</sup> The author of the book seemed to have taken a negative approach, but Heidebrecht rebutted this idea. Heidebrecht went along with the thought that Jesus would want Christians to identify the culture that they are in. According to Niebuhr there are multiple viewpoints when it comes to how Christians should respond to culture. In Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture* there is an outline of multiple approaches to culture: Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ as transformer of culture.<sup>22</sup> Niebuhr writes of how Christians can choose different paths when it

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19. IAlan G Padgett, “God versus Technology?: Science, Secularity, and the Theology of Technology,” *Zygon* 40, no. 3 (September 2005): 578, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0001475019&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

20. Ibid.

21. Graham Baker, “Beyond the Cutting Edge?: Yoder, Technology, and the Practices of the Church,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 33 (2015): 319, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLAn3859768&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

22. Nieghbur, *Christ and Culture*.

comes to culture. Christians can be countercultural in a way that shows their lack of support, be within culture but not of it, to be greater than what culture says is okay, or to allow Christ's influence to transform the culture they are in. In this God and Christians are able to reclaim things for the kingdom of God.

There is a misunderstanding when it comes to technology, however. Technology and theology are not two completely remote ideas that are against each other. Stephen Garner writes that God is present in all things, this includes technology. Technology is seeking to transform reality and yet God is still in it. This means that there is a theology in technology that has yet to be understood. Garner calls for an openness in the church community to begin discussing the effects of new technologies within the church.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, the decision of technological inclusion has multiple viewpoints and opinions. There are three camps that are involved when it comes to technology's adoption: the "never-betters," "better-nevers," and "ever-wasers."<sup>24</sup> The never-betters believe that everything is the best it could ever be with everyone living in harmony with free information, the better-nevers believe that technology is stealing humanity from their users, and the ever-wasers who are constant in knowing that new technologies have been appearing since the days of Socrates.

Theology is the study of God. Whenever there is a discussion about God or someone tries to read the Bible and come in closer relationship with the Lord, they are in fact participating in a theological endeavor. One of the misconceptions held in the academic Christian community is

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23. Stephen Garner, "Hacking with the Divine: A Metaphor for Theology-Technology Engagement," *Colloquium* 37, no. 2 (November 2005): 181–182, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0001616042&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

24. Stephanie Paulsell, "Technology and Ministry," *Reflective Practice* 31 (2011): 20, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0002003045&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.



that online theology is inferior to offline theology. The argument for both sides is valid in one way or another, but the side for its inclusion is quite strong in its own right.

Traditional academic form [of doing theology] does not breed conversation, but promotes monologue; it does not foster crossfertilization of ideas, but reinforces one particular perspective on an issue; it is not open to other voices, but is designed precisely to close them off; and, finally any such discourse is not welcoming to all voices, but privileges a select group who have been properly vetted by the Western academy.<sup>25</sup>

An expansion of the argument for online theology's presence in the academic community is provided by Andrew Byers in *Theomedia*. Byers points out that the internet has allowed for a whole new frontier for theological ideas to be expressed and debated. Byers states that offline theology has become something that has become solely confounded to the lecture hall and does not invite those who are not highly educated in that area. He states that microblogging and blogging have created an atmosphere of inclusion for theology.

Byers cites the disciples as the source of some of the greatest theological discoveries. "The disciples were conspicuously identified by the Sanhedrin's professional theologians and exegetes as "uneducated and ordinary men" (Acts 4:13). No one in their right mind would have accepted book proposals by the amateur disciples, even though a number of them were responsible for much of the New Testament."<sup>26</sup>

Of the other advantages that Byers goes on to list are their multimedia dimensions. It brings an approach to theology that is beyond the printed page. It introduces videos and a more interactive aspect to theology. Now the way that people are able to respond with these

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25. Warren Cole Smith, *New Kind of Conversation: Blogging toward a Postmodern Faith*. (Place of publication not identified: Intersivity Press, 2007), 1.

26. Andrew Byers, *Theo Media: The Media of God and the Digital*, 2014, 121, accessed March 21, 2019, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10924412>.

theological and articles are unrivaled. Social media allows for greater exposure and a sense of immediate accessibility that is unrivaled. “In his letters, Paul is sometimes in the midst of an ongoing, back and forth conversation with other Christians (given the communications technology of the day, however, the pace of interaction was quite slow).”<sup>27</sup>

Online theology is not without its faults. Theology that is immediately accessible can also be disastrous. Online theology can give someone with bad theology a high platform. Someone can speak to the masses without having the firm foundation that is needed. Those who sanction who is reputable are unable to do so within the online format. The internet is ever-expanding with new content, and with this comes the competitiveness to get out new content faster without contemplation, thus giving way once again to incomplete thoughts.

Theology is the basis of which Christians use to format all of their beliefs. Without these statements of faith and belief, how can Christianity stand firm.

<sup>24</sup> “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. <sup>26</sup> But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. <sup>27</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

- Matthew 7:24-27 (NIV)

Those who are the followers of “the way” will always base their beliefs on the word of the Lord and as such shall not fall. Therefore, how technology alters or affects the theological beliefs of the Christian community is just as vitally important. “He has already commissioned His church as the chosen instrument. I suggest that we as

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27. Andrew Byers, *Theo Media: The Media of God and the Digital*, 2014, 121, accessed March 21, 2019, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10924412>.

Christians not view the internet as technology, but as God's moving to bring the gospel to every man, woman, and child upon the earth."<sup>28</sup>

### Relevancy through Technology

In order to maximize the influence of the Church there needs to be a starting place to connect. People are most receptive to things that affect them. In other words, in order to best reach people, there needs to be a certain amount of relevancy. Being open to the use of technology goes along with being relevant to the rest of the world. It is important for the Church to recognize that there was a cultural shift, not to ignore that it even happened. This is true for what goes on outside of technology as well. Members of congregations stay relevant with what is going on outside of their churches, so why should the church do any less? The Church has a direct affect on their communities and how they function, such as in politics.<sup>29</sup> Religious institutions have a greater influence than can be expected because of their unique position in the lives of the people they serve. The Church sits at the "intersection of public and private life."<sup>30</sup>

One of the ways that the Church can have an even greater impact on the lives that it touches is by using the tools available. The Church's already wide influence is expanded through the use of technologies found in Web 2.0. The time period that we are in calls for for a certain degree of relevancy, one of the ways to stay current is for the church to explore the instruments available to them.

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28. Walter P. Wilson, *The Internet Church* (Nashville: Word Pub, 2000), 15.

29. Anna Greenberg, "The Church and the Revitalization of Politics and Community.," *Political Science Quarterly (Academy of Political Science)* 115, no. 3 (2000): 385, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=3726547&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

30. *Ibid*, 380.

## Web 2.0, the Social Media Takeover, and Internet Tools

Web 2.0 is the next step in internet evolution. The internet pre-Web 2.0 was focused on websites for information a before the transition to the importance of the internet's social aspect.

In general, the key characteristics of Web 2.0 are: Web-based applications can be accessed from anywhere, Simple applications solve specific problems, Value lies in content, not the software used to display content, Data can be readily shared, Distribution is bottom-up, not top-down, Employees and customers can access and use tools on their own, Social tools encourage people to create, collaborate, edit, categorize, exchange, and promote information, Network effects are encouraged; the more people who contribute, the better the content gets.<sup>31</sup>

Web 2.0 is based upon social media formats, which have the goal of creating social communities within the construct of the internet. This includes Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and many other mainstream internet media services.

“The emphasis of Web 2.0 designs on social networking would seem to make them a natural resource for religious communities who also want to reach people and bring them together.”<sup>32</sup> For example some churches use Facebook and Twitter to try and attract others to the group of believers. This allows for the expansion of the church's brand and to reach out to the people beyond the church walls. Web 2.0 brings a new way for the church to engage the community and for pastors to influence and spread the gospel. Pastors can now tweet out devotionals, churches can advertise events with much greater ease and lessened cost.

Mark Stephenson calls the internet a “wonderful mission field.”<sup>33</sup> The internet is filled with so many free opportunities to reach out to people. Within Web 2.0 there are many categories that websites fit in. There are websites that are built for social networking, social

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31. “What Is Web 2.0?,” accessed April 3, 2019, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/what-is-web-20/>.

32. Paulsell, “Technology and Ministry,” 26.

33. Mark Morgan Stephenson, *Web-Empowered Ministry: Connecting with People through Websites, Social Media, and More* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 121.

media, messaging and communication, and blogging.<sup>34</sup> Each of these can serve a purpose for the Church.

The social networking applications like Facebook allow for the Church to create a community online for others to join and become a part of. Churches have the opportunity to create events on the website and invite others too. No longer does word-of-mouth have to be the only way information is communicated and spread. Social media services allows for the Church to share media content like still pictures and video. Sermons can go viral through the use of Vimeo and YouTube; pictures of events can be shared on Instagram. Messaging and communication applications/websites have a way of bringing worlds together. Services like Skype and Google make things possible that were not before. Skype can allow a missionary who seems like they are worlds apart enter right into a room to ask for support through the use of internet based video conference calls. Blogging and microblogging allows for theological ideas come into the world faster without the slow process of publishing. Now, because of Twitter there are things we call tweetable moments in service. Something that stood out to a service-goer can be tweeted out to the world in a matter of seconds.

“The Internet gives Christians access to the means of cultural production. Christianity has a shot at being influential in the culture again. As the printing press was the engine of the Reformation, the Internet will be the engine of whatever comes next.”<sup>35</sup> Social media tools are the next step in the evolution of evangelism and discipleship. Churches and Christian communities are already places for socialization, it can be taken a step further to call them social

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34. IMark Morgan Stephenson, *Web-Empowered Ministry: Connecting with People through Websites, Social Media, and More* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 124-130.

35. Gene Edward Veith and Christopher L. Stamper, *Christians in a .Com World: Getting Connected without Being Consumed*, Focal point series (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2000), 149–150.

networks. The Church is already a social network, so the logical next step is online social networking. “Community-based web tools connect people to people and allow them to work and learn together.”<sup>36</sup>

One of the ways that churches are able to enhance the process of community formation is through speeding up access. SEO (Search Engine Optimization) is one of the tools that is utilized. The Mormon Church has moved forward in this area to help alter search results to bring their websites and affiliates closer to the top results of Google searches.<sup>37</sup> This brings marketing to a whole new level. The way that SEO works is through small modifications made to a website in order to adjust the user experience and performance in organic (unpaid) web-searches, which increases/maximizes the user traffic to the site.<sup>38</sup>

SEO has created an opportunity to allow for subliminal messages to transpire into the media for the help of the church. Search Engine Optimization allows for greater exposure of churches and in turn the gospel message. By bringing church and religious search results further to the forefront of a search, the gospel message has a greater chance of being heard and influencing the lives of many lost souls. As far as the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary’s John P. Jewell is concerned Christian institutions still are not doing enough to equip students going into the ministry who will be entering the digitalized world.<sup>39</sup>

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36. Stephenson, *Web-Empowered Ministry*, 161.

37. Chiung Hwang Chen, “Marketing Religion Online: The LDS Church’s SEO Efforts.,” *Journal of Media & Religion* 10, no. 4 (October 2011): 185, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&AN=67526071&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

38. “Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Starter Guide - Search Console Help,” accessed March 31, 2019, <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/7451184?hl=en>.

39. John P Jewell, “What Does All This (Technology) Mean for the Church?,” *Theological Education* 41, no. 1 (2005): 17–29, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0001507487&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

## Authenticity and Relevancy

A key desire of humanity is for authenticity, the desire for realness. People want something from a church that they cannot get from anywhere else. The Church is offering the gospel of truth, which is the purest form of authenticity. However, people also long to be a part of something authentic and to be authentically themselves in this place, a place to be accepted. There is a craving for authenticity but call for relevancy as well. Without relevancy the authenticity does not maintain the attractiveness. Being relevant and attractional is how to get people in the door of the building but being authentic is what causes people to stay and invest.

When something is relevant, it adds value. In order to be relevant, there needs to be a degree of common ground. When being taught how to properly exegete scripture the steps to go through are called the interpretive journey, going from “their town” to “our town.”<sup>40</sup> In order to fully understand scripture must be understood in its original culture before being transplanted into modern day context and application. Thus, contextualization is a key step in the journey to being authentic and having the greatest impact. If the Church wants to share the gospel message in a very authentic way, it must be willing to transplant the scripture into the current culture’s environment. Sharing the gospel message through contextualization is modeled well by Paul and Jesus.

<sup>19</sup> Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. <sup>21</sup> To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. <sup>23</sup> I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

- 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (NIV)

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40. J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-on Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012).

Paul made sure to make himself like whoever he was trying to reach. He was not afraid to go beyond his comfort zone in order to create an atmosphere where people could be receptive to the gospel. He went out, he did not just make people come to him.

Jesus is another fine example of contextualization. The style in which Jesus taught his disciples and all who wanted to hear Him speak was through the use of parables. Rather than spouting of the scriptures of the Pentateuch to the people, he decided to communicate in a way that brought teaching in a simplified manner. Jesus was able to create a way of teaching life lessons that were easy to grasp but also were applicable to the gentiles. The lessons that Jesus had were not just for the Jewish people that he hailed from but for all people.

The Church has an opening to join in with culture and contextualize themselves through technological advancement and participation. The arts and beauty have been included in places of worship for quite a while: the Sistine Chapel, architecture, and stained-glass windows. There is something pure when it comes to art. Art has the balance of both being authentic and attractive. One of the ways that the Church can move forward with authenticity and be unique is through the adoption of the arts into the service to a greater capacity in a new way. Technology is a gateway for the arts to be represented and people to serve and bring an offering of worship to the Lord. People who have a gifting with technology and presentation now have a place to use what they are passionate about. This outlet provides a place for people to serve, connect, and be discipled.

Technology is very tightly connected to contemporary worship. Typically, when the word “worship” is used people automatically link it to the music being played before the sermon start in a church service. Worship is much more than that, it is doing something unto God in order to bring glory to Him and to help others do the same. When considering this all aspects of a



worship service are in fact an offering of worship. Thus, service planning has changed from making a set list to an ordeal that involves multiple parties. Team-based approaches to worship planning has become a more normalized approach by many churches. Impact Church in Atlanta, Georgia does just this under the leadership of pastor Olu Brown. Pastor Brown works in tandem with his Creative Programming team to outline their Sunday “experiences. The team consists of four sub-teams that coordinate the entire service: an administrative team, a creative team, a service production team, and a video production team.<sup>41</sup>

The way that church buildings were once setup were with traditional liturgical centers. What was once the baptismal, the altar table, pulpit, and presiders chair has been changed in one way or another. It is not that liturgy has been completely abandoned, instead it is another representation of liturgy through contemporary means. Liturgical practices may not all look the same, but they achieve the same goals of bringing God’s people closer to the Lord. Now in the place of these longstanding liturgical centers are the new sections occupied by the Audio-Visual team and equipment.



Figure 3: A production room in use at West Ridge Church, Dallas, GA.  
(Appendix B)  
Source: Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, Chapter 5.

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41. Olu Brown, *Zero to 80: Innovative Ideas for Planting and Accelerating Church Growth* (Atlanta: Impact Press, 2010), 152.

This inclusion of new teams in the worship experience called for changes in the way that Christian gathering places are formatted and constructed. The way that church buildings are now set up are very different. There are four approaches to making a worship space: taking existing places and make minimal impermanent changes, adapt an existing place with major changes, a midpoint approach by making one large change and many minimal changes, or the most extreme, build a new area for contemporary worship.<sup>42</sup>

Churches have now started to relabel areas of their buildings as part of this change. Sanctuaries are now referred to as auditoriums and the pulpit has changed into the stage. Technology brought with it a representation of Christ's actions through his death. There is a demystification of the process of entering into the realm of angels, the Holy of Holies. In the days of the Old Testament there was the Tabernacle and the Temple, this has continued into the Church to a degree. This no longer has to be the reality. "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51 NIV). When Christ died, he made it possible for the common person to enter into the Holy of Holies with the Lord. In the same way the Church can take this opportunity to keep the mystery of the Lord but usher in a way to the Lord's presence. Technology was more than just the inclusion of ease an advancement but brought forth a new ideology of authenticity.

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42. Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, 42.

One of the first churches to take a step in this direction was the Angelus Temple led by Aimee Semple McPherson. She sought to combine the arts and production with the Christian mission. McPherson's auditorium was built with sound in mind. The contours of the building were designed with the intention of sound reflection and the ability to see the stage from any seat. With the growth of technology came the modernization of the building. This included restoration of the building but also modifications to support the new equipment.<sup>43</sup>



*Figure 4: The interior of the Angelus Temple, Los Angeles, c. 1930.*  
(Appendix C)  
Source: ResearchGate



*Figure 5: The interior of the Angelus Temple, Los Angeles, Post 2002 Renovation.*  
(Appendix C)  
Source: AngelusTemple.com

### Livestreaming, Online Congregations, and the Megachurch Movement

The internet has created opportunities for the church to expand their reach beyond the walls of the church building. Churches have the option to livestream their services and hold online services for multi-site churches. Some of these services are held on interactive websites to help enhance the experience of worship and community. Some of these allow for discussions

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43. CaspianSerives.net, "Reveal Studio, Inc. » Angelus Temple," n.d., accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.revealstudio.com/angelus-temple/>.

among the different “congregants” of the online community.<sup>44</sup> However, not all parties are on board with the idea of online churches. The Protestant churches in Germany have concerns about this new trend. They believe that online churches are unable to properly celebrate the sacraments. As such “...it was argued that online congregations lack something compared to local congregations, and should therefore be described as online communities rather than congregations.”<sup>45</sup> McIntosh also warns of the lack of quality that might be attached to the media accessed.<sup>46</sup> This leads to the question of “what do livestreamed services do to contribute to community?”

First of all, a community is “a unified body of individuals.”<sup>47</sup> Livestreamed services in of themselves are communal. A group of individuals are gathered at the live service and are unified under their goal to have fellowship, to grow spiritually, and to worship the Lord. When livestreaming a service the individual is able to become part of the whole of that ministry. The viewer thus virtually becomes a part of that congregation and apart of the Body of Christ. Streamers not only become a part of the congregation that you are viewing on whatever device is being used, but you can form new communities. There is an opportunity to participate within

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44. Heidi A. Campbell and Michael W. DeLashmutt, “Studying Technology and Ecclesiology in Online Multi-Site Worship,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29, no. 2 (May 2014): 274, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=95861501&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

45. Ralf Peter Reimann, “‘Uncharted Territories’: The Challenges of Digitalization and Social Media for Church and Society,” *The Ecumenical Review* 69, no. 1 (March 2017): 68, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLAI FZK170410001489&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

46. Esther McIntosh, “Belonging without Believing: Church as Community in an Age of Digital Media,” *International Journal of Public Theology* 9, no. 2 (2015): 137, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAn3836332&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

47. “Definition of Community,” accessed March 3, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/community>.

home or anywhere in the worhip, in the communion, and the sermon of the church. Through the viablity of social media experiences livestreams are thus advanced.

A congregation is a group of people assembled for religious worship. In other words the only difference between a community and a congregation is the specific purpose of gathering for worship. The Church is not the buildings that its people meet in but the people themselves. In the days before permanent meeting places for people to meet there were house churches instead. People would meet wherever was available, the place was unimportant. In the same way communities and congregations are able to meet through the online resources.

Life.Church, Craig Groeschel's church in Oklahoma, is one of the best examples to cite for their vibrant online ministries. "A typical local church can reach thousands of people in its city, but through the media, that same church can reach millions around the world."<sup>48</sup>

Life.Church has a ministry that has made a way to share the word of the Lord and to go beyond that to create online congregations. Online congregations provide a service to those who would never dream of walking into a church. Life.Church has services that are played on a loop repeatedly with the option to invite others to join in on a specific planned service. Their idea is to make a place where people who are watching the same video can participate in a service with one another through group chat and connect with volunteers. They have volunteers who are able to interface with the online congregant to provide prayerful support.<sup>49</sup> Podcasts are closely related to livestreaming and online video messages. Podcasts are a mixture of blogging, sermons, and episodes of a television series. Podcasts bring a more in-depth conversation to biblical ideas.

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48. Phil Cooke, *Creative Christian Media: Secrets of Successful Media Ministry* (Longwood, Florida: Xulon Press, 2006), vii.

49. "Church Online at Life.Church," accessed April 1, 2019, <http://live.life.church>.

They can follow a series of ideas in a much more relaxed setting. Podcasting has grown in popularity and created downloadable, listenable content, thus being a great alternative for pastors to begin utilizing, whether for devotionals or other resources for teaching.

Life.Church is also a user of the multi-site model. Technology is not only used widely within churches in the United States, but in other countries around the globe. The Rhineland is much more progressive with the use of modern media technologies such as multi-site worship.<sup>50</sup> The multi-site model provides a sense of fluidity by allowing remote campuses to connect to a main campus, whether through delayed or live-steamed content, or pre-recorded sermons. These provide a way for smaller individual gatherings to become connected to an even larger corporate worship entity.

The megachurch movement is one of the alternatives to the multi-site worship movement with the option for a hybrid of the two to be formed. The Hillsong Church movement is an incremental trend setter for megachurches everywhere. The Hillsong Church dabbles in almost every type of media technology to help enhance their efficiency and ability to usher in the presence of Christ. It could be said that they attribute their success and growth to their pursuit of excellence in all areas, including media technology such as audio, visual, and video.<sup>51</sup> “Although

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50. Reimann, “‘Uncharted Territories’: The Challenges of Digitalization and Social Media for Church and Society.”

51. Miranda Klaver, “Media Technology Creating ‘Sermonic Events.’ The Hillsong Megachurch Network.,” *Cross Currents* 65, no. 4 (December 2015): 422–433, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=112708112&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

the level of technology typically correlates with the church's size and theology, most churches are in some way jumping on the technology bandwagon.”<sup>52</sup>

Churches that are categorized as megachurches are typically of a Protestant background and have an average weekly attendance that is greater than 2000 people per week in their services.<sup>53</sup> Churches of this status typically utilize technologies in order to bridge the gap between the audience and those on the stage and to create new ways for the arts to be introduced. Set design is one of the areas that has become a key part of today’s ministry environment and worship experience. The use of sermon series has become commonplace in the church world. From Craig Groeschel to Andy Stanley to Steven Furtick, from the largest megachurch to one of the smaller country churches, sermon series are being utilized to attract attenders back week after week. Set design is part of sermon series, it makes a series into an attractive event for people to visit. One of the ways that technology has made a way for this is through lighting, hazers, and

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52. Stanley L. Daniels and Nancy E. Reynolds, “Today Changing Church.,” *Planning* 78, no. 9 (November 2012): 32, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=83387029&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

53. “The Definition of a Megachurch from Hartford Institute for Religion Research,” accessed April 1, 2019, <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/definition.html>.

environmental projection. This makes for an ease in creating transitions from worship through song to worship experienced in the presentation of the word.

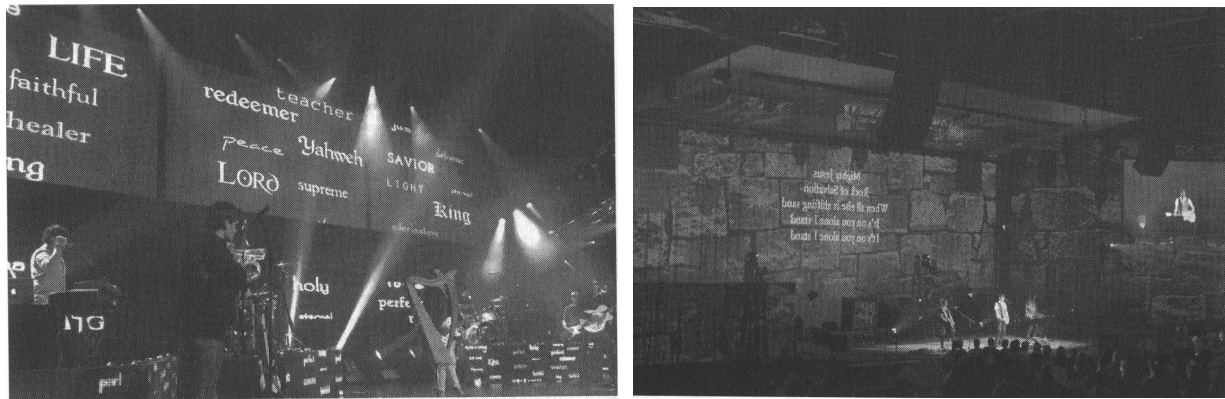


Figure 6: Examples of environmental projection from <http://illuminate.us> (Appendix D)

Source: Lim and Ruth. *Lovin' on Jesus*. Chapter 5.

In places like megachurches that have large auditoriums the layout is often set apart to make the stage visible from every chair, but a feeling of separation is still present and palpable. Like any event the chairs farther away from the action have a worse view and feel cheapened. One of the key solutions to this was through image magnification (IMAG). Image magnification has a way of making space become minimized. Now every seat in the house seems to be at a fair advantage. The sense of distance between the worshipper and the stage becomes almost non-existent.

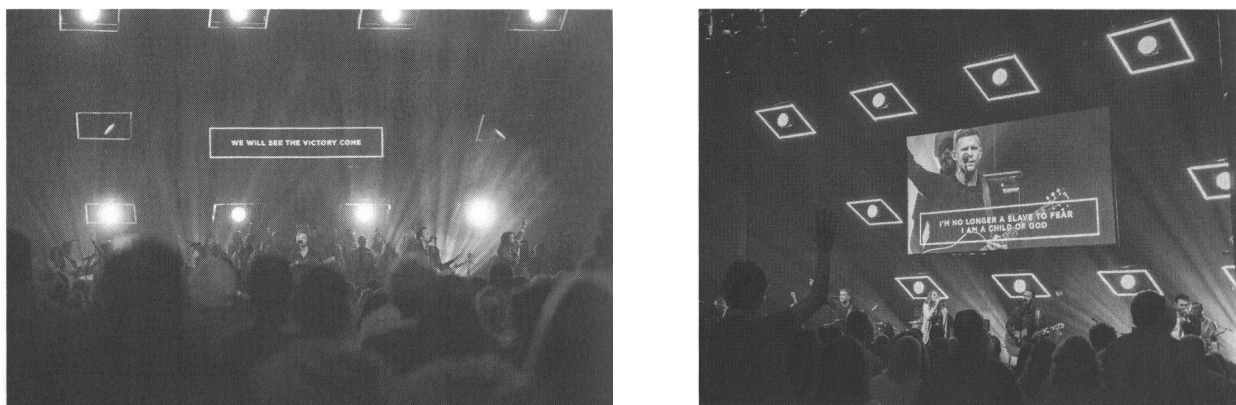


Figure 7: IMAG (image magnification), lighting, and haze machine, Passion City Church, Atlanta, Georgia, 2016 (Appendix E)

Source: Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, Chapter 5.



“Because the faces of musicians and preachers get magnified worshippers even at remote distances from the platform stage are able to see their facial expressions.”<sup>54</sup> Being able to see the expressions of the band allows for the intensity of musical worship to become increased by seeing an authentic back-and-forth experience with the Holy Spirit, and seeing the pastor up close brings an even more interactive and captivating sermon. With this comes the necessary video equipment. Among these that has become an integral part of IMAG is the video switcher. A video switcher allows for the use of multiple cameras to provide the best angles and shots to be shown for each movement the pastor may make. It allows for a more dynamic style of preaching as the pastor is able to move and use body language to help iterate his/her point.



Figure 8: A video switcher used to select images for projection.  
Source: Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, Chapter 5.

### Concerns About Becoming a Show

One of the greater concerns about this extensive adoption of technology is that the Church will become exactly like the world. Most of the technologies adopted were created and utilized first by the entertainment industry, thus it is not out of reach to believe that issues could preside. With the transformation of liturgical practices into new ones comes the danger of losing

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54. Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, 57.

them altogether. There is a danger in trying to add technology to worship services in order to be applicable. One of the other theological concerns about adding technology into the Church's worship experience is that worship could lose its spiritual aspect.<sup>55</sup> With the use of production tools the church runs the risk of overemphasizing this part of the experience.

Saddleback Church in the 90's came to the conclusion of the "5-Second-Rule" which states that there should be no more than five seconds without anything happening on the stage. What started as good flow of time changed into the idea of seamless flow throughout the entire service.<sup>56</sup> When we plan, we can run the risk of wanting to be out of church in the hour and fifteen minute window that we neglect the importance of the Holy Spirit's input. Sometimes the lights are too much. Sometimes the music is too loud. Sometimes we are too concerned on looking good that we forget the reason why we do it.

Relevancy has its place in ministry, however, there is a fine line that must be observed in order to prevent falling prey to the downsides that comes without moderation. Robert Howard, when reviewing Jewell's work, says, "The ability to enhance a sermon or liturgy with electronically projected images accompanied by prerecorded sounds is a modern wonder. Digital technology can truly be a useful tool in preaching and worship, but we who would use it – as Jewell does indeed caution - simply must be aware of as many of its inherent pitfalls as possible."<sup>57</sup> There is a danger that the church service can transition from a worship service and

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55. Shawn P. Stapleton, "The Carnivalization of Church: Christian Worship or Procliturgitainment?," *International Congregational Journal* 11, no. 1 (2012): 21, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=78091421&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

56. Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, 35.

57. Robert R Howard, "Wired for Ministry: How the Internet, Visual Media, and Other New Technologies Can Serve Your Church," *Homiletic* 29, no. 2 (2004): 51, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0001452363&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

spiritually-charged environment into a concert and removing the theological basis from behind a message.<sup>58</sup> Vergel warns that technology makes life less “strenuous,” but that there are appropriate uses of technology.<sup>59</sup>

### Office Space Technology

The church is not only a place where people gather on Sundays but is a place where church business is performed. The Church is not only a place utilized once a week but is called upon nearly every day. Churches have duties that must be attended to on a regular, weekly basis. The congregation attendance must remain accounted for, membership needs to be tracked, as well as finances, sermon planning, and so many others. The whole purpose of the Church is to serve the people and as such these responsibilities are in place to better serve the people. An example: church attendance tracking helps to measure impact and to reach out to congregants who have not attended in a while. Technology is meant to provide a way to enhance the productivity of the church and encourage discipleship. It has not only made a way to improve the Sunday morning service but extends help to the week-in processes of church offices.

There are plenty of resources that help the church run smoothly. One online software that is usable to track this information is PowerChurch Plus. It has a check-in system for children to help track attendance and improve the safety on a Sunday, it also puts together mailing lists, both physical and electronic to keep in contact with the congregation. It also takes care of finances by tracking contributions and handling payroll.<sup>60</sup> What was once multiple manual processes have now been streamlined into one program.

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58. Stapleton, “The Carnivalization of Church: Christian Worship or Procliturgitainment?,” 25–26.

59. Vergel, “Using Technology for Ministry: Trends, Principles, and Applications.”

Sermon planning and service planning is now much easier with the resources at the fingertips of this generation. Pastors have access to thousands of translations of the Bible, commentaries, and sermon series materials. Life.Church provides free resources for all age groups: for sermon series, bumper videos, and curriculum for small groups, youth groups, or children's ministries. Content is being created quickly and is vastly available for churches to employ. Planning Center is another service that is wonderful for creating a step-by-step outline of a service. It allows for flow to be fully taken advantage of and ensures that each moment has an impact.

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60. "PowerChurch Plus - All In One Church Management and Office Administration Software," accessed April 1, 2019, <https://www.powerchurch.com/products/peplus/?sid=0b35a9500fbac1b08952715db22efbd7>.

### **Analysis and Review:**

The way that technology has changed over the past decades has clearly come in leaps and bounds. The way that technology is embraced will either be a milestone for the good of the Church as a whole or be remembered as a grave mistake. The questions posed earlier in this work were: How has technology prompted progress within the Church? How far behind the church is in adopting technology in comparison to the rest of society that find itself outside of the Church realm? In order to fully understand how much the church has progressed there is also the subset question of how much is technology used in the day-to-day functioning of the church? So, inversely, how has technology been a hindrance for the gospel?

The adoption of technology, both media technology, social media technology, and office technology has helped to carry the Church into an age of efficiency that had not yet been seen. Technology has done far more than just this however; technology has also brought an advancement of the church in its relation to culture and in its representation of scripture. The use of media has allowed for people to express their love for God in new ways, which has brought about inclusion and investment of people into a serving role within the church, becoming greater disciples in the process.

The Church has done well in the past few decades to close the gap between its inclusion of electronics, however it is still behind as a whole. Some churches have remained adamant in not embracing this equipment, which splits the mission of the church and causes detracting deliberation between Christians themselves. For those that do go ahead and support it, those churches are often imitators rather than innovators. This is not a bad place to start, but there is still work to be done.

As far as the day-to-day use of technology is concerned the Church has done fairly well. The number of resources available is stunning, there are blogs for theology and apologetics, sermon research resources, service planning materials, and church management software. All of these in one way or another have created a sense of ease for the utilizer and allows for that person to go even deeper than before in the same amount of time. However, not everything about technology is positive.

A warning from Mark Stephenson is provided in his book, *Web-Empowered Ministry*. He states how it is the duty of churches and the Christians leading those ministries to help prevent a brother and sister from stumbling. In it he provides an unfortunate incident that their church experienced using a free secular software. With the use of that software came ads with unfortunate messages. His warning is that free does not mean free, someone is paying for it, even if that person is not you.<sup>61</sup> Another pitfall to be aware of is one of not being consistent. Authenticity is something people seek in others, and Christ was above all authentic. The same thing must be said of Christians. It is a call for churches and the leaders of those churches to be the same online as they are offline and not represent themselves, or the Church.<sup>62</sup>

Adding creative elements such as lights, hazing, IMAG, and better sound equipment are great additions to a Sunday service, and planning out every second ensures that not a moment is wasted, but this can have a detrimental effect to the spiritual aspect of worship. These devices can create a more intimate moment with Christ, however there is a place where it is overdone and become more like the shows that the technologies were taken from than an interaction with the most high God. The goal of these technologies is to be supplemental and not a distraction. There

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61. Stephenson, *Web-Empowered Ministry*, 132–135.

62. Byers, *Theo Media*, 174–175.

needs to be time planned in for the Spirit to move and freedom to let the Spirit move rather than moving on before the moment is over.

One of the last lines that must be observed carefully is the use of livestreaming and online services. These two assets like anything not used in moderation can become harmful. The creation of online congregations and livestreamed community services are a wonderful invention of the 21st century. This is a modern marvel and a wonderful alternative, however it is a tool, not a replacement for the real thing. The word “ekklesia,” which is often translated as “church” literally means assembly. “<sup>20</sup>For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:20 NIV). Christians experience God’s presence in a much more powerful concentration when gathered together. Online congregations are excellent gateways for people questioning Christianity and for people who are unable to make it because extenuating circumstances but is not the same as being among the body of Christ.

### **Conclusion:**

Overall there is a lot to be said on the use of technology in the widespread changing culture and communities located around the globe. It is still in question whether the pros outweigh the cons of adding these new technologies into the church. There have been improvements that years ago could never have been dreamed. The Church has seen great progress through ministerial technologies both in theology and praxis. These leaps and bounds of development have not come without their prices. For all the positives that could be displayed, there were also negatives that come with them. New solutions bring new problems; the question is whether it is worth it?

Should we reflect culture back through a different lens that is a Christian worldview or are we to be completely countercultural? The simple answer is that Christians are called to be in the world but not of the world. The Church should strive to contextualize itself like Paul or Jesus in order to reach its goal, but not sacrifice its moral standing. Is technology really neutral and able to be adopted for good? I say yes. The key here is the concept of balance. It should be the goal of the church to maximize the positive of technology but minimize the negatives through careful contemplation and planning. I believe in the view of ever-wasers; there have been advancements since the beginning of time and there will continue to be. We must not fall behind and risk irrelevancy, but not compromise our values and replace the presence for the savior for fancy lights.

The work that was done here was limited by the scarcity of peer-reviewed written resources, however, has made a good basis for future exploration. The future research that could be done in this area of study would involve more interviews with experts in their fields as well as



looking to resources not yet written. Technology is ever-evolving and as such this paper cannot cover everything that technology has to offer the church, but the future looks bright.

**Appendix A:**



*Figure 1: Glencairn's "Fenix Press," a replica Gutenberg-era printing press.  
Source: Glencairn Museum/*

**Appendix B:**



*Figure 2: An early adopting Lutheran Church in Texas (Covenant ELCA) worshipping with an overhead projector, 1996. Source: Lim and Ruth, Lovin' on Jesus, Chapter 5.*



*Figure 3: A production room in use at West Ridge Church, Dallas, GA. Source: Lim and Ruth, Lovin' on Jesus, Chapter 5.*

**Appendix C:**



Figure 4: The interior of the Angelus Temple, Los Angeles, c. 1930.  
Source: ResearchGate, [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-interior-of-the-Angelus-Temple-Los-Angeles-c-1930-International-Church-of-the\\_fig6\\_275245502](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-interior-of-the-Angelus-Temple-Los-Angeles-c-1930-International-Church-of-the_fig6_275245502)



Figure 5: The interior of the Angelus Temple, Los Angeles, Post 2002 Renovation  
Source: AngelusTemple.com, <https://angelustemple.org/about/>

Appendix D:

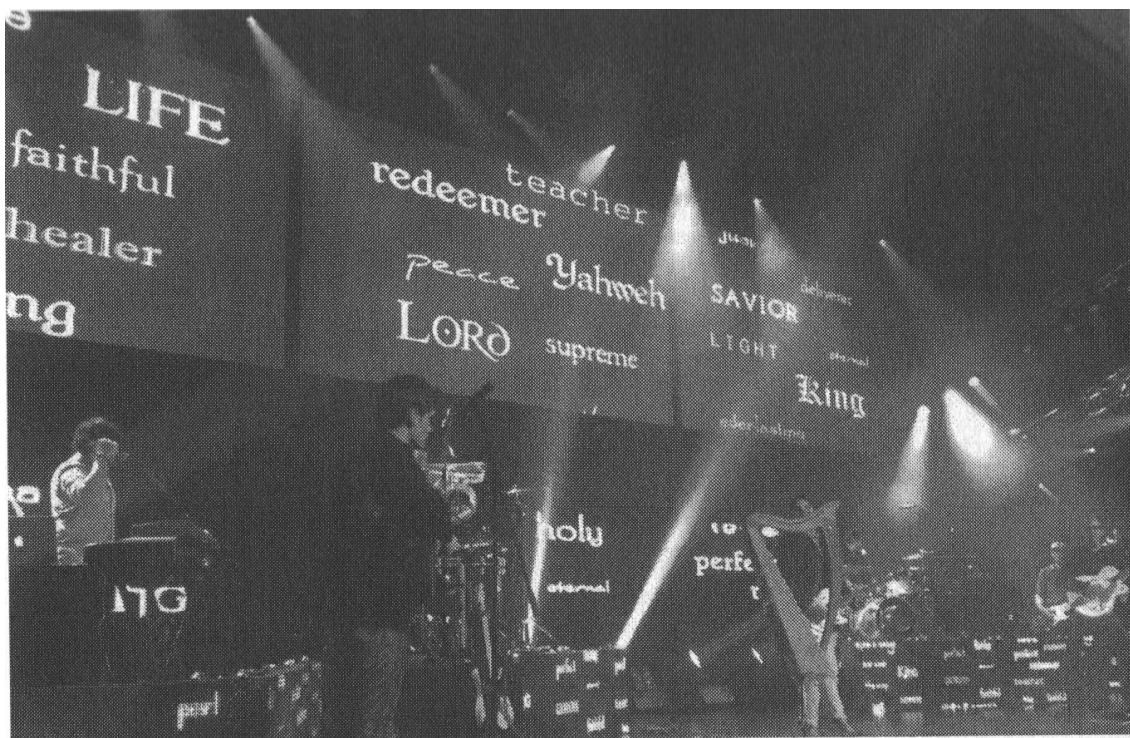
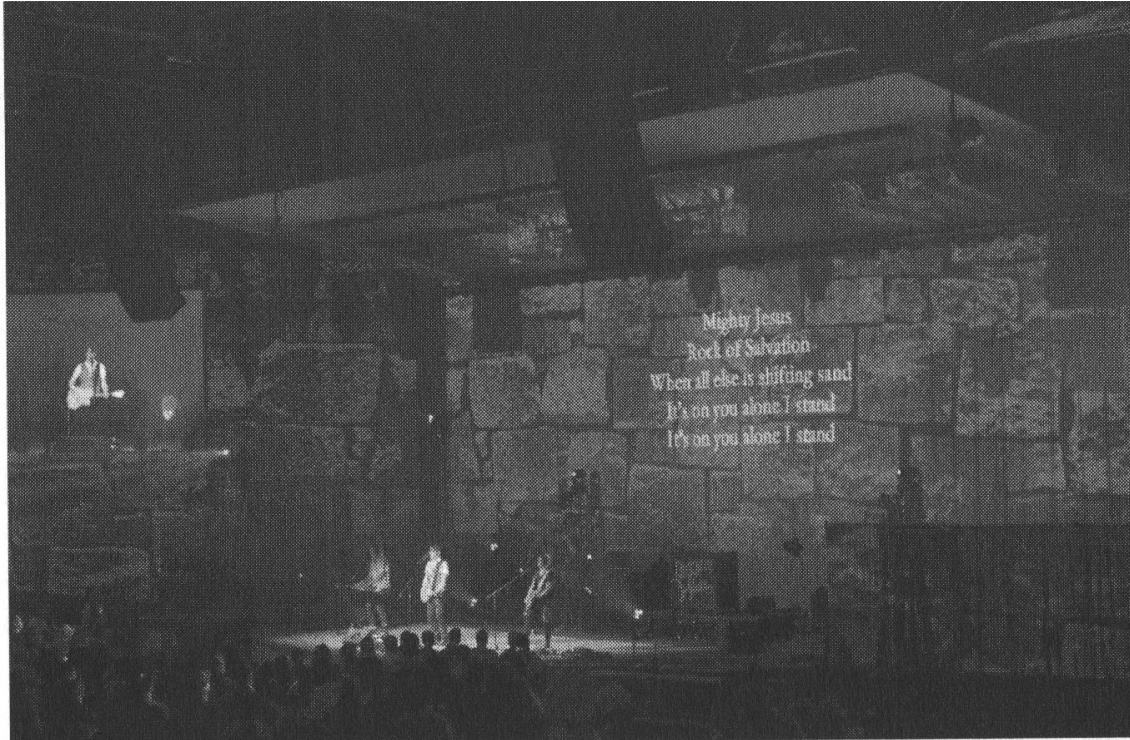


Figure 6: Examples of environmental projection from <http://illuminate.us>  
Source: Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, Chapter 5.

Appendix E:

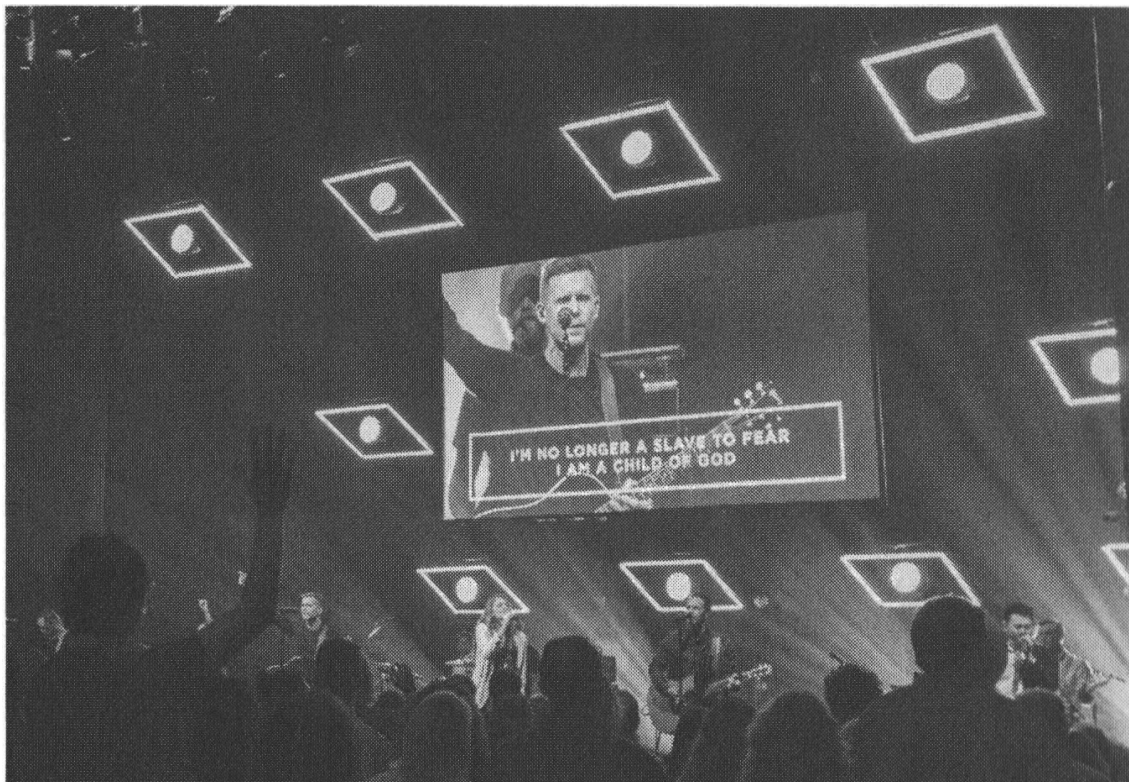


Figure 7: IMAG (image magnification), lighting, and haze machine, Passion City Church, Atlanta, Georgia, 2016  
Source: Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, Chapter 5.

## Appendix F:



*Figure 8: A video switcher used to select images for projection.*  
Source: Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, Chapter 5.

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