

Foreword

Somewhere in the Mediterranean world, sometime in the early second century CE, someone named Mark created a novel literary form that came to be known as a “gospel”—that is, “good news.” The medium used to convey the message was named by the message. Mark’s “gospel” was somewhat like a biography, which the Romans were familiar with through the writing of Plutarch. It was sort of a speech but not quite. It was somewhat of a history like that by Josephus, but it was more. Just a few paragraphs into Mark’s gospel, we know that we are reading real events that happened in a historical time and in a particular place; this isn’t fairy tale or fable. Yet we also have the feeling that Mark wants more than to give us information about Jesus; Mark wants us to be encountered by Jesus. Mark wants us not only to know about Jesus but to follow Jesus. The gospel is a story that almost speaks for itself but not quite. It was as if the truth about Jesus Christ, the truth who was Jesus Christ, could only be conveyed through the invention of a new genre, a new medium appropriate to the message called *euangellion*.

There is much reason to believe that Mark expected most people to hear, rather than to read, his gospel. The Christian faith is not innate; it cannot be discovered by long walks in the woods or by delving into the recesses of one’s ego. Someone must tell you this odd, wonderful story that you can’t make up by yourself. As Paul says, faith comes through hearing. Something about the good news of Jesus Christ privileges the media of oral communication. Faith, this particular faith, is acoustical, auditory by nature.

In other words, the Christian faith must be mediated. We are not born with it, nor can we come upon it without help, nor can we grow into it without exemplary demonstration by others. Every Christian is therefore cast in the position of a receiver, utterly dependent on someone else to bring us into faith in Jesus Christ. All knowing about Christ is relational, an interaction between persons, as is appropriate to trinitarian faith. Someone must be willing to hand over to us the story of how the world has shifted on its axis in Jesus, to stand up and testify to an event that has occurred that changed the course of history. Someone must dare to be a witness and walk this way before us. All of us are Christians only through mediation.

Mediation is inherent in an incarnational faith. The supreme act of mediation is Jesus Christ. Having been encountered by God with Us, God

in flesh, Christians quite naturally expect to encounter God in the material, time-bound, social world, because that's where the incarnation occurred. The Holy Spirit did not shrink from enfleshment in a Jew from Nazareth, so we are unsurprised to discover that the Holy Spirit continues to animate, call, reveal, push, and prod through human means of communication. Having encountered God in bread and wine, it's not too much of a sacramental leap for us to find God using the Internet to get close to us.

And yet Christians learn to take care with media. Not every gospel that was written made it into the canon. Not every story about Jesus was treasured and remembered by the church. Though Jews were suspicious of visual images and worried that painting and sculpture might be used as violations of the first commandment against image making, Gentiles loved painting, sculpture, frescoes, and mosaics. How curious that during the great period of evangelization of Gentiles we have so few early Christian images in the first centuries, and almost none depicting Jesus himself. These Jews become Christians were appropriately cautious with their adoption of gentile media. Then, in the fourth century, there was an explosion of specifically Christian art throughout the Mediterranean world, and pictures of Jesus were everywhere, icons too. Constantinians baptized Roman architecture, adapting forms like the basilica for church rites and the mosaic encrusted apse to encase divine liturgy.

Creative theologians like Ambrose and Gregory the Great created new music to fit the church's liturgy, as if the fine but bombastic Roman imperial music just wouldn't do for the praise of a crucified Savior. An incarnational faith seemed to provoke an unprecedented outburst of artistic creativity, a media frenzy instigated by newfound faith in an incarnate God. An incarnational faith quite naturally locates, embodies, and posits itself in human media.

The church's creative utilization of media was not without internal critique and sometimes bitter controversy. There was fierce debate over the propriety and the fidelity of some Christian media making, the so-called Iconoclastic Controversy. The church seemed to realize that media were not innocent. Not all songs and not all images could be baptized and brought into the church's worship. Throughout the history of the church, there has been continued debate over the place of media, the appropriateness of new media, and the ambiguous role of media in proclaiming and forming Christian faith. Staring at a row of defaced, decapitated statues of saints in an English parish church—victims of the more radical wing of the English Reformation—reminded me that the church has not only lived through its artistic, communicative media but has also had some of its most violent fights over media.

Marshall McLuhan taught us that a medium can change the message in subtle and powerful ways. We think we are using our technological tools only to discover that they are using (and sometimes even abusing) us. Though we presume that we have become masters of the world through our technology, we are dismayed that we are mastered. In every advance of technology, something is gained, but something is usually lost as well, and the loss may be an essential aspect of our humanity. Media are not innocent conveyors of information.

In *Mediating Faith*, Clint Schneklath continues, extends, and enriches the church's debates over the media of *euangellion*. Although Clint is generally enthusiastic about the rise of new communicative media, seeing these as potential extensions of the church's catechetical, evangelical, and apologetic tasks, he is far from uncritical about our trans-media era. While he boldly claims that much of the new media can be signs of "the cooperation of the Holy Spirit with neurology," Clint also knows that media are never passive, neutral conduits for human communication. Neither dystopian nor utopian, *Mediating Faith* draws on some of the most perceptive psychosocial commentators on media and technology and puts them in conversation with classical Christian theology, particularly Christian trinitarian pneumatology. Clint encourages the church to critically embrace the new media by desacralizing media and by making media subservient to our theological commitments.

Because Clint is a Lutheran, he knows the radical way the grace of God devastates our vain human attempts to get to God. Clint, as a Lutheran, also has a healthy appreciation for the way we use even the greatest of human creations for idolatrous purposes, attempting to build various ladders up to God, unwilling to receive God's radical condescension to us in Jesus Christ. Throughout *Mediating Faith*, we see a robust, thoroughly Lutheran pneumatology at work. Though God's primary locus for mediatorial work is the church, the church neither contains nor limits God's encroachment upon God's creation. The Holy Spirit's machinations are always ahead of and beyond the church that is created by the mediating Holy Spirit. In one place, Clint even says that the Holy Spirit tends to be "hyper-mediated."

Media like Mark's gospel required the church to spend centuries developing the exegetical, hermeneutical, and homiletical skills to faithfully use necessary media without having them distort the *euangellion* they were purporting to bring to speech. Now awash in new communicative media and overwhelmed with proliferating media platforms, we must learn new skills for using media without allowing media to abuse us. Rapidly developing technology won't allow us centuries to reflect on these issues and to acquire

those critical skills. Clint gives us some of the essential critical tools we need to exploit new media in service of communication of and formation by the gospel.

Clint's book is one of those rare gifts: a book that comes at the right time, written by the right person for the right reasons. All of us preachers, and not us preachers alone, will find *Mediating Faith* to be a gift in the fulfillment of our vocation to pass on the faith to a new generation who, without the relentlessly mediatorial work of the Holy Spirit, would not know the truth about God.

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