THE SPECTACLE OF AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA INTEGRATION IN THE EVANGELICAL PRACTICES OF LITURGY, TEACHING, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the use of audiovisual media in the Evangelical practices of liturgy, teaching, and community engagement. In order to gain a more holistic perspective on the role media plays in these practices, the study focuses on media examples taken from prominent religious institutions. By analyzing these examples through the lens of critical theory, the study reveals aspects where the spectacle trends of our culture has permeated the media produced to help audiences engage in religious practices. Because religion helps people cultivate meaning in their lives, the influence of the spectacle trends on religious practices is important to examine as it has the potential to control that meaning. As a result, the contributions of religious media can become indistinguishable from those of mainstream media. Therefore, critical theory can be a powerful tool to help religious institutions discern where media amplifies meaning in practices and where it becomes a distraction. As the study examines existing content already utilized in Evangelical practices, the impact is compared across the three practices, which better illuminates the overall influence.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As the world becomes increasingly enamored with entertainment distractions and exhibitions of spectacles, grandiose audiovisual works permeate all aspects of life, including those from which people derive meaning, such as religion. Douglas Kellner (2003) defines this transition into large-scale entertainment and coins it simply as the era of "the spectacle," specifying that we've transitioned our culture and values that govern our lives into commodities. This spectacle perspective speaks to how we have come to value experiences, but there is still much discussion about the spectacle's influence on people's ability to construct individual meanings. As a result, I will use this notion of the spectacle to gain a better understanding of the role media has in religious institutions as society is gravitating toward constant entertainment.

Because audiovisual media is so prevalent in our lives, it is becoming increasingly more important to analyze how it is integrated in various areas. Historically, religion has been an area of human engagement that has allowed people to examine themselves, discover their purpose, engage with those around them, and build relational foundations (McLuhan, McLuhan, & Szklarek, 2010). Stewart Hoover also emphasizes the importance of religion as it helps cultivate identity, community and politics (2011, p.611). As media has been implemented into many religious practices, it has altered the way some communal practices are performed, and in turn, transitioned religion to seem more individualistic.

From closely examining the scope of religious practices, I find that they can be broken down into three distinct branches: liturgy (or creative expression), teaching, and

community engagement (or the "charity" element that contributes to religious institutions' 501c3 status). For the Evangelical faith in particular, these three branches appear to be more pronounced, so the focus of this study is guided by Evangelical practices. Christianity has historically been more receptive to incorporating emerging media in their practices. Cheong (2016) notes that this is due to the physical limitations of church structures. Since they are limited by location, the incorporation of media creates the illusion of broader reach. Both McLuhan (2014) and Hoover (2006) emphasize the Protestant Reformation as a key point where media became essential to religious reform. Since then, it is easy to see how people engage in religious practices as a collective through the use of media. Religious ideas and understanding may vary based on personal interpretation, but group participation in established practices speaks to enduring values and understanding of religious ideas. Sustained within these collective practices is a preserved core of meaning that has the potential to change as the culture surrounding it also changes.

Kellner (2003) argues that as various aspects of our lives are governed by commodification, the spectacle is used to promote food, fashion, and everything in between. This incorporation of audiovisual media creates changes in the scope of religious practices as well (McLuhan, McLuhan, & Szklarek, 2010). The way the elements of liturgy, teaching, and community engagement functions now matches the rest of the world's fascination with mediated spectacle displays. To better understand how those changes encourage spectacle viewership and what the use of media communicates, the goal of this analysis is to examine the implementation of media in these three types of religious practices. This analysis is also meant to illuminate how the focus has shifted

away from a divine, cultivated meaning, and amplified our need to be entertained to distraction. This study will explore what media adds and what it takes away from the meanings traditionally associated with the three forms of religious practices identified for investigation in this study.

In order to do this effectively, my goal is to conduct a textual analysis of media examples specifically produced for the three religious practices. The paper will analyze the liturgy impact of the following media texts: the live performance recording of Elevation Worship's *Do it Again*, video from Darlene Zschech's *Revealing Jesus: A Live Worship Experience*, and *A Holy Moment* recorded by Bethel. These media examples capture the use of IMAG in a space as well as recorded video projected on large screens in order to guide the audience in the liturgy experience. These examples also indicate how people engage in the liturgy practice within an online space by using the digitally distributed video compilations. To examine how teaching is affected through the incorporation of audiovisual media, this study will also analyze *The Bible Project* animated video collection, Mark Batterson's video series *The Circle Maker*, and episodes of *The Holy Post* podcast. All of these examples are randomly selected episodes within larger teaching series. They are professionally produced in order to help people engage in the practice of teaching. As a result, the analysis of these selected episodes would help illuminate the functions of all the series as a whole. Finally, the community engagement element will be examined by looking at popular nonprofit campaigns spearheaded by religious institutions with prominent video content. Examples such as *The Deep Place* director's cut short film from International Justice Mission, clips from the World Vision: Water campaign, and *Ernesto's Story* from Samaritan's Purse TV. These three examples

are all crafted around true stories that represent the involvement of the institutions in bettering lives through community engagement. Because all of these organizations produce professional videos that are distributed among churches via digital platforms, they were selected to illustrate how media aids people in the practice of community engagement. Together, these examples of audiovisual content produced within the three branches of religious practices should illustrate the shift individual views of religion has made toward entertainment.

All of these Evangelical media examples will be examined through the lens of the spectacle, which is underscored by critical theory. As people move toward the spectacle directed by commodification, it guides the ways they cultivate meaning in their lives (Jethani, 2009). According to Jethani, the branding of experiences has replaced divinity and its ability to help people construct meaning (2009). Rather than accepting institutions as authority, people are transforming them into sources of individual entertainment, or something that can simply be watched and passively received. Douglas Kellner (2003) identifies this transition into large-scale entertainment as the era of "the spectacle," specifying that as a culture, we've transformed our values into consumable products, which now dictate much of our lives. As we live in a capitalist society, the providers of products and services are striving to stand out by utilizing large-scale, multimedia displays. Since entertainment elements are constantly competing for our attention and are increasingly incorporated into any experience, it's important to analyze how audiovisual media is amplifying the effects of the spectacle in our everyday lives. For religion in particular, this trend is important to analyze since religion has historically been at the forefront of utilizing new media (McLuhan, McLuhan, & Szklarek, 2010). When media

is used to transform practices from which people derive meaning, the effect has the potential to reach other aspects of life. Reflecting on how media is used to interpret religious practices helps illuminate how people express and understand deeper ideas. Continuously analyzing this process creates an awareness for the value of these ideas and the additional meaning that makes them more presentable (or acceptable) to the public.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

To better understand the intersection of media and religion, I examined the history of religious communicative practices and religious institutions' adoption of the new media as well as the intersection of media and religion on sociological a level. The research revealed the cultural shift taking place in other areas of life. Many scholars emphasized that media has become so imbedded into our lives that religious institutions have had no choice but to adopt new forms of media in their practices (Hoover, 2006, 2011; Jethani, 2009, Kellner, 2003; Hjarvard, 2015; McLuhan, McLuhan, & Szklarek, 2010). Hjarvard (2015) notes that the visibility of the media speaks to its amplified relationship with media platforms. As religious institutions adopt new media, religious content becomes widely dispersed and therefore, more noticeable (Hjarvard, 2015). Because all of these scholars agree that media and religion are not separate from one another, but rather intertwined in many aspects. As a result, this study is designed to analyze the use of media in specific religious practices. The various perspectives I've identified in my literature review have enabled me to construct a study that looked into the intersection of media and the three major branches of Evangelical religious practices: liturgy, teaching, and community engagement, which provided a clearer understanding of media and its relationship with religion.

Liturgy (Creative Expression)

While methods have evolved, the concept of liturgical engagement has remained consistent in the music and collective worship that people participate in. It takes on many

forms but is essentially an outlet for people to express praise, gratitude, or repentance. Historically, it has been comprised of congregational singing with occasional accompaniment of musical instruments. Hoover (2006) underscores that since the Protestant Reformation, media and religion have been closely linked, particularly in forms of oration, rituals, and even dress (p. 300). All of these elements signify that the practice of liturgy is cultivated through media and is used to emphasizes one leader (or group of leaders) guiding the audience in the same practice. These examples emphasize that media exists in many forms, and that the practice of liturgy can be better understood as creative expression, which we understand to mean art, performance, and digital media (Cheong, 2016). Through the practice of liturgy, the goal for people is to connect to a rooted tradition through individual reflection. This idea is best described by Hjarvard (2015) who identifies liturgical practice as being both "out there" and "within," meaning it can be both an outward expression and internal reflection. They both exist simultaneously. Much like any other human experience, this element of religion helps people engage with one another after they've had a chance to internalize their experiences, feelings, or deeper thought.

Liturgical practices, particularly in large gatherings such as megachurches, have now incorporated IMAG (image magnification), background LED screens, and abstract video overlay. Ward (2018) notes that these particular uses of digital media are proof of media convergence at work in religious institutions. While these elements can enable creative expression, they can also be modified to disperse liturgical material beyond the physical building. For example, IMAG that is used to amplify the stage during a performance can also be transformed into a video for online distribution. Likewise, a live

performance recording can be distributed as a concert via music streaming platforms. These are classic techniques we identify in other spectacles such as sporting events, concerts, and exhibitions in other institutions. The impact is consistent in that it draws people's attention away from participation as a group that is physically present and capable of engaging with one another or the divine (McLuhan, McLuhan, & Szklarek, 2010). Rather, they act more as individual viewers of a performance that is presented merely for their entertainment (Pine & Gilmore, 2011).

Cheong (2016) also notes the use of these technologies in liturgical practices, but attributes this media utilization to the performative nature of religion. She emphasizes that religion emerges in communication, so it makes sense that we create meaning through new media and are able to incorporate it in liturgical practices that require communication. The idea that religion emerges through media is also reinforced by Christians (2002), whose earlier reflections note that audiovisual technology is built from and contributes to our human experience. As a result, we can't think of it as existing independently from us, but rather something we must engage in. In *Portrait of a Liturgical Artist,* Crowley (2008) emphasizes that visual elements help contribute to a corporate experience and guide people as a collective. Likewise, Hjarvard (2015) notes that audiovisual media can help cultivate an environment for a communal experience. While participation is important, the establishment of an environment can help usher participation. Because collective participation and communal experience make up the foundation of liturgical practices, it's clear that there is an important intersection here that needs to be further explored.

In his musings on the effect of media on the interpretation of religious practices, Marshall McLuhan (2014) explores this question based on how the message is perceived through the medium. Because his background is in Catholicism, he offers a closer perspective on the extravagant elements that mediate personal experiences in a religious setting. His conclusions lean toward distraction in liturgical practices as well (McLuhan, McLuhan, & Szklarek, 2010). He argues that liturgical practices ought to illicit raw and natural responses from people as they grapple with putting their feelings into words. Audiovisual media is already coded with some of these reflections, which leaves less space for people to be able to construct their own meaning, either individually or collectively. To clarify the effect, McLuhan, McLuhan, & Szklarek (2010) trace the impact of the microphone on liturgical practices. He notes that traditional liturgical practice was rooted in verbal delivery. As such, murmuring and change of tone were integral to engagement. With the introduction of the microphone in the altar space boosts sound “to a meaningless degree” (p. 112).

As the purpose of liturgy is to bring focus and calm the turmoil of thoughts, the incorporation of audiovisual media needs to be examined to see if it is accomplishing this original purpose. For content creators in particular, understanding the effects of media incorporation can help guide the production. One of the defining elements of the spectacle is humankind’s ability to recreate naturally occurring phenomena through media technologies (Kellner, 2003). It’s possible that visual extravagance in a reflective space brings people into a state of awe that is consistent with the original purpose of liturgy and creative expression (Christians, 2002). A grandiose display can have a fixating effect that leaves viewers focused solely on what is in front of them. This

perspective is apparent in the early church's use of elaborate architecture and elements such as stained glass, which were overwhelming to attendants and purposely used to create a captivating visual effect, while at the same time telling a story (McLuhan, McLuhan, & Szklarek, 2010). Juxtaposed with the banality of everyday life, this experience has the potential to inspire deeper thinking about purpose and meaning outside of the religious institution space. The question here is whether spectacle displays are able to usher the audience into a space that inspires internalization, whether in the moment or as a later takeaway. This power of media on the practice of liturgy also extends to the way media impacts the practice of teaching.

Teaching

Similar to scholars' analysis of the transition liturgy has made, religious teaching is likewise being examined as a practice transformed into a viewer experience. Historically, teaching was a way of promoting personal reflection, much like the purpose of liturgy or creative expression. Nord (2004) documents the history of Evangelical practices and notes that they were often early adaptors in incorporating new media formats for furthering faith. Nord emphasizes that the persistence of religion is underscored by its ability to utilize media and create content comparable to popular media. He also points out that the persistence of religion is not due to the constant stream of content produced by religious institutions. Rather, teaching historically included furthering the message of faith (via books, pamphlets, or tracts) as well as teaching people how to read the publications. This dual mission created a generally more informed public. That proceeded to create content on their own using their newfound

understanding of media and by gaining accessibility that was encouraged by religious institutions (Nord, 2004).

Today, teaching incorporates creative media, such as condensed, animated videos or other visual illustrations. These are frequently eye-catching, entertaining, as well as informative. Full teaching messages are videotaped or livestreamed as well. Hirschkind (2011) argues that since religion itself is a mediation between the divine and human, the use of media to convey teaching simply acts as an extension of that same mediation. As a result, the intent behind incorporating media into teaching practices is to enable people to carry those messages outside religious institutions. As they become mediators themselves, they actively engage people and can cultivate discussions that would inspire higher levels of thinking. Neil Postman (2007), however, argues that deliberate discourse (on any topic) has died down due to instantaneous information which comes with the increase in media. As a result, information is presented with the motive of entertainment. Postman's argument is that we've come to see media as authority. Its domination and convergence make media seem like a governing power. This argument is in line with other scholars who base religious teaching on the inherent authority religion holds. Hoover (2011, 2006), for example, emphasizes that religious authority is often unquestioned (or at least has been unquestioned in the past), yet the authority religious institutions have over their own symbols is diminishing as symbols are dispersed into the public sphere. The more content religious institutions create for teaching purposes and release to the public, the more they open themselves up to scrutiny and individualized interpretation by their audiences. Therefore, Postman's argument is reinforced in that media is the ultimate authority, but it's so accessible that everyone has it.

The distribution structure is an important element to analyze in the visibility of religious teaching. Christians (2002) notes that the social world is driven by efficiency and as a result, we become slaves to accomplishing as much as possible. The tradeoff is that mass transmission takes away from ethics, or the original intent of the message. Hoover (2005) concurs with this idea by emphasizing that media's limitations often force religion to make compromises to fit into a specific form. Because media has these inherent restrictions, religious institutions frequently feel the need to emphasize the divide between secular and religious content (Scannell 2015). There is much disagreement about whether media itself can be considered secular, since it has become entangled in many religious functions. Yet, the divide exists. Redfield's (1947) description of the "folk society" sheds some light on the organization of religious communities, which are often reluctant to interact with members outside of their society. Redfield asserts that people in these groups have a strong sense of belonging together, and as a result, the "secular" category of content is defined as separate. The effect, therefore, is that religious content is accepted without question as it belongs to the members of the community who created it (Redfield 1947).

As teaching becomes vastly distributed, the impact of commodification is becoming a major concern for scholars. Hjarvard (2015) cautions that as people are presented with more opportunities to voice their opinions and interpretations, teaching becomes less centralized. At the same time, media is increasing the visibility of religious institutions and many are seeking to increase impact through marketing techniques. Jethani (2009) traces this trend back to the culture's demand for branded experiences. The message no longer holds value in itself, but rather is amplified by the fact that it

comes from a particular speaker known for powerful messages or because audiovisual content that is created around a message, thereby making it a full learning experience. Pine and Gilmore (2011) attribute this popularity of branded media experiences to the rise of individualism. Although experiences are mass-produced, people encounter them individually, making experiences seem customizable. As media amplifies the spectacle, content encompassing religious teachings gradually takes on more elements of grandiosity to keep up with the demand.

Pauline Hope Cheong (2016) notes that there is a focus on religious teaching as "performative," but that religious meaning is co-produced by leaders and audiences. Teaching in any space is often identified through a model where an "expert" presents information to a large group of people whose sole role is to absorb the information. Especially in a religious institution, elements such as the stage or audio amplification augment this perspective of an expert communicating ideas, since teaching is often conveyed this way. This adds to the illusion that meaning is contained within one person. Cheong's argument that religious meaning is co-created requires that we reexamine the role media plays in teaching practices and focus on how audiences can work together to cultivate meaning, even while they seem to be mere receivers of information. Baudrillard makes the same argument decades earlier by observing that "information devours meaning" (1994, p. 80). He states that too much time is spent in staging information that deeper meaning becomes muddled and lost. It is entirely possible for media to act as a supplement to the presentation of information, but there needs to be space for the audience to contribute knowledge, personal insight, and feedback to the perceived "expert," as well as to each other. Additionally, Mark Ward (2018) suggests that the use

of teaching tools creates an even greater divide in congregational perception of religion. He examines the phenomenon through the lens of technological determinism and notes that the divide is caused mainly through the use of the tools which are meant to help people create content. Within religious spaces, knowledge of video and access to it may not be an issue. Outside of that space however, technology can dictate what people see and the information they are exposed to. Understanding religious teaching can be a major deterrent for some who have no access to platforms content is dispersed through. If certain voices are excluded, the dynamic of religious meaning changes. Ward (2018) also cautions against religious institutions who aim for mass market concentration as content created by "old" media of print and television is transferred to "new" digital platforms. Ward underscores the church's main function as instructive, but suggests that distribution of teaching content can be driven by performance (2018). As Kellner notes, the "fun factor" of media content can give institutions an advantage (2003). Likewise, Ward's observations turn to religious institutions' market incentives to create and distribute popular content (2018). This idea conveys how religious institutions may have succumbed to the demands of the spectacle within the practice of teaching, however, there is also the practice of community engagement that can be impacted by the influence of the spectacle.

Community Engagement

The community engagement element is where liturgy and teaching come together and transform into actions that impact surrounding environments. ~~In~~ a study conducted by Lewis, Macgregor, and Putnam (2013), found that Americans exhibit more

"neighborly" behaviors due to the social networks established in religious congregations. Stroope (2012) also confirms this connection between congregation relationships and how people sustain religious beliefs, as well as institutional engagement. Both studies stressed that relationships are ultimately the driving force of community engagement. They are able to come about because people engage in practices together and learn as a collective. As a result, these networks spur advocacy and promote charitable giving.

Interestingly enough, many religious institutions with an "impact" function embedded in their mission statements translate their purpose into increasing visibility. As a result, many institutions utilize audiovisual media to amplify events, campaigns, and outreaches because they are better equipped to tell compelling stories of worthwhile causes. Scannell (2015) outlines the commonly held perspective of religious institutions who claim that technology is a gift from above and should be utilized for good. When paired with the desire to make a massive impact, this belief drives religious institutions to produce content rather than emphasizing the role relationships have on propelling charity work. Ward (2018) posits a warning for focusing solely on producing content. Viewers demand quality content, and the high cost of producing such content creates an economic incentive for mass distribution, which is needed to recover costs. This has the potential to shift the focus away from community engagement toward celebrity status and fame driven by quality of content produced. This is the same observation that Kellner makes about organizations aiming to succeed in markets amplified by spectacle-driven media (2003). The incentive to make a greater impact on the community can open the door for spectacle influence if people value the impact more than the mission behind the impact.

The focus on grander impact has the potential to bring spectacle to the forefront while pushing the values to the back.

Hoover (2011) emphasizes that media has close ties to cultural values and helps set a valuation system to the stories we tell. Particularly for aid programs with religious roots, much of the content that is produced is driven by true stories. We value truth as a culture, so it makes sense that the integration of audiovisual media to spur community engagement efforts is driven by content that is linked to truth. Because the stories told by outreaches are so intimate, they serve as beacons meant to entice involvement from members of religious gatherings. The stories become extensions of real people's lives. That value is inherent, but it is not always transferred through the film medium. Again, Hoover's observations of media's limitations are helpful in understanding that religious institutions are often forced to make content sacrifices in order to fit stories into a particular format (2005). The issue is that there can't always be restrictions on the story of someone's life. Because religious institutions generally focus on bettering lives and communities, questions of how to properly utilize media should always be on the minds of content creators.

Visual storytelling in particular relies on elements of entertainment, so there are things that are dramatized for maximum effect or cut away because they do not seem relevant. The general public isn't encouraged to validate stories. Audiences can only see what is presented to them, which places an unspoken trust in the filmmakers. Considering this, Jethani (2009) notes the paradox of promoting truth while aiming for calculated impact. He asserts that certain spectacle elements are necessary to illicit responses from the audience. For example, for programs to seem effective and to inspire people to

become involved, highlighting results is important. This emphasizes the potential of community engagement and acts as incentive for people to contribute. Postman's (2007) thinking is also in line with this idea that we've crafted a culture for ourselves where we look to the media for truth. If truth is slowly losing value, this becomes problematic for the function of community engagement, making it difficult to entice audiences to participate in an effort or a cause if the outcome isn't amplified through media. The spectacle demands that the resolution be idealized: the grander the impact desired, the bigger the spectacle needs to be (Kellner, 2003).

As several scholars indicate, media and religion perpetually interact (Hoover, 2006, 2011; Hjarvard, 2015; McLuhan, McLuhan, & Szklarek, 2010; Scannell, 2015). To further understand the impact of media integration in the common religious practices of liturgy, teaching, and community engagement, a more in-depth analysis is needed. As Hirschkind (2011) notes that meaning is cultivated at the individual and the communal experience levels, it is imperative to discern where media application can be beneficial to an experience and where it becomes a distraction. It is also important to think critically about how these mediated messages can be interpreted differently. The goal is to be aware of how religion is perceived through media in each of the three elements and to gauge how this perception changes over time. If religion is an active and not a passive function, how can media tools cultivate environments where religious practices thrive and help people co-create meaning?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

In order to gain a holistic perspective of the role media plays in liturgy, teaching and community engagement, I aim to examine various examples of religious media already incorporated in each of the three practices. Since the scope of religion is comprised of all three types of practices, it's important to analyze them together to understand the overall effect the spectacle has. This multi-faceted approach is also what makes this study different from the ones already examined in the literature review, as it aims to illuminate the effect audiovisual media has on multiple levels of integration in religious practices.

Because the analysis treats the audience as participants in all three types of Evangelical religious practices, it establishes the audience as one culture or group. Therefore, diversity in ages, ethnicities, genders, denominations, or other specific characteristics are not factors. While this provision can help provide insight into trends created by the culture as a whole, the main limitation in this study is that it does not account for interpretations of individuals based on those diverse characteristics. The results are therefore useful to better gauge overall influence of the spectator culture on the religious practices.

The main method of this study is comprised of a textual analysis focused on examining a diverse sample of 9 media texts, of which three will be analyzed per religious practice. The texts that were selected were chosen because they capture extended video footage of people engaging in that particular practice. In a meta twist, all of the examples also use the video produced as a tool to help others engage in the practice

the video originally documented. Because these videos exist on easily accessible video streaming platforms, access was also a determining factor. Finally, the most important determinant for the selection of each sample was how widely it was distributed in Evangelical circles. The liturgy examples were taken from Christian Copyright Licensing International's (CCLI) top 100 worship songs. As a privately-owned company, CCLI provides resources for churches regarding copyrights of Christian worship songs. As a result, the company offers compiled data of popular songs used in Evangelical circles. While *A Holy Moment* was not a single song that was analyzed, the media sample came from an interlude of Bethel songs, which were on the CCLI top 100 list. Additionally, teaching examples were taken from popular RightNow Media videos. The RightNow Media streaming platform is exclusively available for churches to offer their attendees access to teaching content, conference highlights, and interviews from prominent leaders in the Evangelical sphere. As a result, the data for popular content on RightNow Media is driven by similar religious organizations. Additionally, the Patreon pages for these content producers were reviewed to see the extent of outside support garnered by viewers. While the Holy Post (Phil Vischer) was not available on RightNow Media at the time of this study, similar content by Phil Vischer was prominent and the added support of Patreon subscribers made the example a worthwhile addition to the study. Finally, community engagement examples were taken from a few of the largest nonprofit organizations with expressed faith affiliation. Again, a strong video presence was a key determinant in the sample selection, but the texts that were selected were also longer-form pieces that captured more data to be analyzed. All 9 examples were taken from the past 7 years, making them the perfect examples to analyze recent trends of Evangelical

practices. Although the texts are used in different practices, they were analyzed by the same characteristics, since they will all be examined for the same influence of the spectacle culture, despite the practices they are currently used in. This approach will ensure consistency and reliability. The driving force of this study is grounded in the following research questions:

1. How does audiovisual media encourage spectacle viewership when used in the religious practices of creative expression (liturgy), teaching, and community engagement?
2. What does the audiovisual media incorporation communicate within the realm of these three specific religious practices that makes it different from other popular events not guided by religious meaning?

Because all of these examples are real life practices based on events, my analysis approach is grounded in critical theory with a focus on the spectacle interpretation. Since critical theory looks closely at language, symbolism, communication, this framework is helpful in examining how people are pressured by external forces of circumstance (Horkheimer, 1982). For media influences on religion in particular, the critical theory spectacle perspective can help explain some of the trends religious institutions are following.

The following media examples will be analyzed for the practice of Liturgy: the live performance recording of Elevation Worship's *Do It Again*, video from Darlene Zschech's *Revealing Jesus: A Live Worship Experience*, and *A Holy Moment* by Bethel Music. All of these examples are highly visual representations of liturgical practices involving large gatherings. They are varied by location, style, year of production, and run

time. Collectively, they represent facets of creative expression, including music, light, video work, and the creative use of space. Together, the analyses of these video samples would paint a more general picture of present-day liturgical practices in media-publicized religious gatherings.

In addition, the following examples will be analyzed for the Teaching practices of religious institutions: *The Bible Project* animated video collection, Mark Batterson's video series *The Circle Maker,* and *The Holy Post* (Phil Vischer) Podcast. Since all of these are lengthy series, one "episode" or segment will be selected at random and used as a representation of the whole series. Since the episodes are consistent in run time, style, and structure, the extrapolation of one episode will be enough to speak for the whole series.

Finally, the media example created to perform the Community Engagement function will be as follows: International Justice Mission's *The Deep Place* Director's Cut, the short film campaign from the World Vision: Water, and *Samaritan's Purse TV* - Operation Christmas Child videos. Much like the teaching examples, these are also produced in series. As a result, episodes of these examples will also be selected at random. Nevertheless, the consistency in these examples remains representative of the whole series.

A textual analysis of these examples will be conducted on a case by case basis, but from the perspective of the branch it is meant to be utilized for. Rather than looking into how media could be utilized effectively, however, the main focus will be on the themes that emerge. The analysis will also examine the recognizable elements religious media has adapted from other fields. To keep better track of the diverse characteristics,

all findings will be compiled in the general overview chart included in the appendix. By analyzing the texts along the characteristics defined in the chart, an emergent code is expected to appear. The analysis will include an investigation of who the content was produced by and for what anticipated distribution model. Additionally, the goal is to also analyze the run time for each piece, whether it was staged or scripted, if special effects were used, and with what type of musical accompaniment. This portion of the analysis would help determine if there are inherent patterns in the media created for religious practices and if they are driven by popular demand. From there, the analysis will determine what role these elements play and how the text is impacted with their incorporation. Finally, the analysis will look into the visible religious elements that are included in each media example in order to differentiate how these religious practices can be distinguished from other popular events not guided by religious meaning. This will help determine how much religious media has been impacted by the allure of the spectator culture. This initial part of the analysis will be guided by manual descriptive coding, which would define each media text with a word or phrase, thereby identifying recurring patterns in content created for the three separate types of practices (Saldaña, 2015). Because the characteristics of religious media are examined in the same way, the descriptive coding compiled in the general overview chart would also reveal ways in which media incorporation impacts the practices in the same way.

The goal of this study is not to examine the intent of the content, but rather how it is presented and received. While the points in the general overview chart will be helpful in establishing a foundation for examining the content with a unified code, a more in-depth analysis is needed to determine how media incorporation transforms religious

practices. As a result, I will be conducting a critical-cultural analysis with an inductive code. To begin with, all texts will be thoroughly described through detailed notes of what is seen on screen in the space, the addition of audio, what the audience appears to be doing (if shots of the audience are included), and what a digital audience can see. To maintain consistency within the notes, the study will evaluate each of the media examples by exploring the following questions in depth:

1. Who/what is the focus in the selected media text?
2. Who is the audience and what is its role when viewing the media?

Both of these questions focuses less on the logistics of the text and more on what the text conveys as a whole. By answering these questions, the goal is to uncover a descriptive code that summarizes the content. This approach is modeled according to Saldaña's (2015) guidelines that coding is done during and after data collection. These in-depth analyses, along with the data aggregating design developed by the chart, will be helpful in illuminating conclusions about what audiovisual media adds and what it takes away from the meanings traditionally associated with the three forms of religious practices.

Both the descriptions and the evaluations will be coded manually using in vivo coding, which retains words or phrases taken from large sections of notes and assigns them as labels (Saldaña, 2015). These labels will then identify recurring words/phrases from within the media examples. These patterns will then be complied in a data chart included in the appendix. As in vivo coding ties distinctive words or phrases to whole sections of data in the form of a label, it is useful for summarizing large portions of notes without distorting meaning. The descriptions and the guiding questions for the notes all

focus on the perspective of the audience. As a result, this code will help establish patterns within one practice, but also highlight any crossover patterns among the three practices. Overall, the media samples chosen for this analysis represent the scope of religious practices in various settings. The results should therefore provide a general idea of the spectacle's influence of audiovisual media integration in the religious practices of liturgy, teaching, and community engagement.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Description of Sample: Elevation Worship "Do It Again" Live

The full 10 min clip is the live performance of the song "Do It Again" by Elevation Worship. The opening is a grayscale video depicting soft movement of mountains and trees as the instrumental music begins. What viewers see in the video is also what is presented on a large LED screen hanging over the stage as well as several smaller screens behind the band. As the performance begins, there is a combination of wide shots of the stage, close ups of the band, and varied shots of the audience in the space. Many camera shots are positioned from the point of view of the audience, which acts as a bridge between the audience and the band. The stage is located at the front of the space, but the curved design makes people gather around it, which helps blur the divide between the performers and the participants. Haze is used, which helps bring definition to the lights, but also blends the space where the stage ends and the audience begins in the video. While the stage space is flooded with spotlights, they are targeted entirely at band members. The audience remains in the dark. At various parts in the video, viewers can see extremely wide shots that include both the stage and the audience, where the lighting divide is apparent. Additionally, there is a row of microphones at the front of the stage targeted at the audience, which helps both encourage and capture their participation. Finally, the use of image magnification (IMAG) in the space brings the audience closer to the band. These kinds of connections show both sides of the stage divide engaging in the practice together. The band members act as leaders of the creative expression practice and entice the audience to follow along. At the interlude of the song, the spotlights on

stage pivot from focusing on the band to focusing on the audience, illuminating some of the audience that was previously in the dark. At the conclusion of the song, the band fades some of the music and plays soft chords in the background, which creates an opportunity for the audience to individually engage in their own form of liturgy and creative expression. The recorded video reverts back to the grayscale mountain footage, giving people in the video a little privacy for creative expression, while also encouraging online video viewers to reflect on the meaning of the lyrics (centered on mountains). After about a minute, the band builds back into the song and varied shots of the band and the audience return.

Analysis: Elevation Worship "Do It Again" Live

- Who/what is the focus in the selected media text?

In this media example, the focus is on the song itself. The video captures shots of the stage perspective as well as the audience perspective equally. The visuals (mountain footage) amplifies the emphasis on the lyrics. The lights in the space and the setup of the stage bring the focus to the band at certain points, but the video people are viewing online and the use of IMAG in the space helps even the focus to all of the elements in the environment. It's clear that the space is an important component for the practice of liturgy, yet elements don't amplify the space or distract from the practice. This use of media emphasizes Hjarvard's observation that media and religion are both capable of cultivating environments, and this effect is amplified when they come together (2015). In this example, the focus is on bringing the leaders and the participants together, which is emphasized by the way IMAG draws attention to both equally. From this use, media acts

as a tool for engagement rather than the focus itself. While the performance contains elements of the spectacle, it does not transform attenders into mere spectators.

- Who is the audience and what is its role when viewing the media?

The audience is not restricted in any way. From the video, it's clear that the audience is diverse (age groups, ethnicities, genders, etc.). When viewing the video incorporated into the performance, the audience's role is to engage in the practice. This is clear from the video as people in the audience interact with the members of the band. The use of IMAG makes the space appear smaller as it amplifies portions of the stage as well as fragments of the audience. This deliberate effort of bringing the audience to the same level as the performers ensures that everyone is able to engage in the practice together. Because the video footage shown on the LED screens in the space is a visual representation of lyrics, it further entices the audience to actively reflect on the practice, reinforcing their role as participants rather than spectators. Here, media is not used to amplify the focus, but rather usher the participants into a more guided experience.

In addition to the audience physically present in the video, there is also an online audience whose role revolves around viewing the video as a whole. This audience is also not restricted in any way, but its role does come with limitations. The video is comprised of IMAG and the grayscale footage shown on the LED screens. While that compilation gives viewers a general perspective, it also controls what viewers see. Their role is to also engage in the practice through a digital platform, but the edited video restricts viewer's freedom to choose what they see. Here, the spectacle has the power to dictate what the audience sees, but since much of the footage is taken from the IMAG incorporated in the space, the digital audience directed to the interaction between the live audience and the

performers. This invites the digital audience to engage in the same way. While spectacle elements exist in the space, they are emphasized by their usefulness in bringing people together rather than capturing the attention.

Table 1:

Data Coded for "Do It Again" Analysis

Emergent Themes	Focus of Media	Target Audience	Role of Audience
• Band and audience merging • Creating an environment	• Content itself • Band and audience engaging together	• Dual audience (physical/digital) • Diverse group	• Engaging with content/with others • Private experience mixed with communal experience

Description of Sample: Revealing Jesus

Revealing Jesus takes the form of a live concert that was recorded and later distributed as a worship experience on various video and music streaming platforms (YouTube, Spotify, Vimeo…). The sample that was examined here was the video recording of the full concert, which is about an hour and thirty minutes. The video opens with shots of the band intercut with nature time-lapse videos. Scripture appears on the screen and is followed by the official logo for the Revealing Jesus project, which is an ornate cross. Throughout the remainder of the performance, there are no other visible religious symbols. As the band initiates the first song, shots of the stage, the band, and the audience are cut quicker. From the video, the space is revealed to have a stage at the front, with all of the audience facing toward it. Upon the stage, there are several platforms that raise up the drummer and the keyboardist. This layering of the stage

further creates a divide between the band and the audience, as the band towers over the audience. The backdrop of the stage is a large LED screen which constantly loops footage of moving light points and other abstract designs. Raised above the stage are five projection screens. The center one consistently projects the logo and one screen on each side of the logo remains blank but adds dimension to the space. To the right and left of the stage, two larger screens display IMAG footage throughout the performance. The IMAG provides a comprehensive perspective of the liturgical experience since the live feed illuminates close up details of the band's performance and the audience's response.

Analysis: Revealing Jesus

- Who/what is the focus in the selected media text?

From the format of the space and the style of the video coverage, it appears as though the focus is at the front. Because video has the potential to capture snapshots of reality, the focus of this example was fractured at times. Attention was drawn to the content itself, the stage, the audience, and the band fairly quickly. For a practice that has many different components, the incorporation of audiovisual media in this example made it difficult to emphasize one focus. As the performance progressed, it included music, interludes of speaking, audience reaction, videos, testimonials from the band and instrumentals that encourage the audience to reflect quietly to themselves. This further distracts from the focus of the practice itself and reinforces Kellner's argument that spectacle elements compete for our attention, which could make it difficult to concentrate on what's meant to be the focus (2013).

- Who is the audience and what is its role when viewing the media?

From reviewing the video, it's clear that there are two distinct audiences. The first one was physically present at the performance and was able to engage with the IMAG video. The second audience is the one that engages with the recorded performance on a digital platform. Both audiences see the same footage, but in different contexts. It's possible that the audiences overlap, but the larger audience is the one that watching through digital platforms. The role of the live audience is to engage in the performance, as well as with others in the audience. Contrary, the digital audience can only engage with the content. Even though the title of this media example defines the content as an "experience," it seems that the experience is less impactful for the digital audience. The disconnect between the physical/virtual audiences makes it difficult for content to be created for both. This could explain why this media example had such fractured spotlights on so many details. If the content was created for the physical audience and the digital audience simultaneously, it's likely that the two separate audience needs weren't properly understood, but were meshed together. The result is audiovisual media that attempts to meet the needs of two very different audiences. The effect is that one audience can feel invited to participate in the liturgy practice, while the other audience merely takes on the role of spectators.

The limitation for the audience watching through a digital platform is that they can only see what the cameras show them, but it also helps guide viewers through the practice by encouraging internal reflection. A live audience has more viewership freedom, on the other hand. They can choose to look at screens, stage, or each other, but this freedom can also be a distraction. Fractured attention required to view all of the elements of the spectacle leaves less focus for internal reflection. At several points in the

video, wider shots revealed several members of the audience taping on their mobile phones, which reinforces the interpretation of the "worship experience" as a spectacle rather than a practice. The simple act of people recording on their phones suggests that viewers see the performance as strictly a concert, rather than an invitation to engage in the communal practice of liturgy. In this context, it's clear that an overemphasis of the stage can signify to the audience that the stage is of utmost importance. This has the potential to conflict with the meaning intended by the media. As a result, the spectacle has the potential to take over if media is not thoughtfully incorporated into the practice of liturgy.

Table 2:

Data Coded for "Revealing Jesus" Analysis

Emergent Themes	Focus of Media	Target Audience	Role of Audience
• Band and audience divided • Space emphasized	• Band • Details of the space	• Dual audience (physical/digital) • Diverse group • Technological determinism	• Outsider viewership

Description of Sample: A Holy Moment

This media sample is taken from Bethel Music's live recording of an extended interlude between worship songs. The video captures individuals engaging in liturgical practices (singing, playing music, praying, speaking softly to one another, and even painting). Included in the video, we can see elements of the space, such as the stage, musicians, and background screens, but there are shots that also reveal the audience. Some people face the front (stage), but there are also people who break off in groups and face each other.

At the beginning of the video, there is an emphasis on one main speaker ushering people into individual creative expression practices, but the rest of the video is a compilation of wide and focused shots of everything going on set to ambient music. There is one LED screen at the back of the stage that consistently shows swirling points of light (like stars), which creates an ambient atmosphere. Additionally, there are two projection screens hoisted above the stage that show IMAG, but the shots switch infrequently and stay wide, so as to capture the stage and the audience at the same time. While the beginning of the video shows closeup shots of the stage, the majority of the video captures closeups of the audience. There are several spotlights on the stage, but they are all dimmed, which shifts the focus away from the stage and the people on it.

The video documents people's engagement with the practice of liturgy. The result is a more authentic representation of the practice, and can be used in the space to guide the audience to a particular form of engagement, such as outward expression, internal reflection, or a combination of both. As Stroope notes in his analysis of people's engagement with religious activities, what urges people to participate is the sense of community (2012). Therefore, it's important to emphasize communal engagement in practices. With IMAG's potential to merge the divide set by the stage, people on both sides of the stage can focus on the practice itself and engage rather than simply observe the individual elements in the space.

Analysis: A Holy Moment

- Who/what is the focus in the selected media text?

For the majority of the video, the focus is the audience. There are points in the video where the footage is dark, but it's clear that the cameras are focused on people in the space. Image quality is simply less of a priority. There is no performance to focus on. The music played by the band is soft and ambient, which draws attention away from specific band members. Shots of the stage are included, but those on stage are acting as part of the audience. They are engaging in the same liturgical practices and they are not cast in a spotlight. The video still contains elements typically identified with the spectacle, but they are used to emphasize the audience and their participation in a common activity. Because everyone is highlighted in the same way, there is no sole point of focus. Instead, the activity itself is amplified.

- Who is the audience and what is its role when viewing the media?

Since there is no consistent IMAG in the space, the audience for this video is strictly the online audience. At times, it's almost awkward watching the video because it feels like an intrusion on a private experience. At moments, the lights in the space dim, as if intentionally creating a private environment. The video is not a promotional tool. The pace is slow and the shots are detailed, but it seems that they are geared toward authenticity rather than cinematic intent since many of them are dark and shaky. Because the result isn't well-lit and in-focus, it appears less staged. As it doesn't draw attention to itself, the video functions as a tool to help people recognize each other and their role in the practice. Since there is not one main focus, the power of the spectacle is diminished.

For an online audience, the role is less clear. If the video was meant to inspire the online audience to also engage in the liturgy practice, then the missing element is the live environment. When viewed from a digital platform, the video no longer unifies

participants if they are watching from individual screens. As a result, the atmosphere changes. In the space, the video perfectly captures an essential part of the experience, which is the interaction with other people. A strictly online viewership doesn't guarantee the same kind of interaction, and thereby, the same experience. The quality of the video emphasizes the priorities placed on the function of media in an online platform. Rather than containing elements of entertainment, the video is dark and shaky. It's not optimal for online viewership. As a result, it entices audiences in both spaces to search for a deeper meaning by reflecting internally and being present with those around them. This message conveyed by media is unique to the religious practice of liturgy in that it turns focus away from what could be made entertaining. Instead, the media used in this practice magnifies the importance of slowness, reflection, silence, and community, which act as an antidote to distraction.

Table 3:

Data Coded for "A Holy Moment" Analysis

Emergent Themes	**Focus of Media**	**Target Audience**	**Role of Audience**
• Personal reflection • Outward expression • Band and audience merging	• Band and audience engaging together	• Dual audience (physical/digital) • Diverse group	• Engaging with content/with others • Private experience mixed with communal experience

Description of Sample: The Bible Project

The Bible Project is a collection of videos (each an average of 7 minutes). There are currently over 100 videos, all of which follow the same format: simple animations are

paired with voiceovers to explain certain passages in the Bible. The "episode' examined for this analysis was based on the "Book of Proverbs," although the style, tone, and timing is consistent throughout the rest of the short episodes. Each animation includes Scripture readings, interpretations from scholars, reference to the historical background, and the biblical context. Voiceovers are conducted as banter between the two creators and include interruptions, additional thoughts, and clarifications. All illustrations are professionally done and flow with the voiceovers fairly quickly. As a bonus for each "episode," the last minute or so of each video shows footage of the content creators in order to give people a sense of the producers, their motivations, and their process.

Analysis: The Bible Project

- Who/what is the focus in the selected media text?

The focus in the text is on the content as a teaching tool. All information in each "episode" is geared toward helping viewers better understand complex Biblical content. The visual format is paired with verbal explanations to help target multiple learning styles. It's important to note that these two elements work together. Material is simplified for easy understanding and complicated ideas are repeated to ensure understanding and retention. The simple illustrations also help draw attention to the content itself rather than extra special effects and visual techniques to make the content stand out more. This approach places emphasis on the content itself rather than how it is presented. The impact of the spectacle is minimal here because the content is given space to speak for itself. The entertainment elements that bolster spectacle viewership are minimized. While the videos are professionally produced, they don't incorporate exaggerated effects meant to promote

the series over any other teaching series. Viewership is encouraged for knowledge rather than entertainment.

- Who is the audience and what is its role when viewing the media?

The style of the content suggests that the intended audience is everyone. The simple presentation of information requires no previous knowledge or foundational understanding. Material is contained within each "episode," and if information builds on a previous episode, any necessary knowledge is recapped. It's important to note that literacy is not required to view videos, since all words are either explained in a voiceover or depicted visually. However, the digital distribution can create an audience restriction. Technological determinism is at play when people without internet or digital platform access are prevented from seeing content. Despite the restriction, the design of this teaching tool makes it easy for people to engage in the practice of teaching. The distribution on multiple free platforms makes it simple for people to tune in at any time, chose videos that they want to watch, and engage for as long as they wish. The short-form of the videos makes them convenient. Since the distribution is independent (and free), another role of the audience is engagement through giving. The project is funded entirely through crowdsourcing, which helps the creators not only produce content by garnering financial support, but also to gauge the level of interest audiences have in the content.

While it's clear that this teaching series is only viable with support garnered from the audience, there is no evidence to suggest that media is incorporated to specifically attract attention from a wide audience range. Since the content stands alone, the impact spectacle effect is unidentifiable. Information is presented concisely and supported by

multiple viewpoints rather than excessive effects. Attention is focused on a single topic to be transferred to the audience. Entertainment is not a priority. These findings support Cheong's argument that religious media reinforces authority, particularly because it gives speakers a chance to incorporate different pedagogical styles (2016). The result is a series crafted around media as a tool to help people engage in the religious practice of teaching.

A unique supplementary role of audience engagement is their ability to contribute to production through crowdfunding efforts. As audiences engage with the content and financially support the creators, they are building a foundation for similar, future content to be created. The problem with this model is that if the audience is limited from the beginning, all future content will also be limiting since it will only be targeted toward supporters and not the full potential audience. This is Hjarvard's main caution about "popular religion" and it's potential to dictate meaning if perpetually reinforced (2015).

Table 4:

Data Coded for "The Bible Project" Analysis

Emergent Themes	**Focus of Media**	**Target Audience**	**Role of Audience**
• Collection, series, consistent episodes • Professional content • One concept	• Content itself • Complex ideas thoroughly explained • Main idea highlighted	• Digital audience only • No restrictions • Technological determinism	• Engaging through giving • No engagement with others • Crowdfunding emphasizes engagement

Description of Sample: The Circle Maker

Since this teaching series is comprised of several sessions, only the first session was examined for this analysis, although the style of the first session is representative of the

whole series. The video opens up with b-roll footage of the Washington D.C. area, which sets the stage for the main speaker, Mark Batterson. Through a series of close up shots, he shares the history of prayer circles, and elaborates with historical examples. Toward the end of the session, he also introduces guests who share a personal story relevant to Batterson's explanation of prayer circles. While Batterson does the majority of the talking, his stories are accompanied by illustrations. This element helps provide another dimension to his teaching style.

Analysis: The Circle Maker

- Who/what is the focus in the selected media text?

The focus in this selected session is the principle of prayer circles that Batterson is trying to relate. This is clear from his use of multiple examples, illustrations, and guests' stories, who help reinforce the validity of his teaching. While Cheong (2016) argues that religious teaching is often unquestioned, this example attempts remedy this assumption and gain validity by including voices other than the main speaker. The close ups of Batterson's face while he is identifying the concepts helps bring the focus to what he is saying, rather than to his surroundings. Even the run time of the session emphasizes that the focus in on the idea being presented. Once the idea was explained in full, the video came to a close.

- Who is the audience and what is its role when viewing the media?

The content in this media sample is centered around the topic of prayer, so the audience would really only be people interested in the topic. Additionally, because this

teaching series was only released digitally, the audience would need to know about the series and have ways of accessing it. While these restrictions limit the audience size, they amplify the meaning the audience is able to create from the series since the content is specifically targeted to people who are interested. As a result, the role of the audience is to take in the information presented to them, which can signify a spectacle effect if the audience is not inspired to engage with the content or think critically about it. The digital platform also means that the audience doesn't engage with each other in the same space. This creates an obstruction in audience engagement. As engagement with content is the primary role of the audience in the teaching practice, limiting the audience through the platform delivery weakens the function, particularly when considering Hoover's argument that audiences play an active role in co-producing religious meaning from media they consume (2006). Because viewers don't engage with each other, their role is defined as spectators. The significance of this role suggests that religious media does not inherently guide people to engage. For the practice of teaching in particular, the incorporation of media in the practice needs to be constructed around the audience's involvement. Otherwise, merely presenting people with information makes them passive observers, which is no different from mainstream informative media.

Table 5:

Data Coded for "The Circle Maker" Analysis

Emergent Themes	Focus of Media	Target Audience	Role of Audience
• Series consistent • One concept • Authority on topic established	• Content itself • Main idea, multiple examples	• Digital audience only • People interested in topic • Technological determinism	• Engagement with content • No engagement with others

Description of Sample: The Holy Post (Phil Vischer) Podcast

Although this is a podcast, episodes are released in both audio and video format. For this analysis, I will be examining the video release of episode 232, which is the last original episode released in 2016 (there was a throwback episode following this one). As the last episode, it worked as a summary of the year, as well as a good highlight of what other episodes are like. The style of all the video episodes consists of multiple shots of the three/four speakers (two or three hosts and a different guest). The first part of the episode is friendly banter between the hosts and guest. Topics discussed usually center around news stories and current events. The hosts have backgrounds in theology and religion, so they contribute a perspective on how current events could to be analyzed from an Evangelical perspective. The teaching they offer isn't direct, but comes through thoughtful commentary on the issues that are relevant for everyone. Part of their teaching is also done through the resources they highlight for people to refer to on their own. The role of the guest is to help add more depth to the discussion. The guests who are brought in are invited for their particular expertise and unique opinions. The goal is to provide audiences with a much broader perspective on issues they come across every day.

In this episode, the guest is David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Research Group. A lot of the conversation is centered on the 2016 election (because it was a major event at the time). David offers his perspective as a researcher as the group discusses trends that are at the intersection of faith and culture. Using current news stories, the crew frames their discussion and goes over several perspectives. The episode progresses with an overview of a book released by Barna that is a resource for the audiences. The

conversation in the episode then shifts to a select few trends identified by Barna in the book. Throughout the discussion, the crew brings up several open-ended questions for the audience to consider. While no specific answers are given, audiences are encouraged to consider the questions for themselves and think on a critical level.

Analysis: The Holy Post (Phil Vischer) Podcast

- Who/what is the focus in the selected media text?

The content here is the main focus. All information is carefully analyzed and presented to the audience. The semi-scripted format provides and outline for the content, but also leaves room for the hosts to discuss and suggest broader ideas. The format also leaves space for viewers to contribute their thoughts and ideas. Not only does this connect viewers to the creators of the content, but it also connects viewers to each other and enables them to engage in the same content, even if it's not directly. This outcome reflects Cheong's idea that religious meaning emerges in communication (2016). While the content itself is a channel for communication, discussion around content also contributes to the cultivated meaning. This interpretation is in line with Hoover's argument that religious media is reflexive and does not offer a dominant perspective (2005).

- Who is the audience and what is its role when viewing the media?

While the intended audience can be anyone, the content seems to be targeted toward people who care about being up to date with current events and like hearing from various perspectives. As a result, the role of the audience is to actively engage in the teaching by thinking critically about the information presented to them. Because different

opinions and ideas are represented within the media text, the audience isn't necessarily taught what to think, but rather how to think. This structure is uniquely different from other types of teaching content driven by a few core concepts that are amplified by spectacle elements. As the word "practice" suggests, the goal of incorporating media in teaching is not to convey information to a passive audience. Rather, it is to tie meaning to a discipline, or consistent practice. By emphasizing the audience as crucial contributors to teaching, the spectacle is neutralized. Viewers are not captivated by a centralized focus, but rather recognize the focus as existing within them and moong them.

Table 6:

Data Coded for "The Holy Post (Phil Vischer) Podcast" Analysis

Emergent Themes	**Focus of Media**	**Target Audience**	**Role of Audience**
• Consistent episodes • Few topics • Authority on topic established • Thoughtful commentary	• Content itself • Critical thinking	• Digital audience only • Technological determinism	• Engagement with content • Open discussion encouraged

Description of Sample: The Deep Place Director's Cut

This IJM film is a cinematic retelling of Foli's life as a young boy enslaved on Lake Volta in Ghana. The story unfolds for viewers to see the complicated circumstances that got Foli into this position. Foli's only close family is his grandfather, who is temporarily unable to care for him. As a result, Foli is entrusted into the care of a distant relative. Under the promise that Foli would attend school, Foli is taken away. While his grandfather is unable to check up on him, Foli is forced to work excessive hours on a

fishing boat until he is rescued by the IJM team. He is then given proper care and the chance to attend school.

The film is dark and color-graded, seemingly meant to represent Foli's dark circumstances. Much of the film moves slowly, as suspense is built around the turns in Foli's life. The compilation of shots mostly consists of close ups, so audiences can read more of the characters' expressions and feelings. Throughout the film, a voiceover of Foli's character tells the story as well. There is a lot of water imagery, which is helpful to understanding his position on the lake, but also emphasizes that Foli feels trapped. Even though an actor portrays Foli for the retelling on the story, the real Foli also makes an appearance at the end of the film as IJM emphasizes the real impact they made in his life. For most of the film, however, IJM is in the background. There is a small logo imprinted in a corner of the film, but it is given no introduction. Additionally, only the last 30 seconds of the film highlight a call for action, emphasizing IJM's work. This is done solely through text appearing on the screen, no voiceover, and a link appearing in the corner of the video.

Analysis: The Deep Place (Director's Cut)

- Who/what is the focus in the selected media text?

The focus of the film is clearly to tell this one story of a boy named Foli in depth. While the larger picture is to show the impact of IJM's work, the focus is limited to only Foli's experience. The film quickly depicts other children in the same situation as Foli, but since most of the close ups are of Foli and since his voiceover drives the story, it's clear that he is the focus. It's interesting that the majority of the film focuses on Foli's life before IJM's rescue. Very little of the film is dedicated to highlighting his life afterward. This

could have been a storytelling tactic to garner audience emotion, but it also shifts the focus to a darker time for Foli. The overall candid nature of this story is amplified with spectacle elements (cinematic production, musical score, etc). While these are powerful storytelling tactics, the impact has the potential to change the way a story is received by the audience. Since the media sample is based on a true story, how the story is conveyed to an audience also conveys the life of the person the story is about. By amplifying community engagement this way, audiovisual media can clearly define the correlation between efforts and impact. Unfortunately, as Hoover (2005) notes, media comes with limitations, which often forces religious organizations to make compromises in order to fit into specific requirements of the media format. For media to be incorporated into the community engagement practice, it needs to adhere to restrictions put in place for effective storytelling. This perspective of video created for community engagement addresses the medium's susceptibility to comply with spectacle demands. Regardless of the inherent value of a story, the film medium demands that a story be crafted to match audience attention spans and expectations. Christians (2002) makes this same observation when he underscores that religious content needs to retain focus on value questions, but often "concentrates on style, mechanics, and digital capacity instead" (p. 42). By refocusing the attention back to the value of candid storytelling and community involvement, videos incorporated in the practice can avoid succumbing to the demands of the spectacle driven by amplified cinematic content.

- Who is the audience and what is its role when viewing the media?

Since there is a call to action at the end of the film, this suggests that the intended audience is anyone who can support IJM and its work. To help people better connect with

the call to action, the style of the film makes sense. It looks like the goal is to tell a compelling story that would inspire viewers to join the call to action. For the majority of the film, where Foli's story is told, the role of the audience is to become immersed and develop a connection to the character. I think that's also the significance of the appearance of the real Foli at the end. The tactic helps reinforce the validity of the story. This makes media a powerful tool that can be used to highlight external philanthropic work of institutions through the involvement of individuals guided by moral values. The impact, however, is made to be the point of ultimate concern, so media is structured to amplify the influence community engagement can have. Christians (2002) addresses this conundrum by cautioning religious organizations against prioritizing transmission over ethics. While institutional impact is important in the role of community engagement, overemphasis on impact can take away from the values that drive the mission of the organization. This opens up doors for spectacle elements to take precedent over the original story. The goal can be a good cause, but religious media needs to also drive the impact through values and meaning cultivated within a community. If the goal is impact alone, religious media is indistinguishable from popular media.

Table 7:

Data Coded for "The Deep Place" Analysis

Emergent Themes	**Focus of Media**	**Target Audience**	**Role of Audience**
• True story retelling • Cinematic techniques used • Concludes with organization "rescue"	• One story • Happy ending • Impact	• Digital audience only • No restrictions • Targeted to supporters	• Call to action • Connection to main character

Description of Sample: World Vision: Empowering Women in Kenya

The video opens up with ambient music as a woman's voiceover talks about her tedious journey to getting clean water. She speaks in Maa, so the video also includes English subtitles. The woman tells of her journey, her struggle without clean water, and the various ways that her life was impacted. She then contrasts that living situation with her life after the World Vision team brought clean water to where she lived. While the video begins with dark color grading, as the story progresses, the colors also brighten. The video focuses on the one woman in the beginning. Wider shots are included later on to show how her relationship with people has changed after clean water was brought into her life. The wider shots with more people seem to communicate a greater impact. The last 15 seconds of the film clip are a call to action, asking people to donate to the clean water initiative spurred by World Vision. Though the film is distributed by YouTube through World Vision's channel, there few other identifiers linking the video to World Vision. Throughout the video, there is one logo in the bottom righthand corner and a larger logo appears during the call to action at the very end. The only other reference in the video is from the woman describing her experience with World Vision and several shots of people drinking clean water from World Vision branded cups.

Analysis: World Vision: Empowering Women in Kenya

- Who/what is the focus in the selected media text?

Because we only hear one voiceover and most of the shots in the video focus on one woman, it's clear that the focus of the media text is this woman and her experience

with World Vision. The video is split fairly evenly in telling the woman's story before and after clean water is introduced, so the focus is equal in both parts (at about the halfway point, the audience learns about the role of World Vision in the woman's life). However, the brighter colors and wider shots in the video emphasize World Vision's impact toward the end, which draws audience attention to the latter part of the video. This makes the focus more centered more on the impact. Since the story only depicts this one woman's experience, the video seems to utilize the woman's experience and extrapolate the impact World Vision can make on people in similar circumstances as this woman. Again, the video reveals that while the focus is on impact, the media used to depict the impact does not underscore values that would drive people to engage. If values are not emphasized as the foundation for action, the impact alone can be amplified as spectacle. It's the Evangelical values of a group that guide people to engage in the practice of community engagement.

- Who is the audience and what is its role when viewing the media?

Viewers of the video can be anyone. The connection to the audience is drawn through clean water, which everyone needs. Because everyone can understand the basic need of the woman, the video is relatable to everyone. The call to action at the end of the video, however, is targeted toward people who are able to donate to World Vision efforts. The video first introduces the issue by helping the audience connect to a real person facing real struggles, it then outlines an impact World Vision is capable of making, and then the very end it identifies how community engagement is the driving force behind this impact. The emphasis of this undeniable need guides people in specific ways that they can take action. The targeted response from the audience also evidences how media

has taken on elements of the spectacle. The story is not told for the sake of sharing this woman's journey. Rather, the video is crafted to illicit an emotional response from viewers and directly them to one specific action they can take. While Hirschkind (2011) advocates media use by religious institutions to reinforce their prominence as social forces, this conflicts with Kellner's (2003) view that the media spectacle can exhibit control over viewers by targeting for a particular response.

Table 8:

Data Coded for "World Vision: Empowering Women in Kenya" Analysis

Emergent Themes	Focus of Media	Target Audience	Role of Audience
• True story retelling • Cinematic techniques used • Initial struggle outlined	• One story/single point of view • Happy ending • Impact	• Digital audience only • No restrictions • Targeted to supporters	• Call to action • Community emphasis • Viewer education on issues

Description of Sample: Samaritan's Purse TV – Ernesto's Story

The video tells the story of Ernesto, a young boy living in Mazatlan, Mexico. Through the Operation Christmas Child program developed by the Samaritan's Purse organization, Ernesto became a recipient of a shoebox filled with small gifts. He explains how the shoeboxes were distributed by a local church in order to engage with the community and build relationships with people. Through that gift, he was introduced to a new group of people and invited to attend church. While the gifts were small, Ernesto explains how they were perfect for him and how excited he was with everything that was in his shoebox. The shoebox became a conversation piece among his friends and within his

family. The video shows Ernesto opening the box, where viewers can see a deflated soccer ball and pump, along with other small toys and school supplies. Ernesto talks about his love of soccer, and the video cuts to shots of Ernesto playing soccer with his friends. Since becoming connected to a church, Ernesto notes that his behavior has changed and he feels happier. In several shot, Ernesto's mother also discusses the changes she's seen in her son. While folding laundry, she speaks to the camera about her own journey to becoming connected in the church her son goes to. They both credit the shoebox as the gesture they needed to become involved in the local church. While the video is recorded with them both speaking in Spanish, it includes English subtitles as well. In the final frames of the video, we see the official logo for Operation Christmas Child.

Analysis: Samaritan's Purse TV – Ernesto's Story

- Who/what is the focus in the selected media text?

In the short video, the recurring focus is on the shoebox. The audience follows the origin of the shoebox, learns what it contains, and how it impacts the recipient. The box itself is highlighted as a tool for community engagement, but it's clear from the video that the box is symbolic of the gesture of gift-giving. Through this gesture, the box acts as an outreach channel. The documentary style of the video, along with the focus on the essence of gift-giving, shifts the focus away from impact and toward the values that drive that impact. This video captures elements of Ernesto's story beyond the initial impact of the box. As a result, meaning is ascribed to the box, and the impact is able to travel beyond Ernesto's individual experience. Through his experience, his mother,

grandmother, and friends are all impacted as well. Because the focus highlights the value of caring, it's difficult to incorporate spectacle elements. The story is simplified and shortened to better hold the audience's attention without spectacle effects. The media example is able to speak for itself without additional bolstering for maximum effect.

- Who is the audience and what is its role when viewing the media?

The audience is everyone. The video is short, and offers a heartwarming story that can resonate with anyone. There is no call to action, so the audience role isn't defined. The length of the video and the original digital distribution suggests that the audience is encouraged to share the video through social media platforms. The absent call to action also speaks to how the audience might benefit from simply hearing the story. Since the expected response isn't outlined, the value conveyed by this video is within the story itself. The emphasis is placed on educating viewers about the operations of the Samaritan's Purse organization in order to inspire the audience to engage as a community. As a result, the spectacle viewership isn't reinforced in any way.

Table 9:

Data Coded for "Samaritan's Purse TV – Ernesto's Story" Analysis

Emergent Themes	**Focus of Media**	**Target Audience**	**Role of Audience**
• True story retelling • Cinematic techniques used • No introduction to organization	• Single point of view • One tool for impact • Impact	• Digital audience only • No restrictions • Targeted to supporters	• Community emphasis • Viewer education on issues • Sharing via social media

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, my goal was to analyze prominent religious media samples used in the practices of liturgy, teaching, and community engagement in Evangelical circles. Through an in-depth analysis of three texts used in each practice, I was able to examine the influence of spectacle culture on the content produced. My findings revealed that while spectacle viewership did emerge as a trend in media used for these practices, it was frequently a pattern driven by impact as many people as possible rather than by a desire to engage audiences. In order to captivate audiences, the emphasis on the spectacle was prioritized over the inherent meaning, thereby diluting the engagement effect. The videos evidence that audiences become involved on the practices, but on a shallow. Media incorporated elements of entertainment and that do not inspire deeper meaning.

The call to engage is the essential element that distinguishes religious media as tools of religious practices. As many scholars note, media and religion are intertwined, which makes it difficult to think of audiovisual media as tools (Hoover, 2006, 2011; Hjarvard, 2015; McLuhan, McLuhan, & Szklarek, 2010; Scannell, 2015). Rather, it's more beneficial to bolstering religious practices by thinking of media as emerging in communication (Cheong, 2016). This perspective relies heavily on the role of the audience who contribute to practices by supporting the cultivation of collective meaning.

As religion is becomes more visible in media, it confirms its augmented relationship with media (Hjarvard, 2015). Unfortunately, this also means that religion is losing control over its symbols (Hoover, 2011). This could explain why the initial analysis of the texts revealed very few recognizable religious symbols. Therefore, a

simple analysis of the videos made it difficult to categorize the as elements of religious practice. This doesn't hinder the effect of the media, but it does emphasize that a greater focus needs to be placed on how audiences are invited to engage. Otherwise, audiovisual media contributes no religious meaning to the practice and cannot be distinguished in any way from secular media. Media is already tied to secular entertainment (Hoover, 2005). Therefore, special considerations must be made to emphasize its non-secular functions before incorporating them into the practice of liturgy.

Since many spectacle elements were incorporated in the production and utilization of religious media, they came to mirror similar media examples not guided by religious meaning. The emphasis on values and collective meaning is what ultimately distinguishes them as religious. As a result, the focus on content created for religious practices needs to be shifted toward people's ability to participate in what can help them further cultivate meaning in their lives.

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APPENDIX

ADDITIONAL TABLES

Table 10:
General Overview Chart

	Title	Produced by	Distribution Model	Run Time	Staged/ Scripted	Special Effects Used	Type of Music Included	Visible Religious Symbols
Liturgy	Do it Again	Elevation Church	• Live recording • YouTube	• 10 mins	Staged	• Abstract Video • Haze • IMAG • LED screens	• Contemporary worship	• None
	Revealing Jesus	Integrity Music	• Live recording • YouTube • Vimeo • Music streaming platforms (Spotify, iTunes) • DVD release	• 90 min • 7-10 min individual songs	Staged Semi-Scripted	• Video • Stage lights • IMAG • LED screens • Abstract video	• Orchestral • Contemporary worship	• Scripture • Cross logo
	A Holy Moment	Bethel Music	• YouTube	50 mins	Staged/Live interaction	• Moving lights • Haze • Abstract Video	• Instrumental • Ambient	• None
Teaching	The Bible Project: Proverbs	Independent - Crowdfunded	• Youtube • Patreon • Independent Site	6 min	Scripted	• Animation • Voiceover	• Instrumental	• Scripture
	The Circle Maker: Session 1	Zondervan	• Amazon • YouTube • Independent Site	22 mins	Scripted	• Animation	• Instrumental	• Illustrations • Scripture
	The Holy Post: Episode 232	Independent - Crowdfunded	• iTunes • YouTube • Independent Site • Pateron	54 mins	Semi-scripted	• None	• Instrumental • Improv	• None
Community Engagement	The Deep Place	International Justice Mission	• YouTube • Independent Site	11 mins	Staged/ scripted	• Voiceover • Subtitles	• Ambient	• Logo
	World Vision: Empowering Women in Kenya	World Vision	• YouTube • Independent Site	3:25 mins	Staged/ scripted	• Voiceover • Subtitles	• Ambient	• Logo
	Samaritan's Purse TV – Ernesto's Story	Samaritan's Purse	• Independent Site	1:50 mins	Staged/ scripted	• Subtitles	• Instrumental	• Logo

Table 11:
Compiled Coded Data

	Emergent Themes	Focus of Media	Target Audience	Role of Audience
Creative Expression (Liturgy)	• Band and audience merging • Building an environment • Holistic representation of the space • Personal reflection • Outward expression	• Content itself • Front/stage of the space • Audience/ interactions	• Physical vs. online audience • Access/discovery limits audience • Diverse group • No restrictions	• Engaging with content/with others • Private experience • Participation vs. outsider viewership
Teaching	• Collection, series, consistent episodes • Professionally done • One concept presented/limited topics discussed • Restricted time • Authority on topic established • Thoughtful commentary	• Content itself • Complex ideas repeated • Multiple examples used • One main concept/idea	• Technological determinism: access/knowledge • Diverse group • No restrictions • People interested in a topic	• Engagement through giving • Digital audience doesn't engage with each other • Engagement with content
Community Engagement	• True story retelling • Cinematic techniques used • Organizational involvement at the end • Initial struggle outlined • No introduction to organization	• One story/experience • Single point of view • Happy ending • One tool for impact • Impact itself	• Viewers are everyone • Targeted to supporters/people able to donate • Digital audience	• Call to action • Connect with the character • Community emphasis • Viewer education on issues • Sharing via social media