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Participatio Actuosa in Cyberspace?
Vatican II's Liturgical Vision in a Digital World*

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  Fifty years ago this December 4, the Second Vatican Council promulgated its first two documents, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, and *Inter Mirifica*, the Decree on the Means of Social Communication. At the time, these texts shared little but the date of their publication; only minor thematic overlaps existed. After the Council too, the two documents went their separate ways: *Sacrosanctum Concilium* quickly became a much-studied text while *Inter Mirifica* remained largely marginal.
  In terms of broader cultural change, however, precisely the opposite development occurred in the years following the Council. While means of social communication expanded exponentially in the wake of novel technologies, attendance at worship, and especially popular devotions, declined dramatically, at least in the North Atlantic world.[1] Yet together with—and indeed related to—these contrasting movements, another development took place that conjoined the separate conciliar topics of 1963 in an entirely new way. Worship and digital means of communication converged in a site unknown fifty years ago: cyberspace.[2] As part of this development, both very old and entirely new liturgical practices have flourished online. Cyberspace also hosts communities of faith that exist only online, for example in Second Life, a web-based inter-active virtual-reality environment. Clearly, liturgical life in cyberspace is multifaceted, effervescent, perplexing, constantly shifting, and ceaselessly expanding.[3]
  In what follows, I explore some of these online liturgical practices (focusing on practices related to the catholic tradition, broadly conceived) as part of the larger cultural transformations of which they are a part. My interest in online liturgical practices is rooted in the conviction that liturgical life is always shaped and is indeed co-constituted by larger

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        To cite but one contemporary statistic for these inverse trends: 15 percent of young adult Catholics in the United States attend Mass weekly, while 72 percent use social networking sites. See Brandon Vogt, *The Church and New Media: Blogging Converts, Online Activists, and Bishops Who Tweet* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2011), 60.

  [2] I use the term "cyberspace" here as shorthand for the essential diversity and breadth of digitally generated communication technologies, i.e., "any form of digital technology that involves user engagement with software via a screen interface," to borrow Rachel Wagner's succinct definition; see her *Godwired: Religion, Ritual and Virtual Reality*, Media, Religion and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1.

  [3] Ritual life in cyberspace is, of course, multireligious. For glimpses of this reality, see the special issue on "Rituals on the Internet," in *Online: Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, ed. Kerstin Radde-Antweiler, 02.1 (http://online.uni-hd.de, 2006). Last accessed July 8, 2013.

cultural trends.

The spectrum of these online liturgical practices, even when confined to a largely catholic context, is exceedingly wide, from official church websites that basically mirror traditional liturgical forms, through a wide variety of practices of popular piety, to contemporary new rites. I will focus my explorations here on key theological concerns. There is an urgent need for a deeper theological engagement with these constantly changing and expanding liturgical practices. In terms of methodology, it is important not to compare an ideal or idealized liturgical life offline with the worst of online liturgical practices. Also important is a recognition that conceptual categories of importance to liturgical studies—among them space, presence, participation, and community—are undergoing profound cultural transformations that become especially visible in cyberspace.

1. Exploring Liturgical Practices in Cyberspace

1.1. *Bodies @ Virtual Worship?*

The mere notion of liturgical life in cyberspace routinely arouses misgivings on the assumption that being @ worship can only be disembodied, virtual, and thus unreal. Yet clear and easy distinctions between online-virtual and offline-real worlds have become increasingly difficult, especially after the appearance of Web 2.0 a decade or so ago.[4] Since then, people have steadily assimilated internet-accessing devices into daily living. As Christopher Helland, a theorist of online rituals, recently noted: "Many people using the Internet no longer distinguish between life-online and life-offline—rather, being 'online' has become part of their daily life and social existence."[5] More basically still, online worship is neither accessible nor inhabitable as an entirely disembodied, dematerialized world. Like offline worship, online worship relies on and cannot do without the actual bodies of worshipers. Without at least some bodily engagement, entrance into an online sacred space is impossible. What may very well not be present is the "physical co-presence of worshippers."[6] A further point is important here. Online liturgical practices are material practices, as are all offline liturgies too. In the case of online worship, this material practice is enabled, foundationally, by the interface of a human body with a computer or other internet-accessing device. At the same time, offline worship too has become more and more technologically enhanced, and that not only in its accessories (e.g., the sound system) but in the very bodies worshipers bring into the sanctuary (think, for example, of cochlear implants, arterial stents, or cosmetic and gender reassignment surgeries). What online liturgical practices force us to see is that there is no unmediated ("pure") bodily presence at worship, be it offline or online. There are only bodies (plural), and these are always in flux, porous, changing, and transitory.[7]

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[4] The term "Web 2.0" refers to the move from the older web-as-information "Web 1.0" to the much more inter-active web-as-platform that emerged just over a decade ago.

[5] Christopher Helland, "Ritual," in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell (New York: Routledge, 2013), 26–40, at 26.

[6] I owe this helpful description to Graham Ward; see his essay "Belonging to the Church," in *Liturgy in Migration: From the Upper Room to Cyberspace*, ed. Teresa Berger (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 1–16.

[7] Craig A. Baron has taken this point up in his "Sacraments 'Really Save' in Disneyland: Reconciling Bodies in Virtual Reality," *Questions Liturgiques/Studies in Liturgy* 86 (2005): 284–305, at 285, 289–92.

The above insights, when taken together, open a space for interpreting online liturgical practices on a continuum with offline bodily presences at worship. Rather than being disembodied, online worship requires its own bodily proprieties, governed on the one hand by what new communication technologies enable, facilitate, and constrain (to date, smelling incense is not possible in an online sanctuary) and on the other hand by the bodily particulars of the worshiper who enters sacred space in cyberspace. Mention of the bodily particulars of each worshiper leads directly to the next key theme.

1.2. Actuosa Participatio *in Cyberspace?*

A second set of anxieties over online liturgical practices clusters around the notion of active participation, a key concept of the twentieth-century Liturgical Movement and of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (e.g., SC 14, et al.). The routine suspicion regarding cyber-space liturgies is that active participation is not possible in a virtual environment. This suspicion demands a closer look. I begin by noting that most online practices are shaped by what constitutes active participation in offline worship. The linkage between offline and online participation is especially visible when traditional liturgical practices are simply transported online. Yet traditional liturgical practices have also been adapted to fit the technological possibilities and constraints of the internet. An example is the "cyber-rosary" whose beads change color from gold to blue as one prays along and moves the cursor over the beads.[8]

Especially since the emergence of Web 2.0, those who engage in liturgical and devotional practices online are increasingly inter-active participants. Even in a technologically basic example such as online eucharistic adoration, the worshiper is not purely and passively receiving the image of a monstrance through a webcam on a screen. Forms of active liturgical participation are possible here, even if such participation differs from offline forms. The more technologically sophisticated the online worship site is, the more varied and rich are the possibilities of participation.[9]

Contemporary theorizing of how people "view" and "receive" has moved away from a notion of passive reception to an appreciation of the active negotiation that happens in reception. A receiver is now seen as an active participant, and the range of active participation is magnified in computer-based interactivity. As studies have shown, online multimedial and multisensual environments are not only connected to but have physical effects on participants.[10]

The networked culture of cyberspace also encourages participants to draw on quite different liturgical sources simultaneously, blending, for example, online eucharistic adoration with Coptic chant, African drumming, or global song. For better or for worse, online worshipers are very actively involved in the production of liturgical meaning since liturgical practices can be individualized and "user-generated" to some degree. Yet such active participation—and its dangers, especially of hyper-individualization—are not a

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[8] This online rosary can be found at http://cathedralofmary.org/faith/Rosary/index.html; last accessed July 17, 2013.

[9] An example is the online church St. Pixels, which grew out of the Church of Fools experiment. St. Pixels recently moved most of its activities to within Facebook (http://www.facebook.com/stpixels), where congregants gather each day for a short worship service or social event.

[10] Cf. Kimberly Knight, "Sacred Space in Cyberspace," in *Yale Divinity School Reflections* 96 (2009): 43–46, at 46.

characteristic of worship in cyberspace alone. As Heidi Campbell put it:

> What the internet does is make the practices of "pic-n-mix" religiosity mainstream, as the process of mixing multiple sources or forms of spiritual self-expression, once done by individuals in private or on the fringes, becomes more accessible and visible to the wider culture.[11]

I contend that online liturgical practices put pressure on the conventional construal of *actuosa participatio*. In their difference from the conventional liturgical participation of a worshiper, online practices shed light on the privileged norm or ideal person behind the conventional understanding of active participation. The notion of active participation, so influential throughout the twentieth century, suddenly seems closely linked to quintessentially modern construals of the self, namely, the image of a fixed, clearly definable, able-bodied, self-determining, neuro-typical, healthy, unencumbered self (who also often just happens to be male). The postmodern online worshipers may allow us to see this more clearly because they embody a self that is opaque, fluid, porous, contested, decentered, and—as often as not—gender-ambiguous or transgender, at least online. These worshipers thus call attention to the fact that there is no general or abstract active participation, only concrete, particular, embodied participants.

1.3. *Liturgical Community Online?*

The first-ever virtual ecclesial community was established in 1992 when the *[First Church of Cyberspace](...)* opened its online sanctuary. This interdenominational congregation (sponsored by Presbyterians) mirrored the features considered important in Protestant worship offline. The focus was on the pastor's sermons, now posted on the web.[12] Since then, online liturgical communities have developed much more vibrant and technologically sophisticated ways of congregational presence.[13] A well-known example is the 2004 twelve-week experiment with [Church of Fools](...), a church environment built in Shockwave that was sponsored by the Methodist Church of Great Britain as well as the Anglican bishop of London.[14] The traditional-looking sanctuary, which included a crypt, was able to hold just over thirty avatars (although more worshipers could join in even if unable fully to take part). Communication in the sanctuary was primarily text-based, although some sound was offered (church bells, hymn tunes, etc.). [Avatars had gestures available to them,](...) three of which were specifically "liturgical": crossing oneself, blessing others, and "hallelujah," i.e., raising one's arms in the air. As Simon Jenkins noted, the liturgical repertoire came from quite different ecclesial traditions, since the worshipers who cross themselves usually are

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[11] Ibid., 79.

[12] *The First Church of Cyberspace* continues to this day, now on the *GodWeb* at "First Church of Cyberspace, Sanctuary." At http://www.godweb.org/sanct.html; last accessed July 17, 2013.

[13] Heidi Campbell has mapped these developments; see especially her *Exploring Religious Community Online: We Are One in the Network*, Digital Formations, 24 (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), and her latest, edited volume *Digital Religion* (2013).

[14] See the description of one of the creators of Church of Fools, Simon Jenkins, in his "Rituals and Pixels: Experiments in Online Church," *Online: Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 03.1 (2008): 95–115. Cf. also Randy Cluver and Yanli Chen, "The Church of Fools: Virtual Ritual and Material Faith," *Online: Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 03.1 (2008): 116–42.

not the ones who also routinely throw up their arms in praise.[15] Yet in the online liturgies, worshipers simply made use of all the gestures available to their avatars.

These endeavors at ecclesial community and liturgical gathering in cyberspace have to be seen in the context of broader contemporary transformations of sociality. Offline too social relations and community formation have undergone profound changes. The surge of social networks in cyberspace has to be understood as part of larger transformations of sociality that have shaped worship life both offline and online.

Forms of ecclesial community online range from congregations that simply maintain a website to faith communities that exist online alone. Somewhere on the higher end of the spectrum of technological possibilities for ecclesial communion is the Vatican, which has been quite active in extending its digitally mediated presence (surprising for many, one of the earliest film clips, from 1896, features Pope Leo XIII). By now, the Vatican has its own YouTube channel, a PopeApp that allows one to follow in real time the major papal liturgies, and a papal Twitter account (which has tripled its followers since the election of Pope Francis), to name only three examples. The Vatican has also embraced new forms of liturgical gathering enabled through digital communications technologies, such as the first-ever synchronized worldwide eucharistic adoration in June 2013.

At the most digital end of the spectrum of liturgical gatherings in cyberspace are worship services that take place online alone. An example is the well-known Anglican Cathedral in Second Life,[16] a web-based interactive virtual reality environment. Second Life also hosts many smaller and less well-known congregations.[17]

Interpretations of such digital community formation have undergone sustained changes in recent years, moving from initial suspicion to increasingly nuanced ways of interpreting the ecclesial and liturgical socialities that have emerged.[18] Many theorists of digital religion today accept that there is indeed community formation in cyberspace. Accounts of participants also insist that liturgical community can be and is lived in cyberspace. This communion in prayer is marked by simultaneity across vast distances, without the physical co-presence of worshipers.

For liturgical scholars—especially those who are digital immigrants, i.e., who came of age before the widespread use of digital communication technologies—the emergence of forms of liturgical gathering that are not grounded in the physical co-presence of worshipers may be a startling development. Conventional categories of liturgical analysis, rooted as they are in pre-digital worlds, are limited in their capacity to engage this development. What interpretive approaches might enable an open reading of the evidence? I see the following

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[15] Jenkins, "Rituals and Pixels," 105.

[16] See Tim Hutchings, "The Politics of Familiarity: Visual, Liturgical and Organisational Conformity in the Online Church," *Online - Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 04.1 (2010): 63–86.

[17] Kimberly Knight, for example, pastors Koinonia Congregational Church of Second Life; see her reflections "Sacred Space in Cyberspace," *Yale Divinity School Reflections* 96 (2009): 43–46.

[18] See especially the essays by Lorne L. Dawson, "Do Virtual Religious 'Communities' Exist? Clarifying the Issues," in *Religious Communities on the Internet*, ed. Gorän Larson, Studies on Inter-Religious Relations 29 (Uppsala: Swedish Science Press, 2006), 30–46; and "Religion and the Quest for Virtual Community," in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 75–89. Dawson suggests that a virtual community exists to the degree that the following six criteria are in evidence: interactivity, stability of membership, stability of identity, netizenship and social control, signs of personal concern, and occurrence in public space.

possibilities.

First, it seems important to acknowledge—with regard to offline liturgical life—that the physical co-presence of worshipers in and of itself does not guarantee liturgical community. Second, the Christian tradition certainly knows forms of liturgical belonging not shackled to physical co-presence. In the second century, for example, Justin Martyr acknowledged that eucharistic communion extended beyond those who were able to attend a given liturgy; the eucharistic bread from the celebration was taken to those unable to attend (the text does not specify that they were sick). They belonged, even if they were prevented from being bodily present at a particular celebration. More than a millennium after Justin Martyr, Claire of Assisi, unable to attend Mass because of an illness, mystically joined and witnessed the celebration of a Mass in her cell (which in 1958 led to her designation as the patron saint of television). Other, less startling examples of ecclesial *communio* beyond physical co-presence could be mentioned, such as the communion of saints embodied in the eucharistic prayer. Here too, ecclesial communion is voiced and performed—with the saints, the pope, the local bishop, etc.—without physical co-presence. If we have these examples from within the tradition in mind, emerging forms of digitally mediated liturgical community may not be so startling after all.

Finally, it is important to remember that there is no clear-cut divide between brick-and-mortar churches and online liturgical communities. Most online faith communities do not exist online alone, and, as studies have shown, the vast majority of worshipers do not leave brick-and-mortar churches behind for online worship but rather are liturgically active in more than one realm. Online and offline realms are no longer conceptually separate but interrelated.

Taking the above points into consideration, I suggest that a cautious welcome to emerging forms of liturgical gathering in cyberspace is in order. These forms are not unambiguous by any means, but neither are offline forms of gathering for worship.

1.4. *Digital* signa sensibilia*?*

When *Sacrosanctum Concilium* spoke of liturgy under "signs that are perceivable to the senses,"[19] digitally mediated signs had not yet flooded the world. In the fifty years since the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, however, profound cultural changes have taken place in whose wake pixels, visual literacy, and digital materiality have begun to dominate the cultural imaginary. This development has put pressure on the desire expressed in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* for a simplification of rites (SC 34). Indeed, cyberspace has been compared to a medieval cathedral,[20] and Christians especially have noted parallels between online modes of engagement and offline gestures toward the transcendent.[21]

Whether one finds these claims convincing or not, online liturgical practices are material practices as are all offline liturgies. However, the kinds of materiality involved in the two realms differ at significant points. While in both offline and online worship a human body is the core materiality, the human body in online worship is interfacing with an internet-

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[19] The "*signa sensibilia*" of the important paragraph 7 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*; cf. CIC, 834.

[20] See Andrew Dewdney and Peter Ride, eds., *The New Media Handbook*, Media Practice (New York: Routledge, 2006), 293.

[21] See Wagner, *Godwired*, 5.

accessing device without necessarily being physically co-present to other worshipers. There is more to the realm of digital *signa sensibilia*. We have witnessed the emergence of a specific digitally inspired materiality, even if many of the signs are ancient. A striking example were the iPhones and iPads held high as people gathered to mourn the death of Steve Jobs: each screen displayed nothing but one flickering candle. In a similar vein, online worshipers are able to light candles in cyberspace sanctuaries, chapels, and prayer rooms or leave written prayer requests. These worshipers interact with and change the materiality of a cyber-sanctuary, often in quite similar ways to how they would interact with a brick-and-mortar one. Liturgical and sacramental mediation is always linked to particulars both of human embodiment and of materiality. Is it so difficult to see computer-mediated liturgical practices as one particular form of mediation?

1.5. *Liturgical Authorities in Cyberspace*

While *Sacrosanctum Concilium* is heralded for broadening the exercise of liturgical authority (SC 22), this broadening pales compared to the unprecedented leveling of traditional loci of authority in cyberspace. This online reality is related to broader cultural changes in the experience of authority in a network-based society, especially to the move toward increasing decentralization while at the same time more interconnected living. Liturgical expertise has proliferated in all directions through a multiplication of voices rather than through a simple replacement of traditional loci of liturgical authority. Traditional authorities too are actively present online; witness the lively and constantly updated website of the Vatican. Maybe most importantly, the internet is a vast and constantly expanding site of liturgical "information," from a basic query about the saint of the day or the readings for Sunday Mass, to such questions as "Do Catholics worship Mary?"[22]

1.6. *Cyber-Communion?*

Concerns raised so far about liturgical practices in cyberspace pale in comparison to those surrounding practices of cyber-communion. Over a decade ago (and thus before the emergence of Web 2.0!), the Vatican already warned: "Virtual reality is no substitute for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the sacramental reality of the other sacraments, and shared worship in a flesh-and-blood human community. There are no sacraments on the Internet."[23] As a theological claim this statement may continue to stand, but it is no longer true as a factual description of practices online. The plural "practices" is important because the term cyber-communion (or digital communion) covers very different phenomena: from following a eucharistic celebration over the internet or practicing eucharistic adoration online, to receiving the Eucharist in a virtual world through an

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[22] See, for example, the YouTube video posted by the Catholic blogger Devin Rose in response to that question at YouTube, "Do Catholics Worship Mary?" (August 29, 2010). At http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZjOUHi0VKs, last accessed July 17, 2013. Or the one posted on FallibleBlogma, "Do Catholics worship Mary?" (2012); at http://fallibleblogma.com/index.php/do-catholics-worship-mary/last accessed July 17, 2013. (Of course, one can also find an affirmative answer to that question in cyberspace!)

[23] See the 2002 document of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications titled "The Church and Internet," 9. At http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20020228_church-internet_en.html; last accessed July 13, 2013.

avatar, to communion elements set up in front of one's own screen that are then blessed by a minister online, who may or may not also preside at a communion service, visible via webcam. None of these phenomena can be explored in depth here, yet an essay on liturgical practices in cyberspace would be incomplete without at least an acknowledgment of forms of cyber-communion. These practices, after all, are not a mere fantasy or, alternatively, a nightmare. They exist and are being discussed, both [online][24] and in print.[25] My own initial reflections on the subject are as follows.

Theologically, we will have to presume that God is able to be present online as well as offline. We also have to presume that God can mediate God's saving grace both online and offline. The point was brought home forcefully to me recently in a story that a Syrian Orthodox colleague told me concerning his friends who had remained in Syria. These Christians gathered one Sunday in the home of a Muslim neighbor who let them borrow his computer. They had brought with them bread and wine that they set up in front of the screen and watched a eucharistic liturgy in North America. When the time came, the Christians in Syria shared the bread and wine in community with a Syrian Orthodox congregation in the United States.

"Did they receive the Body and Blood of Christ?" my colleague asked.

As is clear from this example, any reflection on digitally mediated communion practices will have to take seriously the very diverse practices—and the differing ecclesial and cultural locations—of such digital communion practices. What the Syrian Christians celebrated in front of a Muslim neighbor's computer screen, in the midst of an atrocious civil war, is different from a communion service via Twitter, which again is different from an Anglican Eucharist in a virtual world such as Second Life, where an avatar receives digital bread and wine. At least one theologian, Paul Fiddes, has recently argued that "an avatar can receive bread and wine of the Eucharist *within the logic of the virtual world* and it will still be a means of grace, [since God is present in a virtual world in a way that is suitable for its inhabitants]."[26] Regardless of how scholars of liturgy position themselves vis-à-vis these practices, simply ignoring them will not suffice.

2. The Study of Liturgical Life in Cyberspace: Concluding Reflections

We must ask how liturgical scholarship can engage this ever-expanding realm of online liturgical practices in years to come. These practices, after all, will not go away. To the contrary. How can liturgical scholars engage the emerging liturgical life in cyberspace in service to a contemporary liturgical vision responsive to the realities of a digital world? In my responses to this question, I will assume that theologians agree that there are always at

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[24] For example, on the website Ship of Fools by Mark Howe, "Digital Bread and Wine, Anyone?" At http://shipoffools.com/features/2012/online_sacraments; last accessed July 8, 2013.

[25] See, for example, Jeggle-Merz, "Gottesdienst und Internet. Ein Forschungsfeld in Zeitalter des Web 2.0," in *Zwischen Tradition und Postmoderne: Die Liturgiewissenschaft vor neuen Herausforderungen*, ed. Michael Durst and Hans Münk, Theologische Berichte 33 (Freiburg i.d.S.: Paulusverlag, 2010), 139–92, 163f.; Gordon S. Mikoski, "Bringing the Body to the Table," *Theology Today* 67 (2010): 255–59.

[26] Paul S. Fiddes's short reflections, "Sacraments in a Virtual World," are accessible online where they can be downloaded through Docstoc, "virtual-communion" (2011). At http://www.docstoc.com/docs/86883542/virtual-communion; last accessed July 17, 2013. The reflections stirred much debate in cyberspace. For a counterargument, see, for example, Bosco Peters, "Virtual Eucharist?" (2009). At http://liturgy.co.nz/virtual-eucharist/1078; last accessed July 17, 2013.

least two sides to an encounter with God under liturgical signs: God's self-disclosure and invitation to communion on the one hand, and the response, in liturgical presence and participation, of the faithful on the other hand. I will furthermore assume that there is no inherent problem, theologically, with thinking the possibility of God's self-disclosure in cyberspace. The key question is about the human side of the liturgical encounter with God in this world.

Liturgical scholars and theologians will have to move beyond merely negative claims that liturgical practices in cyberspace "further a disembodied, non-communitarian, and ahistorical sense of sacramental participation."[27] A more nuanced approach might start with attentiveness to actual online liturgical practices themselves and to the worshipers who seek to encounter God through these practices. Such a starting point is a cyberspatial variant of a larger scholarly turn to "lived religion," in this case, "lived liturgy, online." We can then explore in greater depth the transformations that occur from offline to online liturgical practices. Ritual transfer theory, developed to interpret ritual transformations both offline and online,[28] can be helpful here, as one possible way to theorize such migrations. The theory can be helpful for the analysis of online ritual practices because it pushes the analysis beyond simple negation wherever an online practice differs from offline ones. Space is thus opened up to inquire how worship, now transferred online, is articulated and performed—in short, lived. Ritual transfer theory shows one specific path, with the scholarly tools of ritual studies.

Another area of inquiry is opened up by the fact that liturgical migrations into cyberspace are not one-way journeys but influence offline worship too. Studies have suggested, for example, that Twitter (and other social media) affect people's cognitive functions. Which interpretive habits and expectations formed in cyberspace will shape offline liturgical lives in years to come (or are already doing so, for that matter)? Where might practices formed online affect offline worship in quite disturbing ways, for example, by shortening our attention spans and disabling us from living unplugged?

Scholars of liturgy committed to exploring the digital signs of the times will also have to shine a light on their own interpretive tools and explore categories beyond the conventional ones available in theological and liturgical scholarship. I highlight three intriguing foci to pursue (from many possible ones). A first possible task is to attend in depth to the fact that online liturgical practices are no longer place-based, or at least loosen a strict confinement to place. Does this transformation between offline and online worship heighten the importance of synchronicity in the latter?

A second question worth exploring is that of transformations of sacramental mediation in and through cyberspace. Granted that all human experience of (sacramental) grace is mediated, how is this mediation changed when it is *digitally* mediated?[29] If every mediation both enables and constrains, what, then, is enabled and what is constrained in liturgical

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[27] Baron, "Sacraments 'Really Save' in Disneyland," 305.

[28] See Robert Langer et al., "Transfer of Ritual," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 20 (2006): 1–20; and Nadja Miczek, "Online Rituals in Virtual Worlds: Christian Online Services between Dynamics and Stability," *Online: Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 03.1 (2008): 144–73.

[29] Cf. Stefan Böntert, *Gottesdienste im Internet: Perspektiven eines Dialogs zwischen Internet und Liturgie*, (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2005), 222–47, for a vision of how to think the sacramentality of the Church in cyberspace.

mediations in cyberspace?

Third, an engagement with online liturgical practices involves a particular challenge. Scholars of liturgy for the most part have been trained to analyze texts, and the most interdisciplinary among us may have added visual and aesthetic literacy or musical attentiveness to this. But what is called for now is a new logic, a kind of multimedia, hi-tech, interactive, visual literacy, as well as attention to lived liturgical practices, and that in the multisite reality that is contemporary life, lived offline, online, and in "the new borderlands of interactions between online and offline worlds."

I began this essay with a nod to both *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Inter Mirifica*, promulgated fifty years ago this December 4. Romano Guardini's much-quoted concern, raised soon after the promulgation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, seems as important today as it was both unsettling and visionary then: "Should we, instead of talking about renewal, not rather ask in which way the divine mysteries must be celebrated so that *people today can place themselves, with their particular truth*, within these mysteries?"[30] A fundamental part of the "truth" of people's lives today is that we inhabit an increasingly digital world, in which liturgical practices are present in cyberspace.

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[30] Romano Guardini in an open letter to Johannes Wagner, April 1, 1964; published in *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 14 (1964): 101–6, at 106. English translation mine.