The Church in Friendship: A Touchstone for Theological Reflection on Ecclesial

Communication in a Digital Age

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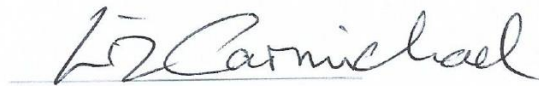St. Thomas University

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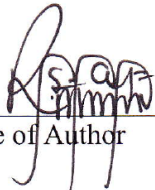
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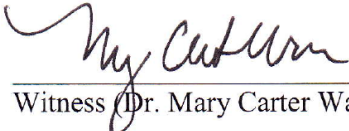
The Church in Friendship: A Touchstone for Theological Reflection on Ecclesial

Communication in a Digital Age

Richmond Dzekoe

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Abstract

Christ, who calls and relates to his disciples as friends, founded the church to be a sacrament of his presence in the world. The church exists to unveil God's friendship with humanity and guide human response to this act of divine love in a way that establishes God's kingdom on earth as one community of God's friends. One challenge that confronts the church today is the new evangelization, the search for new ardor, method, and expression of the gospel. This dissertation contributes to this discussion by proposing an ecclesiology of friendship as a touchstone for ecclesial communication. It uses hermeneutic phenonomenology as a methodological lens and adapts Don Browning's vision for doing theological reflection, which integrates perspectives from sub-disciplines in theology into four hermeneutical sub-movements of descriptive, historical, systematic, and strategic practical theological reflection.

Based on the findings, the study calls for the need for church institutions and individual Christians to transcend a bullhorn approach to the new media. The dissertation proposes an ecclesiology of friendship as way of doing this; and suggests a framework for identifying the marks of Christian friendship and the corporate identity of the church as a friend. It also sheds light on how the ecclesiology of friendship might provide a theological imagination for understanding and communicating the relational aspects of existing models of the church, such as institution, mystical body, servant, herald, sacrament, and community of disciples. Finally, the study discusses the implication of the ecclesiology of friendship for the church's communicative practices with a specific focus on ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, interpersonal communication of those in church leadership, the celebration of the Eucharist, and digital evangelization.

Dedication

To the Greater Glory of Christ Jesus, Our Savior and Friend,

I dedicate this work to the Blessed Virgin Mary,
My parents: Mr. & Mrs. Christian and Christina Dzekoe,

All whose friendship-love and support have brought me this far in life,

And the friends I am yet to meet!

Acknowledgements

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THE CHURCH AS A SACRAMENT OF CHRIST, THE FRIEND

*"No longer do I call you servants, … but I have called you friends…I chose you
and appointed you to go and bear fruit…these things I command you:
love one another." (John 15:15-17*)

Human beings can come to some knowledge about God through creation and

other forms of revelation as evident in the various religious traditions and cultures of the

world.[1] However, it is only in Jesus Christ that we have the fullness of God's revelation.

Christ is the primordial sacrament of God.[2] The church believes that "there can be no

disclosure above or beyond that whereby God fully and unsurpassably communicates

himself to the world in the life, teaching, death, and glorification of [God's] Son."[3]

Through his ministry, passion, death, and resurrection, Jesus communicates God's love

for the world as friendship-love. In Christ, we discover that God created us not to be

slaves who would obey him with mechanical obedience devoid of love, but rather to be

God's friends, people who would do things with God out of friendship-love. As St.

Thomas Aquinas reflects, God is our greatest friend (Deus maxime est amicus).[4] Jesus,

God-made-man, calls and relates to his disciples as friends. He founded the church to be

a sacrament of his friendship-love in the world:

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[1] Vatican Council II, *Nostra Aetate,* accessed June 2, 2015. Vatican.va. 2.

[2] Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, trans. Paul Barrett (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963).

[3] Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 219.

[4] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* IIb, Q. 27, Art. 8.

No one has greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves… I have called you friends because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father...I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain...These things I command you: love one another.[5]

In these words, Jesus describes his "communion with God and the human community" and equates his sacrificial-love to friendship-love.[6] Jürgen Moltmann observes that we can add to the traditional titles of the savior, "Jesus the Friend" because of his self- designation as a friend to humanity. Christ has made friendship central to our Christian understanding of love and calls on us to live this radical love as disciples.[7] Karl Rahner notes that the church[8] was founded to be a sacrament of this saving grace, the continuation of Christ's historically tangible presence in the world.[9] Vatican II teaches that: "it was from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death upon the Cross that there came forth the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church."[10]

The church is, therefore, born out of Christ's friendship-love upon the Cross. This

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[5] John 15:12-15 (English Standard Version). Unless otherwise stated, all biblical texts cited in this dissertation are taken from the English Standard Version.

[6] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 115.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Even though the word "Church" refers to all Christian churches and denominations, the term is used in this dissertation to refer specifically to the Catholic Church.

[9] For a detailed explanation of the church as a sacrament of Christ. See Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments (Quaestiones Disputatae, 9)*, trans. William Joseph. O'Hara (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963).

[10] Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (Vatican website, 1963).

dissertation reflects that it is through friendship-love that the church becomes "the visible

expression of grace and redemption",[11] signifying and actualizing Christ's redemptive

love in a way that makes it "the place in which we hear the invitation to take on this

paschal rhythm as the necessary rhythm of the life of grace."[12]

The concepts of "sign per se" *(sacramentum tantum),* "the reality and the sign" or

"spiritual fruit" *(res et sacramentum), and "*the ultimate reality signified" *(res tantum),* in

the sacramental theology of St. Augustine, St Thomas Aquinas, and other theologians,

provide a useful analogy for understanding the church as a sacrament of Christ, the

friend.[13] As presented in Table 1, John of Taize argues that as a sacrament of Christ, the

church signifies and makes Christ present at these three levels:

Table 1. Church as Network of Friends (Adopted from *Friends in Christ*, p. 121)

Sacramentum (sign per se)	people united and organized by means of structures and ministries, performing rites, undertaking activities
res et sacramentum (reality and sign or spiritual fruit)	community growing in friendship with God through Christ and living in the world as an inclusive society of friends.
res tantum (the ultimate reality signified)	humanity transformed by the Spirit and united to Christ as his Body, thus participating in the communion of the Holy Trinity[14]

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[11] Schillebeeckx, *Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, 48.

[12] Richard Gaillardetz, "The Church as Sacrament: Towards an Ecclesial Spirituality", *The Way: Supplement Supplement* (1999), 25.

[13] John of Taize, *Friends in Christ: Paths to a New Understanding of Church* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2012). Brother John of Taize calls for a vision of the church as a network of friendships and explains how this is an effective way of assessing the fruitfulness of all aspects of the church as a Sacrament of Christ.

[14] Ibid, 121

Adopting these three elements of the church as a sacrament of Christ in friendship, this dissertation observes that the sacramentality of the church is "the corporate testimony of the church"[15] evident in both its structures and the life of grace present in the witness of all members of the church.

Some theologians raise the objection that the notion of the church as a sacrament de-emphasizes the weakness in the church and equates the church to Christ.[16] However, far from downplaying the church's human and sinful nature, the theology of the Church as a sacrament adopted in this dissertation seeks to underline the fact that Christ, is "holy, innocent, and undefiled (Heb. 7:26), knows nothing of sin (2 Cor. 5:21); the Church, however, embracing sinners in her bosom, is at the same time holy and always in need of purification and incessantly pursues the path of penance and renewal."[17] Christ has endowed the church with the grace of continuous transformation, which empowers the church to live out the gospel witness, and teach all people to do the same. "The whole church, saints and sinners alike, shares in the sacramentality of the church.[18] Such an understanding requires that the institutional dimension and every part of the church's life be synched with this spirituality in a way that mediates God's grace and redemption to the world and helps restore the world as one community of God's friends. To that end, friendship-love becomes the touchstone for all aspects of the church's life.

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[15] Rahner Karl, "Reflections on the Experience of Grace," *Theological Investigations III*, trans. Karl H. and Boniface Kruger, OFM (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1956). Rahner sees the sacramentality of the church as a corporate testimony and mission of both creedal Catholics and all people who are channels of God's grace; those he calls "Anonymous Christians."

[16] Miguel Garijo-Guembe, *Communion of Saints: Foundations, Nature and Structure of the Church* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994) 88-92. Miguel provides a detailed discussion on how some theologians have argued that presenting the church as a sacrament equates the church to Christ and downplays its human and sinful dimension.

[17] Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (Vatican website), 8.

[18] Richard Gaillardetz, *The Church as Sacrament*, 30.

Therefore, in exploring the church as a sacrament of Christ, the Friend, this dissertation seeks to argue that the sacramental and ministerial life of the church must foster the growth of a community of friends that manifests the friendship of Christ on earth. The dissertation seeks to propose friendship-love as an important criterion for assessing the fruitfulness of the organizational and structural elements of the church as well as the spirituality of its members. Specifically, it proposes friendship-love as a touchstone for ecclesial communicative practices. This is based on the assumption that a corporate understanding of the church as a friend will help church institutions and individual Christians reflect on how Christian-love might be lived as friendship-love within and beyond the faith community in a way that realizes the church's mission of unveiling the mystery of Christ, who lays down his life for his friends. It is the extent to which the church actualizes this friendship-love that it becomes a universal sacrament of salvation.

The Church's Mission

The mission of the Church as a Sacrament of Christ, the Friend, is therefore to help restore the world back to its original destiny as one community of God's friends. The creation of the human person in the image and likeness of God was an act of granting human beings access into the perfect friendship-love (*agape*) that exists within the Trinity. Our "communion with God is the goal of all human desiring and striving, our Sabbath rest."[19] It is to flood the world with this friendship-love that God created the human community. Human beings are made for companionship with God and with one another.

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[19] John of Taize, *Friends in Christ*, 74.

The story of the fall is the loss of friendship-love that existed between God and human beings (Adam and Eve) in the Garden of Eden. Salvation history is thus the story of the restoration of this friendship that was lost.[20] St. Augustine comments that God made us for Godself and our hearts can never rest until they rest in God.[21] The great commission that Jesus gives is a call to restore the world into one community of God's friends. As the sacrament of Christ, the church needs to be the face of Christ who desires friendship with all humanity and relates to them as such. The church's mission can therefore be seen as embracing friendship with Jesus, living out that spirituality, and helping others to the same so that the world becomes a network of friends of Jesus. More than ever, the world cries out for the realization of this mission because of the extreme famine of true friendship in our digital culture today.

The Hunger for Friendship in the Digital Age

In our digital age, "friendship" seems to be one of the predominant forces that drive all types of human interactions.[22] In his *Message for the 43rd World Day of Communication*, Pope Benedict XVI observes that the new media are "bringing about fundamental shifts in patterns of communication and human relationships," and the notion of friendship is enjoying a renewed prominence in our digital culture.[23] Many

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[20] Col. 1: 19-22.

[21] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: Hyde Park, 1997), kindle,1.1.

[22] Daniella Zsupan-Jerome, *Connected Toward Communion: the Church and Social Communication in the Digital Age* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2014). In her interview with Bishop Paul Tighe, the former secretary of the Pontifical Council for Social Communication, Daniella discusses friendship as a driving force for human interaction in our digital culture.

[23] Benedix XVI, *Message for the 43rd World Day of Communication: New Technology, New Relationships: Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue, and Friendship* (Vatican web site, 2009). The Holy Father called on the church to use new digital technologies to promote dialogue, respect, and friendship (friendship that is not an end in itself but helps people to walk with one another towards their true destiny in Christ).

institutions and individuals are now "friends" with people on social media. Almost half of

the world's population find themselves in networks of friends. In November 2015,

approximately 3.2 billion people (40% of the world's population) were Internet users.

Most of these use media, such as blogs, forums, photo-sharing platforms, social gaming,

microblogs, chat apps, and social networks to connect with friends and family. About two

billion people use social networking worldwide.[24]

Many studies report that the fundamental drive behind people's use of social

media is the desire for relationship, which is part of what makes us human. Findings from

these research indicate that people are driven to social media because of its promise to

foster presence-in-absence, provide people opportunity to be with friends despite physical

separation, [25] and give them full-time intimate communities. [26] People rush to social

networking sites because they want a community that will be with them through the

mundane, a community that will give them a sense of not just being known, but also

"being intimately present with another in the living of life."[27]

Networked Individualism and Trivialization of Friendship

Even though many people use social media to connect and reach out to others,

studies report the trivialization of the notion of friendship in today's digital culture. Many

institutions and individuals might boast of hundreds, thousands, and at times, millions of

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[24] These statistics were retrieved from Internetworldstats.com and ridicati.com on April 20, 2016.

[25] Andrew Zirschky, Beyond the Screen: Youth Ministry for the Connected but Alone Generation (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015). For more discussion on why many, including teenagers, flock to social networking sites, see boyd danah, It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

[26] Craig Watkins, *The Young in the Digital* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009).

[27] Kate Crawford, "These Foolish Things: On Intimacy and Insignificance in Mobile Media" in *Mobile Technologies: From Telecommunication to Media, ed.* Gerard Goggin et al. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 259.

"friends;" however, in the majority of online friendships, human beings are reduced to numbers and are seen as "status decorators", customers and/or clients, rather than true "friends." Instead of the intimate communities of friends that it promises, the digital culture promotes what researchers, such as Subrahmanyam Reich, Barry Wellman, and Manuel Castells have called "networked individualism" or "me-centered networks," a notion that rests on the myth of being able to experience a community without a community.[28]

As Andrew Zirschky rightly observes, such me-centered network "encourages viewing others as objects to be collected 'or discarded' based upon their perceived usefulness."[29] Individuals might have over five hundred friends online but most of these are used as "status decorators" to satisfy personal needs for public prestige and sense of popularity.[30] This sad reality of networked individualism poses a theological problem for the church because as Michael Downey points out, the goal of Christian spirituality is to help the human person transcend "self-isolation, self-preoccupation, and self-absorption"[31] and attain union with God and others.

In order to deepen my understanding of the phenomenon of network individualism, I conducted an online survey on friendship in the digital culture among

[28] Reich Subrahmanyam, "Adolescents' Sense of Community on MySpace and Facebook: A Mixed-Method Approach," *Journal of Community Psychology*. 38, no. 6 (2010): 668-705; Also see Barry Wellman, "Physical Place and Cyber-place: The Rise of Personalized Networking," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research,* 25, no. 2 (2001): 232; and Manuel Castells*, The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[29] Zirschky, *Beyond the Screen,* kindle, chapter 10.

[30] Ibid

[31] Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 33.

three hundred participants from different parts of the world.[32] More than half of

respondents (74%) had about five hundred friends on social media; and 26% had more

than one thousand friends. However, only 7 % of the participants consider online

friendship real. The majority, 94%, sees online friendship as superficial and do not

consider online connections as true friends.

This finding aligns with what has been documented by previous researchers, such

as Fenne Deters and Matthias Mehl who report that social media provides opportunity for

cataloguing and following others, broadcasting self-expressions, and private chats, but

leads to a manicure digital self-presentation, does not promote real friendship, and so

leaves users ever hungry for authentic social connections. These authors conclude that, at

best, online friendships are a type of "social snacking", which sustains people for a short

time but leaves them longing even more for the real meal of social interaction and

belonging.[33] This observation is also confirmed by Adriana Manago and Lanen Vaughn

who point out that such trivialization of friendship leaves people "feeling depleted rather

than fulfilled" and provides "instant pleasure and moment-to-moment reward that distract

from stable friendship based on mutuality and consistency."[34] Unfortunately, the

trivialization of friendship is found not only among commercial institutions and

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[32] I explain the survey items, participants, and how the data was analyzed under methodology, later in this chapter.

[33] Fenne Deters and Matthias Mehl, "Does Posting Facebook Status Updates Increase or Decrease Loneliness? An Online Social Networking Experiment" *Social Psychological and Personality Science,* 4 (2012):1-8.

[34] Adriana Manago and Lanen Vaughn, "Social Media, Friendship, and Happiness in the Millennial Generation," in *Friendship and Happiness: Across the Life-Span and Cultures,* ed. Demir Melikşah (New York: Springer Science, 2015), 187-206.

individuals, but even among some religious institutions as evident in the following comment from Craig Webb:

> The larger the number of "likes" or "fans" you have, the larger your reach. Our page has over 1,000 likes and Facebook Insights, the free reporting tool, shows that there are more than 292,000 friends of the fans of our page. That's a huge reach![35]

> This comment, to a large extent, captures how many religious institutions have fallen into the temptation of trivializing friendship in our digital culture. Many Christian authors have lamented this trivialization. John of Taize observes that, "modern society has privatized friendship, turning it into a predominantly emotional and individual reality."[36] Pope Benedict XVI cautions that "we should be careful… never to trivialize the concept or experience of friendship."[37] Called to be friends of God and help others restore their friendship with God through Christ, the church cannot ignore this sad dehumanization of friendships in our culture today. The Holy Father calls on the church to use new digital technologies to promote dialogue, respect, and friendship that is not an end in itself, but friendship that helps people to walk with one another towards their true destiny in Christ.

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[35] Craig Webb, June 2016, comment on LifeWay's Pastors Today e-newsletter, "A Checklist for an Effective Facebook Page". *Lifeway.com*, June 10, 2016.

[36] John of Taize, *Friends in Christ*, 86.

[37] Benedict XVI, *Message for the 43rd World Day of Communication*.

Reading the Signs of the Times:

God's Call on the Church to be a Friend

This dissertation suggests that the renewed interest in the notion of friendship in the design of the new media as well as the trivialization and dehumanization of friendship in our digital culture might be seen as God's way of summoning the church to realize its nature and mission as a sacrament of Christ, the Friend. For the church to guide human interaction towards authentic encounter by cooperating with all human beings in building the earthly city according to the mind and heart of Christ,[38] the church needs to scaffold what it means to be a friend in our world today. As John of Taize rightly observes: "the Christian church, to the extent that it becomes aware of its own identity as a worldwide network of friendship, can play a highly beneficial role in a world searching, often blindly, for its identity and unity."[39]

Today more than ever, the church is in need of a theology that articulates the church's self-understanding as a friend, and provides a touchstone for church institutions and individual Christians to live out the spirituality of friendship in a way that saves the world from networked individualism and transforms it into a community of God's friends. It is the extent to which the church actualizes this friendship-love that it realizes its nature as a universal sacrament of salvation in a world which is thirsting for love, peace, and unity. In the words of John of Taize: "Christians must therefore 'de-privatize' friendship, rediscovering its public character. The task of the church is to live out this friendship." This is crucial because "the necessary reform of the church involves

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[38] Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Communio et Progressio*, 7.

[39] John of Taize, *Friends in Christ*, 11.

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essentially a rebirth of community, of friendship, at the grassroots level. Without this, any institutional reforms will remain a dead letter."[40]

Statement of the Problem

    The church exists to unveil God's self-communication through Jesus Christ and guide human response to this act of divine love. In contemporary digital culture, the notion of "friendship" has become a major driving force and is used in many different ways for all types of interactions via social media. The church has called on its members and all people to see these new tools for social communication as a "blessing from God" and a means of promoting a culture of respect, dialogue, and friendship.[41] Church institutions and individual Catholics are now "friends" with people on social media. Unfortunately, despite all its blessings, social media promotes networked individualism, a phenomenon which undermines the church's mission of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth as one community of God's friends. There is therefore need for the church to redeem and scaffold true friendship in our world today and guide all to live this spirituality, which is the ultimate vision of Christ [42] and his command to the church.[43]

  Even though many official church documents have been issued on social media, none of the existing documents, at the time of this dissertation, explains what it means to understand the church as a friend. One challenge that confronts the church today is

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[40] Ibid., 86.

[41] Pope Benedict XVI in his message for the 43rd World Communications Day called on the church to use new digital technologies to promote dialogue, respect, and friendship (friendship that is not an end in itself but helps people to walk with one another towards their true destiny in Christ.

[42] John 17:21.

[43] John 15:15-17.

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therefore the need for a theology that articulates the church's self-understanding as a friend, and serves as a touchstone for church institutions and individual Christians to live out the spirituality of friendship and help satisfy the hunger for true friendship in our world today. This dissertation seeks to contribute towards filling that gap by exploring how an ecclesiology of friendship might be used as a touchstone for ecclesial communicative practices.

Research Questions

Official church documents and works of individual theologians show that much has been written on social media as a blessing from God as well as the need to use these blessings in a way that transforms the world according to the heart and mind of Christ. However, the church is still in search of touchstones that will guide theological reflection on social media.[44] This dissertation joins in the search by exploring two questions: 1.What does it mean to understand the church as a friend? 2.What are the implications of such an ecclesiology for the church's communicative practices in contemporary digital culture?

Research Questions as Practical Theological Inquiry

The research questions are phrased as inquiry in practical theology, an interdisciplinary approach that engages theology as well as the social sciences in a conversation for a deeper understanding of the mystery of God and human response to God's redemptive love for a continual transformation of the world.[45] Practical theology is

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[44] Paul Soukup, *Communication and Theology: Review of the Literature* (London: World Association of Christian Communication, 1983), 15-45.

[45] Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains: Manual for Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.,1999), 10-14.

not an applied theology; rather it is a dialogue, a two-way conversation, between

theology and other disciplines with an orientation towards God and development of a

Christian praxis in which theory and practice are seen as two sides of the same coin. As

St. Augustine observes, the task of theology always requires the ability to have God as an

"everlasting guest and enlightener."[46] This dissertation is therefore not an attempt to

conceptualize God and God's works, but an act of response to God who first knocks at

the door of our hearts through the church and carries us deeper into the mystery of faith.

      With a focus on ecclesiology and communication, I adopt Karl Rahner's

understanding of practical theology as a discipline, which is concerned primarily with the

church's self- actualization here and now without neglecting the fact that the ultimate

self-actualization of the church will occur only in the eschaton, where Christ will

transform all things into his perfect image and likeness.[47] The church's "self-

actualization" as used here emphasizes the church as a historical entity without

overlooking its spiritual origin and abiding nature. It connotes an understanding that "the

church not simply is, but must be continually happening anew"[48] through the concrete

historical realities in which God calls the church to witness. The focus on the church's

self-actualization does not suggest an inward-looking or a complacent self-preservation

exercise, but rather a sacramentality in which the church makes present what it's signifies

in a way that transforms both society and the church. In this sense, the challenges that the

church faces with regard to social media today can be seen as a blessing from God for the

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[46] Augustine, *Confessions,* trans. Maria Boulding (New York: Hyde Park, 1997), kindle, 3.12.

[47] Karl Rahner, "Practical Theology Within the Totality of Theological Disciplines," in *Theological Investigations*, 9:01-107 (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972).

[48] Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments* (Quaestiones Disputatae, 9), trans. William O'Hara (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 2.

church to continue to grow into the friend it is called to be so that it can transform human societies into the friends of God.

The desire to explore a corporate understanding of the church as a friend and how that might influence spirituality in this digital age is based on my understanding of practical theology as a process of reflection that sees theology and spirituality as two sides of the same coin. The two research questions, therefore, focus on the praxis of the church and resonate with practical theology as a transformative practice,[49] which requires spiritual, systematic, and critical reflection not only on the essence of the church, but also its social practices with vision and hope for the future.

Overview of Methodology

This research is designed as a hermeneutic phenomenology, a methodology in practical theology that fuses two seemingly opposing approaches: Phenomenology, which is "the study of essence"[50] of a thing, an approach to knowledge that seeks to understand what makes a thing as it is; and hermeneutics, an interpretive approach to understanding reality.[51] Unlike transcendental phenomenology and existential phenomenology, which advocate the suspension of any personal opinion, prejudices, ideological lens and calls for a sole focus on pure reason in understanding reality, hermeneutic phenomenology requires an interpretative and narrative approach to describing human experience.

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[49] Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock.Elaine, 2002). Graham advocates doing theology as a transformative practice that leads to "orthopraxis," focusing on what the church is and is becoming in its practices.

[50] Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: The Humanities Press, *1962*), vii.

[51] Even though hermeneutics was originally understood as an interpretation of written texts, it is currently used in a broader sense to include interpretation of other modes of communication including spoken words, gestures, and actions. For example, Gadamer considers play as a text. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. 2nd ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2011).

Hermeneutic phenomenology has its philosophical foundations in the works of scholars, such as Hans Georg Gadamar, and Paul Ricoeur.[52] Hermeneutic phenomenology approaches reality as a lived experience. It sees the "essence" of a thing as something that can be understood through interpretation that brings one's experience into conversation with other human experiences. In this approach, the researcher's understanding of the "essence" of a thing is always "partial, and particular to the experiences from which the interpretations were formed."[53] This kind of intertextuality is the strength in fusing hermeneutics and phenomenology.

One challenge associated with hermeneutic phenomenology is the inherent contradiction of bringing together the notions of essence and interpretation. Fundamentally, a search for the essence of a thing might prohibit any attempt at an interpretation, which seeks to understand a thing in relation to other realities. However, phenomenology and hermeneutics share some things in common: They are both concerned with an "active, intentional, construction of social world and its meaning for reflexive human beings;"[54] they both see language and discourse as a way of understanding reality;[55] and in contrast to the natural sciences, hermeneutic and phenomenology do not claim that all modes of understanding are "necessarily

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[52] In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer critiques the positivist scientific notion that truth has to be based on objectivity (facts that can be verified); and argues that truth may be expressed as an aesthetic concept as well as a linguistic or a scientific concept. Also See Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred : Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

[53] Narayan Kafle, "Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research Method Simplified," *Bodhi: Interdisciplinary Journal*, 5 (2011): 189.

[54] John Mcleod, *Qualitative Research in Counseling and Psychology* (London: Sage, 2001), 57.

[55] Deborah Van Deusen-Hunsinger, *Theology and Pastoral Counseling: A New Interdisciplinary Approach* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 5.

explanatory."[56] Using hermeneutic phenomenology to explore a deeper meaning of the praxis of the church in contemporary society allows for understanding the church as both a social reality and a divinely established institution.[57] It also offers a lens for combining descriptive and interpretive methods in social science and theology to explore the church's self-actualization as the sacrament of Christ, the friend.

Critical Integration of Social Science and Theology

The relationship between theology and the social sciences has been a subject of debate among theologians. There are a variety of opinions on whether and to what extent theology has to appropriate insights from the social sciences and vise versa. One can identify extreme and sometimes anthithetical positions on what role the social sciences can play in theological reflection and whether or not social science needs to appropriate insights from theology in order to deepen its identity as inquiry into the ultimate concerns of the human person and society. The views on the relationship between theology and social sciences include John Milbank's total rejection of any insights from the social sciences;[58] Nicholas Healy's view of narrative descriptions as theology,[59] Don Browning's view of sociology as descriptive theology[60], Christian Scharen's view of

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[56] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2007),109.

[57] Johannes van der Ven, *Ecclesiology in Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 22-45.

[58] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason.* Second edition (London: Blackwell, 2006), 32.

[59] Healy Nicholas, *Church, World, and the Christian Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 103-105.

[60]Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 47-76.

fieldwork as "ethnographic theology,"[61] and John Zizioulas' call for openness to social theory.[62]

The integration of perspectives from social science and theology in this research is based on the argument that even though some philosophical and ideological underpinnings in the social sciences are in sharp contradiction to the basic beliefs of the Christian worldview; the ultimate goal that drives social science research does not contradict the Christian vision of creating a better world for humanity. As Gerben Heitink rightly points out, "if one takes the unity of understanding and explanation as a starting point, an empirical approach is not at odds with the hermeneutical and the strategic perspectives."[63] Niel Postman observes that "the purpose of social research is to rediscover the truths of social life; to comment on and criticize the moral behavior of people"[64] and to the extent that human flourishing and the drive for meaning are the forces that drive research in theology and the social sciences, both theologians and social scientists can benefit from insights about the human condition that are gathered as a result of a careful and reflective inquiry in both fields.[65]

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[61] Christian Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology: Exploring the Social Context of God's Work in the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), kindle, chapter 4.

[62] John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1985), 30-45.

[63] Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology*, 221.

[64] Neil Postman, "Social Science as Theology," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics,* 32 (1984), 22-32.

[65] Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology,* kindle, chapter 2.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of social science inquiry as *spiritual exercise*[66] informs how the current research integrates insights and methods from the social science. Bourdieu argues that we are shaped by a particular "field", which involves the concrete social context of our lives; and we form "habitus" a mode of being by which we practically navigate day-to-day life.[67] He opines that we are free beings who must take responsibility for our actions, but that we are also influenced by social constraints. This dialectic between human agency and forces that constraint human action allows for doing sociology in a way that provides reflection on ethical values. This moral concern is a common ground for any social scientist, who does social analysis with self-abnegation and the theologian who seeks to understand right human response to God's action in society.

As Bourdieu rightly observes, when guided by "solidarity" and "sympathetic comprehension", when the researcher can take the place of the object of inquiry, and be guided by the habitus of the persons being studied, then the work of the social scientist can be seen as "a spiritual exercise."[68] He explains solidarity and compassion not "as a capacity to connect with another but as a "disciplined effort to fully consider who the individuals are and the social conditions of which they are the product."[69] When social science research is guided by *kenosis* (self-abnegation) and openness to the other, as proposed by Bourdieu, it can be seen as a spiritual exercise, a form of theology. In that

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[66] Pierre Bourdieu et al., *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, trans. Priscilla Ferguson (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 612

[67] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 72-75.

[68] Bourdieu et al., *The Weight of the World*, 612-615.

[69] Ibid.

sense, both religion and social interactions can be seen as a "field" that shape the "habitus" of the human person and be approached as a critical and disciplined craft of inquiry. In this way, both social science and theology become spiritual exercises that complement each other as sources of knowledge about what it means to be human.

Like Bourdieu, Don Browning sees sociological inquiry that uses a hermeneutical lens as a form of spiritual exercise. In combining perspectives from the social sciences and theology, this research develops a hermeneutical circle based on Don Browning's vision for doing practical theology. In what follows, I give a brief background to Browning's vision for practical theology and explain his four-sub-movements of theological reflection adopted in this research.

Practice-Theory-Practice: Insights from Don Browning

Don Browning is from the Chicago school of practical theologians. His scholarly interest centers on the intersection of psychology, pastoral care, ethics, and theology. As a minister and a scholar, he was particularly interested in the integration of religious theory and religious practice in finding solutions to the problems of the family. In *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals,* Browning seeks to establish the importance of the wisdom of religious communities (theology) in society and explains the nature and task of theology as fundamentally practical. His main thesis is that theology in all its forms is fundamentally practical because all theological reflections begin with practical questions that lead to the formulation of normative theories, which are ultimately translated into practical actions.

For Browning, "All our practices, even our religious practices, have theories behind and within them."[70] Theologizing is a task that "goes from present theory-laden practice to a retrieval of more normative theory-laden practice to the creation of more critically held theory-laden practices."[71] He proposes that all theology reguries four-sub-movements: *Descriptive theology*, which involves the hermeneutical task; *Historical theology*, which involves retrieving from the normative texts of the Christian tradition through honest engagement; *Systematic theology*, which involves seeking new horizons of meaning for Christian practice and advancing arguments to support those new meanings; and *Strategic practical theology*, which involves establishing the norms and strategies of concrete practices in light of analyses of concrete situations (theory of action). His design for doing theology, therefore, is practice-theory-practice.

Method: Four Sub-movements in Theological Reflection

This research adapts Browning's four sub-movements, but describes them as descriptive, historical, systematic, and strategic theological reflection.[72] His model for doing theology, *practice-theory- practice,* is based on his understanding of theology as the use of practical reason (*Phronēsis*),[73] theoretical reason (*Theoria),* and technical

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[70] Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 6.

[71] Ibid.,7.

[72] I replace the word "theology" in the sub-movements with "reflection" in order to underline the centrality of reflection in my research as an exploration for a touchstone for theological reflection. In addition, attaching "theology" to each sub-movement can be confusing since they can be taken as sub-disciplines in theology. For a more detailed description of Browning's four sub-movements of practical theology see Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology,* 30-52.

[73] Browning bases his idea of *phronēsis, theoria, and technē* on the works of Aristotles, Gadamer's and Habermas respectively. He explains *Phronēsis* as practical reasoning; thinking through real-life problems to answer the critical questions: (a) What shall we do? (b) How shall we live? *Theoria*, he sees as purely theoretical reason seeking to answer the questions: What is the nature of things?, and *Technē*, Browning explains as technical reason seeking to answer the how-to question: What are the most effective means to a given end?

reason (*Technē)* to think through real-life problems for answers. In the current research, the four sub-movements are considered as movements in a hermeneutical circle. For example, questions raised at one movement lead to reflection in the next movement, and insights gained at the strategic reflection movement can raise new questions that can lead the theologian back to the descriptive movement. This allows for doing theology as an on-going conversation for ever-deeper insights into the mystery of God's love and human response to this mystery. Figure 1 presents the four sub-movements that guide the hermeneutical circle used in this study.
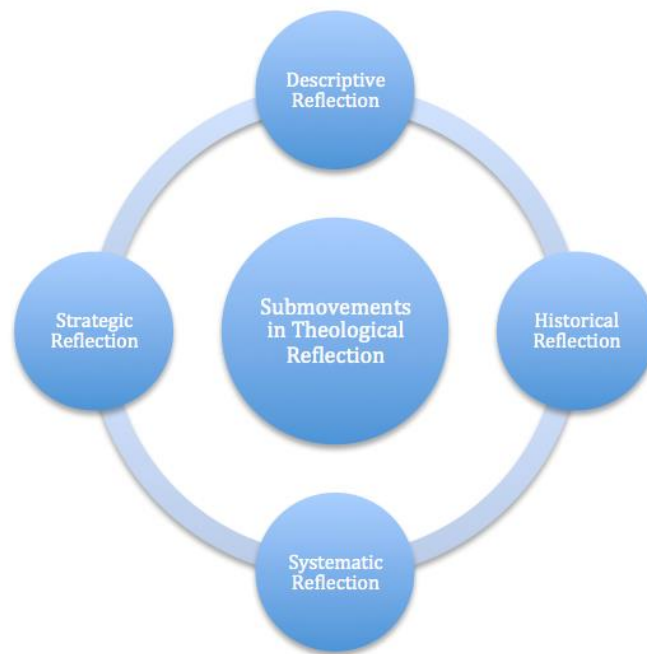
Figure 1 Sub-movement in the Adopted Hermeneutical Circle

Descriptive Reflection

The descriptive reflection explores the reality of the church's use of social media in our world today as well as theories that have been used to explain social media use such as, social exchange theory, social penetration theory, social network analysis, McLuhan's media theory, and strong and weak ties theory.[74] In addition, fifty messages of the World Communications Day celebrations (from 1967 to 2016) are analyzed for the church's theory of social media. Further, empirical studies on how the church is using social media for evangelization in various parts of the world are explored.

Furthermore, a survey was conducted to collect stories of people's experience of friendships in contemporary digital culture. The survey was anonymous and contained twenty questions, which asked participants to share their personal understandings of friendship, how important they consider friendship in their lives, their experience with both face-to-face and online friendship, whether or not they experience God, their religious institutions as friends, as well as their views on how religious institutions can help people live out true friendship online (See Appendix).

The survey was distributed via Twitter and email. Data were coded and analyzed by me and a second coder, who is a professor and researcher at a University in the USA. The inter-coder reliability calculated using simple percentages was 96 %. The location recorder in Qualtrics, the tool that was used to collect the survey data, shows that the 300 responses came from participants in 12 countries: USA, Spain, Germany, Nigeria, Israel,

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[74] Bing Pan and John Crotts, "Theoretical Models of Social Media, Marketing Implications, and future research Directions," in *Social Media in Travel, Tourism and Hospitality*: *Theory, Practice, and Cases,* ed. Segala, Marianna, Evangelos Christou, and Ulrike Gretzel (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 73-86.

Russia, Poland, Italy, Norway, Ghana, Canada, and England. Of the total responses, 260 came from the USA, 29 from Ghana, 2 from Spain, and 1 from each of the other countries. The participants come from different religious backgrounds. 272 (91%) are Catholics, 14 (5%) from other Christian denominations, and 12 (4%) came from other religions, such as Islam, Judaism, and African Traditional Religion. Two (1%) are Agnostics. Findings from all the measures taken as part of the descriptive reflection provide insights into some of the cultural and religious meanings that seem to shape the use of social media among Catholics in our world today. These insights are bought into conversation with the Christian Tradition in the historical and systematic, sub-movements.

Historical Reflection

Browning's historical task seeks to answer the question "what do the normative texts that are already part of our effective history really imply for our praxis when they are confronted as honestly as possible?"[75] In this dissertation, the historical reflection involves a review of the literature on communications theology as well as major church documents on social media from the 1930s to date. This allows for doing the hermeneutic task in this study as a communal understanding of the church's teaching on social media. Conclusions are drawn regarding the church's understanding of social media and its mission of establishing God's kingdom on earth as a community of God's friends. Insights from the historical reflection guide the systematic reflection movement.

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[75] Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 49.

The Systematic and Strategic Reflection

The systematic reflection involves a revised critical correlation of the contemporary human experience of friendship in our digital culture from interdisciplinary perspectives (philosophical, socio-cultural, psychological, and theological) with the church's understanding of friendship. The goal of the systematic reflection is to discover horizons of meaning that might provide a framework for an ecclesiology of friendship. To develop an understanding of contemporary experience of friendship, I reviewed recent literature on the subject and used findings from the online survey I conducted. [76] The strategic reflection movement involves bringing all the insights from the first three sub-movements together to propose an ecclesiology of friendship as a touchstone for theological reflection on Christian communicative praxis. It also explores implications of this ecclesiology for the church's communicative practices, engages existing works that suggest strategies for using social media for church communication, and proposes strategies for enhancing those communicative practices.

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[76] This dissertation adopts Don Browning's revised critical correlation, which is based on the David Tracy's revision of Paul Tillich's "one-way" dialectical approach to theological reflection. Tracy's "two-way" correlation is not dialectical but dialogical. He believes that theology has three publics, the church, society, and the academy and any truth claims from one of these publics must be queried with perspectives from the other two publics. Like Tracy, Browning believes that theology consists of two key sources, namely, Christian texts and human experiences; but unlike Tracy, Browning argues that theological reflection should begin with praxis and not theory. For more discussion on the revised critical correlation methods, see Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 49. Also see Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 1957); David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

The Contribution of the Dissertation to the Field of Theology

Findings from this research contribute to the literature on ecclesiology and communication theology from the perspective of practical theology. Regarding ecclesiology, this work contributes towards developing the model of the Church as sacrament of Christ, the Friend. Specifically, it suggests reading the signs of the times, in terms of the danger of networked individualism and the trivialization of friendship, as God's call for the church to realize its nature and mission as a sacrament of Christ, the Friend. From this perspective, this research is the first known scholarly work that seeks to develop a corporate understanding of the church as a Friend. In this sense, the dissertation contributes to the important literature on Christian friendship and enhances the discussion on our Christian calling to live out the spirituality of friendship in a world that is, more than ever, hungry for true friendship. This work sheds light on how the model of the church as a friend complements existing models of the church to provide a touchstone for theological reflection on ecclesial communicative practices.

In addition, this research contributes towards the development of the church's communication theology by proposing a practical theology of social media. The study offers a theological interpretation of social media as God's gift for a "two-fold" transformation of both church and society. The dissertation suggests that social media is not meant to be used only as a tool to convert the world, but also to deepen the church's own on-going conversion towards a more perfect image of Christ. Such a Christian understanding of social media helps to avoid the current predominant bullhorn approach

of using social media, and also challenges people who expect the church to be a friend but do not embrace their responsibility as friends of the church and treat the church as such. At both the institutional and individual levels, this Christian theology of social media and the ecclesiology of the church as a friend provide practical guidelines for Christian engagement in communicative practices in a way that might help transform our digital culture into one community of God's friends.

Organization of Chapters

This first chapter has explained the theological problem and the specific questions this dissertation seeks to address. It explained the nature of the church as a sacrament of Christ, the friend, and identified the evangelizing mission of the church as a call to restore the world as a community of God's friends, a mission, which is realized through the communicative practices of the church. The chapter also identified both the blessing and some challenges that the new media pose to the church's mission today. Particularly, it laments the unfortunate reality of networked individualism and the dehumanization of friendship, a situation, which makes it even more urgent for the church to provide a concrete example of what it means to be a friend and help all human beings live as friends of God and of one another. The chapter has also provided an overview of the methodology used in answering the research questions.

The next chapter discusses the communication task of the church and develops a practical theology of social media. It explains some major models and orientations towards communication and provides a Christian theory of communication. It also provides brief historical narrative of the church's search for a theology of social media as seen in major church documents on social media from 1930 to 2016. The chapter then

undertakes a critical review of the church's theology of social media and calls attention to the need to transcend a bullhorn approach to social media use and embrace the new media as a tool for a "two-fold" transformation of both the church and society. The chapter then proposes the ecclesiology of friendship as a way of realizing this "two-fold" transformation.

Chapter three begins a search for an ecclesiology of friendship through a discussion of friendship as the soul of divine-human interaction from an interdisciplinary perspective. Different notions of friendship are compared for similarities and differences. The common elements in the understanding of friendship are bought into conversation with the Christian Tradition to propose a framework for identifying the marks of Christian friendship including friendship as a gift from God, a triadic and covenantal relationship, a sacrament that is lived as *kerygma, diakonia*, and *leitourgia*, love that is both particular and universal, and love that embraces both the virtuous and non-virtuous.

Based on this proposed framework, Chapter four develops an ecclesiology of friendship around seven essential elements, namely, (1) A church that celebrates the other as a gift; (2) a church that listens; (3) a church that is bold to correct in love; (4) a church that is just; (5) a church that is friend to sinners; (6); a church that makes the Eucharist more accessible to God's people; and (7) a church that does things *with* and "*hangs out*" with people. The chapter also discusses how the model of the church as a friend might be used as a theological imagination to reveal the relational aspects of existing models of the church, such as the church as an institution, mystical communion, servant, herald, sacrament, and community of disciples. The chapter therefore calls Christians to use the corporate understanding of the church as a friend as a lens to uncover the relationality in

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each of these models and live out the spirituality of the various models of the church as friendship-love in a way that unveils the beauty of the Christian life and the grace of the gospel in our digital age.

Chapter five discusses the implications of the ecclesiology of friendship for the church's communicative practices. It focuses on five specific areas of church communication: ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, interpersonal communication of those in church leadership, the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, and digital evangelization. In each of these cases, some concrete strategies are proposed that might enhance the church's corporate communication as well as that of individual Christians in our digital culture.

Chapter 2

TOWARDS A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF THE NEW MEDIA

*"The church exists in order to bring people into communication with God, and
thereby to open them up to communication with each other…
the church is communication."*
~ *Avery Dulles 77*

This chapter is divided into six sections and focuses on proposing a practical

theology of the new media. The first section explores different theoretical understandings

of social communication and argues that the Christian theory provides a fuller

understanding of social communication because it identifies God as its true origin,

creative and redeeming love as its essential nature, and communion with God, humanity,

and all creation as its purpose. The second section discusses the media of social

communication and some theories that seek to explain the nature and process of

communication in the new media. Section three reflects on the church's task of

evangelization as communicative event. Section four describes how, over the centuries,

the church has relied on different media of social communication to accomplish its

mission. The fifth section focuses on the church's search for theology of the new media

in order to help humanity overcome the challenges these media pose and harness their

potential as gifts for communion with God, humanity, and all creation. The final section

undertakes a critical reflection on the church's theology of the new media and proposes a

practical theology that incorporates insights from the social sciences and responds to the

communicative challenges of our digital age.

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[77] Avery Dulles, "The Church is Communication," *Multimedia International Series no. 1.*
(Attleboro, MA: Multimedia International, 1972), 7.

Section 1: Understanding Social Communication

Theories of Social Communication

Human communication can occur at societal, institutional, group, interpersonal, or intrapersonal levels. A plethora of theories provide different perspectives on the origin, nature, processes, and purpose of human communication. Some provide evolutionary explanations for the origin of human communication and see the need for cooperation and survival in primitive societies as the cause of language development and communication.[78] Other theories avoid the question of the origin of communication and focus on the purpose and processes involved.

In general, rhetorical theories emphasize communication as a process of persuading audience participation in public discourses. Semiotic theories focus on communication as inter-subjective representation and interpretation mediation through signs and symbols. Phenomenological theories emphasize direct personal contacts and dialogue in realizing communication goals. For cybernetic theorists, communication is primarily information processing. Socio-cultural theorists see communication as a system created by human beings mainly for sharing and transforming social realities; and socio-psychological theory explains communication mainly as a process through which individuals interact and influence one another. From the perspective of critical theory, communication is a tool people use to promote ideologies, maintain power and control in society.[79]

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[78]Brad Harrub, Bert Thompson, and Dave Millar, "The Origins of Language and Communication,"*Journal of Creation, TJ.* 17, no. 3 (2003): 93.

[79] Robert, Craig, "Communication Theory as a Field," *Communication Theory*, 9, no. 2 (1999) 119-161.

In his book, *Communications as Culture: Essays on Media and Society,* James Carey categorizes all communication theories into two: those that see communication mainly as *transmission* and those that see communication primarily as ritual.[80] He observes that the origin of the transmission (sender-receiver) approach is traditionally attributed to works of Douglas Waples and Harold Lasswell;[81] and a typical example of the transmission model is the cybernetic or mathematical theory developed by Elwood Shannon and Warren Weaver.[82] The transmission model focuses mainly on the communication processes and seeks to uncover "who communicates what to whom by what medium, under what conditions, and with what effect?"[83] It is "defined by terms such as imparting, sending, transmitting, or giving information to others."[84] This view privileges concepts such as the sender, audience, message, channel, and feedback. It is mainly a linear approach that aims at reducing or eliminating any "noise" for effective transmission of the message. The purpose of feedback is usually to assess whether the information is decoded as intended. The transmission model is mainly concerned with information processing and not so much relationship building that results from the appropriation of the message. It is not surprising that a transmission view does not see the

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[80]James Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (Winchester: Unwin Hyman, 1989). In this dissertation, I adopt Carey's view of communication as ritual but replace the word "ritual" with "relationship" in order to emphasize the idea of communication as relationship, which is central to the argument in this dissertation.

[81] Carey attributes the origins of the transmission model to two pioneering works in this area in the early part of the 20th century: Douglas Waples, "Communications," *American Journal of Sociology.* 47, (1942), 907-917; and Lasswell Harold, "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society," in *The Communication of Ideas, ed.* Lyman Bryson (New York: Harper and Bros, 1948), 37-51.

[82] Elwood Shannon and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1949).

[83] Waples, *Communications,* 907.

[84] Carey, *Communication as Culture*, 12.

audience as senders but receivers. Communication in this sense becomes sending or responding to a message and not a conversation in which parties perform dual role of sender and receiver simultaneously.

The ritual view of communication, according to Carey, holds that even though communication involves some sort of transmission of a message, it goes beyond that and involves relationships that produce core values, such as sharing, participation, association, shared beliefs, and fellowship, for the survival and transformation of the human society in time. Typical examples are the socio-cultural and socio-psychological theories of communication, which see communication as an interactive process and discursive reflection that produces and reproduces shared cultural patterns for individual and communal survival.[85] The relational view of communication rests on the assumption that "life is a conversation" that never ends; and that communication is the means by which people ritualize life and create the world and community they wish to inhabit. Communication then becomes "a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed."[86] While Carey situates the origins of the ritual view of communication in religion, his understanding of ritual goes beyond religious rites to involve all the cultural ways that human beings seek to understand life, interact with reality and transform it. In the relational view of communication, all participants in a communicative event become co-senders and co-receivers.

Even though most communication theories provide useful insights into the processes, they fall short in explaining the origin and purpose of human communication.

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[85] Craig, *Communication Theory as a Field*.

[86] Carey, *Communication as Culture*, 21.

Even linguistics, such as Noam Chomsky,[87] who have argued for the innateness of human language fall short in identifying the true origin of language and communication. In general, "organic evolution has proven unable to elucidate the origin of language and communication"; and has not been able to uncover the truth that "humans were created with the unique ability to employ speech for communication."[88] As Quentin Schultze rightly observes, "by scientifically reducing human communication to a mechanical process of sending and receiving messages, scholars sometimes rob it of its creativity and spiritual mystery… [and] tend to foster manipulation and control instead of love and service."[89] It is a Christian account of communication that provides a complete understanding of human communication in identifying God as its true origin, creative and redeeming love as its essential nature, and communion with God, humanity, and all creation as its purpose.

Communication in Christian Thought

In Christian usage, the term communication might be traced to its Latin root: *communicare* (to share), *cum-munio* (union) or the Greek *koinonia* (fellowship or communion). It suggests a process of placing things in common through a shared process.[90] The Trinity is the source and model of all human communication.[91] In this dissertation, communication is defined as a natural, dynamic, and symbolic process of

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[87] Noam Chomsky, *Language and Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968).

[88] Brad Harrub, Dave Millar, and Bert Thompson*, The Origins of Language and Communication* (Apologetics Press: Reason & Revelation, 22, no.3 (2003): 93.

[89] Quentin Schultze, *Communication for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 172.

[90] Robert Fortner, *Communication, Media, and Identity: A Christian Theory of Communication* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007).

[91] Pontifical Council for Social Communication. Communio et Progressio, accessed March 15, 2016. Vatican.va. 2.

dialogue through which human beings discover, assess, maintain, and develop relationships with God, other human beings, and created things for the survival and transformation of society in time. Social communication refers to all ways and means through which human beings communicate with one another in society.

The Second Vatican Counsel and works of communication theologians, such as Karl Rahner, Avery Dulles, Franz-Josef Eilers, Paul Soukup, Frances Plude, Mattias Scharer, and Robert White present creation, divine revelation, the Incarnation, the Paschal Mystery of Christ, the Pentecost, and all other mysteries of the Christian faith as God's self-communication and invitation to humanity to live in communicative love with God, with one another, and with all creation.[92] Salvation history, as recorded on every page of the Christian Scriptures, shows that when human beings fail to use the gift of communication in the way God intends it, the relationship between God and us, our fellow human beings and, indeed, all of creation suffers.[93] Frances Plude points out that when we use the gift according to God's plan, we reveal God's continuous creative love and help restore our fallen world into the paradise that God created it to be.[94]
As Oladejo Faniran argues, "for Christians, therefore, the ultimate aim of all communication is the promotion of understanding, love, unity, communion, and community."[95]

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[92] Scharer, Matthias, and Bern, Hilberath. *The Practice of Communicative Theology: An Introduction to a New Theological Culture* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008).

[93] John Paul II. *The Rapid Development* (Vatican website, 2005).

[94] Frances Plude, "Communication Theology," *Special Issue of Catholic International Journal*, 12, no. 4 (2001).

[95] Oladejo Faniran. "Evangelizing the Media: A Challenge to the Church in Africa". *AFER*, 40, no. 2 (1998).

Catholic Orientations towards Communication

In the 20th and 21st centuries, four distinct but complementary orientations have guided scholarly work on ecclesial communication in the church: the dialogical, hermeneutical, contextual, and technological.[96] The dialogical orientation focuses on the role of interpersonal dialogue in Christian spirituality and communication within the church. Philosophical works such as Martin Buber on I-it and I-Thou relationships[97] and Gabriel Marcel's ideas on participation, presence, and communion[98] as well as theological works of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Joseph Ratzinger, Avery Dulles, and John Paul II continue to influence discussions on dialogical personalism in the life of faith.[99] Central to the dialogical orientation is the truth that the freedom to love and live one's life to the full comes from overcoming the barriers to knowing oneself and others.

The need to overcome such barriers is also reflected in the hermeneutical approach to communication, and is exemplified in the works of theologians such as Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, Bernard Lonergan, David Tracy, and Thomas Groome. These theologians emphasize the importance of approaching reality with a conversational attitude towards individuals, traditions, texts, and communities for the purpose of

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[96] Scharer, and Hilberath, *The Practice of Communicative Theology,* 3-9.

[97] Martin, Buber, *I and Thou*. trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985). Buber's main thesis "Dialogical personalism" posits that human life finds its fullness in relationships. We objectify relationships in an I-it relationship, but humanize things and people in I-Thou relationship in which the other is another self, undetached from me. Buber sees God as the ultimate Thou.

[98] See Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

[99] In their own unique ways, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Joseph Ratzinger, Avery Dulles, and John Paul II develop the idea that life finds its fullness in relationships and that the freedom to love and live one's life to the full comes from overcoming the barrier to knowing oneself and others. For a detailed discussion on this see Mattias Scharer and Bern Hilberath, *The Practice of Communicative Theology.*

expanding one's horizons and developing relationships. The basic assumption of the hermeneutical approach is that communities are "constituted and perfected through communication."[100]

This idea that communities get perfected through communication is further highlighted in the contextual approach modeled by the works of theologians, such as Stephen Bevans and Robert Schreiter. They continue to call attention to the need to communicate the gospel message in a way that takes culturally specific understandings of life into consideration; but also transforms relationships in cultures, communities and helps to overcome prejudices, economic and social hardships, conflicts, violence, and all forms of evil in society.[101]

The technological orientation towards communication in Catholic circles focuses on the church's use of new communication technology for the proclamation of the gospel. My dissertation falls within this technological orientation in the exploration of communications theology. Conciliar documents, papal encyclicals, World Communication Day messages, as well as the work of theologians, such as Paul Soukup, Robert White, and Eugene Gan, have called attention to the need to explore a deeper understanding of the new media and how best Christians might use these tools for the greater good of humanity and glory of God. Soukup identifies the main concern of this orientation as including the need " to establish some theological touchstones for the churches to use in judging their use of the means of social communication," provide a

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[100] Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1972), 363.

[101] For more discussion on the work of contextual theologians and the communication of the gospel see Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York: Maryknoll, 2002). Also see Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (New York: Maryknoll, 1985).

theological understanding of the new media from a Christian ethical perspective, and develop a more advanced understanding of the processes involved in using them.[102]

One thing that is common in all four orientations to communication in the Catholic tradition is the fact that "the human person, who is ultimately spoken to by God, can choose to answer or ignore God"[103] and so the church needs to guide human response to God's communicative love through the power of the Holy Spirit who empowers us not only to call God Abba (Father), but also to return the love God first gives us in Christ. This is and must always remain the goal of the church's communication.

Section II: The Media for Social Communication

In general, the media for social communication refers to all the tools that human beings use for social interactions and public life expressions in societies and cultures. They include all multimodal ensemble for meaning making and representation, such as spoken word, written or printed texts, visuals, gestures, symbols, silence, and other modes of communication. In Catholic literature, media for social commination began to receive special attention in the 1930s with the publication of the first official church document on social communications, *Vigilanti Cura: Encyclical on Motion Pictures*. The term social communication was used to connote all ways and means of human communication in society.[104] The revolution in social media brought by computer-mediated communication has given rise to different categorizations, such as means of modern communication, old media, new media, social media, and interactive media.

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[102] Soukup, *Communication and Theology, 25.*

[103] Scharer and Hilberath, *The Practice of Communicative Theology, 28.*

[104] Franz-Josef Eilers, *Community in Communication: An Introduction to Social Communication*, (Manila: Logos Publications, 1994), 2. Eilers observes that Vatican II uses the term social communication to mean all ways and means of human communication in society.

In this dissertation, old media is used to mean all tools that are not Internet or Web 2.0 based. The phrases new media, social media, and interactive media are used interchangeably to mean "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of user generated content."[105] They include computers, mobile phones, the Internet and its World Wide Web tools such as blogs, websites, and social networks,[106] which provide "on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device", such as blogs, forums, photo-sharing platforms, social gaming, microblogs, chat apps, smartphones, and social networks. Research around the world indicates that, currently, the most popular social media include, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Pinterest. [107]

Theories of the New Media for Social Communication

Different theories have been proposed as a way of explaining the nature and processes involved in using the new media for social communication. One such theory is Social Exchange theory, which has its origin in works, such as George Homans' cost-benefit analysis in human communication and Richard Emerson's explorations on how exchange between individuals and small groups influence communication, relationship building, and other types of bonding among human beings.[108] The theory holds that

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[105] Andreas Kaplan, and Michael Haenlein, "Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media," *Business Horizons*, 53, no.1 (2010), 61.

[106] Brandon, Vogt. *The Church and New Media* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2011), 17.

[107] Beth Doherty, *Tweet Others as You Would Wish To Be Tweeted* (Melbourne: David Lovell Publishing, 2015), kindle, chapter 1. Beth notes that Social network sites developed out of web logs (Blogs). The first social network was *Friendster* developed in 2002. Currently, the popular social networks include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, MySpace, Pinterest, Instagram, and Google+. This book also provides practical guides on how to use social networks with a Christian perspective.

[108] Richard Emerson, "Social Exchange Theory," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2 (1976) 335-362.

people engage in social behavior they find rewarding and avoid those they consider high cost. Formation of close relationships, according to this theory is based on self-disclosure as it relates to perceived cost and benefits. In the words of Homans, "social behavior is an exchange of goods, material goods but also non-material ones, such as the symbols of approval or prestige."[109] According to this theory, people participate in social media because of expected gain in reputation, influence on others, and an anticipated reciprocity on the part of others.[110] If the cost outweighs the benefits, they end the relationship.

Another theory that seeks to explain communication in the new media is the Social Penetration Theory, which is based on the works of Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor.[111] This theory is helpful in understanding how people engage in relationships with individuals as well as institutions. They begin with a public and superficial self-disclosure and then gradually, depending on the cost and benefits, they either decide to embrace an inner self-disclosure and share feelings at a deeper level, and expose their beliefs, ambitions, and goals. In the new media, people begin such relationships by "friending" people, liking and commenting on their post publicly. However, as the relationship deepens they resort to more private or semi-private options for sharing confidential messages online. This theory also provides a yardstick for accessing how deep or superficial one's online relationship with individuals or institutions are. It is, therefore, helpful for understanding the kind of relationship the church's way of using social media encourages.

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[109] George Homans, "Social Behavior as Exchange," *American Journal of Sociology.* 63 (1958), 597-606.

[110] Pan, and Crotts, *Theoretical Models of Social Media,* 7-9.

[111] See Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor, *Social Penetration: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973).

Social Network Theory also explains the nature and processes of new media communication. It sees communication as connections, links, or ties meant for the development of networks of individuals, families, communities, or nations. The ties could be financial exchange, sexual relationships, friendship, kinship, or common interests of beliefs.[112] In new media communication, therefore, individual actors desire to be connected either partially or wholly to the network. For the church that seeks to form the world into a network of friends, understanding the structure of the network that exists among people connected to the church through the new media is important for ensuring that each node feels connected and valued as an important part of the network.

Furthermore, McLuhan's Media theory seeks to explain the relationship between media and social change. As captured in his famous idea of the media being the message, McLuhan contests that the media itself and not so much its content is what transforms society. He explores media from four epochs of human history, tribal, literate, print and electronic era, and concludes that in each era the media for communication is the primary cause of social change.[113] The claim in this theory could be debated from diverse perspectives. However, the history of the world indicates that the media themselves can have some unintended consequences on human communication. Such awareness is important in developing a good understanding of the affordances as well as the challenges that the new media pose to society today.

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[112] Pan and Crotts, *Theoretical Models of Social Media*, 9-10.

[113] Marshall Mcluhan, *The Guttenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto, Canada. University of Toronto Press, 1995).

Section III: Evangelization as Communicative Event

The church exists to communicate God's love and guide human response to this love. It has the fundamental duty of transforming the world by communicating the gospel of Christ to all human beings.[114] Vatican II describes the church as ''a universal sacrament of salvation'' with a mission of communicating the gospel to all of humanity.[115] Quentin Shultze observes that since the institution of the church, Christians in every age have responded to God's call to be co-creators and restorers through their communication with the world.[116] They have engaged in public lives of society at different levels with the goal of sharing their vision of the "good life"[117] with the world through words of preaching and lives of witness. This communication duty of the church is what came to be known as "evangelization.'

The Catholic Church has been involved in evangelization since its institution by Christ and has succeeded in bringing the gospel to Europe, North and South America, Africa, Australia, and Asia. This communicative task, evangelization, involves not only proclamation of the gospel of Christ, but also the task of guiding people of all nations to embrace God's vision for the world as revealed through the life, ministry, and mission of

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[114] Seward Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 185-200. Hiltner explains the centrality of communication in the life of the Christian community. He argues that one cannot separate the duty of communicating from organizing and fellowship. The essential mission of the church is to communicate Christ to the world.

[115] Vatican Council II, *Ad Gentes*, 1.

[116] Schultze, *Communication for life*.

[117] I use "good life" to refer to what St. Augustine defines as a "harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God and each other in God". See Augustine, *City of God,* trans. William Babcock (NY: New City Press, 2012), 19. 17. In contemporary literature, Miroslav Volf describes the good life as "human flourishing", which is a happy life and the supreme good of each human being as desired by God. See Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve The Common Good* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011).

Christ on earth.[118] The goal of the church's communication, both at the communal and

individual levels, is to establish the kingdom of God, which is not a territory, but a new

order; not merely spiritual but a "totality of this material world, spiritual and human, that

is now introduced into God's order."[119]

After the reformation, the church became suspicious of the word *evangelical* and

moved more toward an ecclesiological approach towards mission to the extent that the

church's missionary activities around the world became more ecclesiological than

evangelical.[120] The term evangelization was introduced again into Catholic discourse by

Cardinal Suenens' book, *The Gospel to Every Creature,*[121] and was made popular by

Pope Paul VI's apostolic exhortation, Evengelii Nuntiandi: *On Evangelization in the*

Modern World. Prior to this apostolic exhortation, the term evangelization generally

meant kerygma or missionary preaching, catechesis/preaching of Christian initiation, and

homily or liturgical preaching.[122] In the 1974 Synod on Evangelization, the term was

used to mean: "the activity whereby the Church proclaims the gospel, so that the faith

may be aroused, may unfold, and may grow."[123] Evangelization has always had a

functional relationship with communication. Underlining this relational character of

communicating the gospel, Pope Paul VI rightly observes, "evangelization would not be

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[118] Pope Paul VI. *Evangelii Nuntiandi: Evangelization in the Modern World* (Vatican website, 1975).

[119] Leonardo Boff. *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time*, trans. Patrick Hughes (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1978), 56.

[120] See Avery Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009).

[121] Leon Joseph Suenens, *The Gospel to Every Creature* (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1956).

[122] See Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium.*

[123] The Vatican Press Office, *World Synod of Bishops on Evangelization- Preparatory / Related Documents: III Ordinary General Assembly 1974*, accessed June 4, Vatican.va.

complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social."[124]

Assessing the transformative effect of various methods of communicating the gospel to the world over the centuries, the church came to the realization that the energy of the Good News is not being felt as it should; the approach to communicating the gospel was not transforming human conscience as it should; and that there was the need for the church to explore new ways of communicating the gospel. These concerns were expressed in the three main questions that guided the Synod on Evangelization in 1974 and remain central to discussions on evangelization in the church today: (1) In our day, what has happened to that hidden energy of the Good News, which is able to have a powerful effect on man's conscience? (2) To what extent and in what way is that evangelical force capable of really transforming the people of this century? (3)What methods should be followed in order that the power of the Gospel may have its effect?[125]

It is in search of answers to these questions that Pope John Paul II introduced the term "new evangelization" in 1983. It refers to evangelization, which remains true to the unchanging content of the gospel, but is "new in ardor, method, and expression."[126] The new evangelization is, therefore, a call to look for new ways of communicating the Christian faith to the world. Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have echoed this call for a new evangelization in emphasizing the need for a new method of communicating the gospel in a way that responds to the needs of the changing world and its challenges

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[124] Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi,* accessed March 10, 2016. Vatican.va, 29.

[125] Ibid, 4.

[126] Pope John Paul used the phrase "new evangelization" in 1983 when he addressed the Bishops of Latin America. See *Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate: Address of His Holiness John Paul II, 1979*, accessed January 12, 2016, Vatican.va.

and ensures a new and renewed personal encounter with Christ. The new evangelization

is, therefore, a communicative event. It is through communication that the church can

turn the world into a community of love according to the vision of Christ.[127] As Avery

Dulles observes:

> The church exists in order to bring people into communication with God, and
>
> thereby to open them up to communication with each other. If communication is
>
> seen as the procedure by which communion is achieved and maintained, we may
>
> also say that the church is communication.[128]

Section IV: Media of Social Communication and Evangelization

The Old Media and Evangelization

Salvation history shows that, in different times, God uses different media to

communicate God's love to people in order to restore a fallen world to its original

dignity.[129] God used spoken word to bring things into being[130] and constantly invites

people into a covenantal relationship (oral medium). Not only did God write the divine

law on chiseled stone tablets, but God also gave specific instructions to Moses, Isaiah,

Habakkuk, John and other inspired authors in Scripture to write down the divine word

(written medium).[131] God also uses signs and symbols such as the rainbow, pillars of fire,

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[127] See Jacob Srampickal, *Communication Can Renew the Church* (New Delhi: Media House, 2010).

[128] Dulles, *The Church is Communications,* 80.

[129] Brandon Vogt, *The Church and New Media (Huntington*, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2011),15-22.

[130] Gen. 1:1-31

[131] Exod. 34:1; Ex. 17:14; Isa. 30:3; Hab. 2:2; Rev. 1:11

clouds, a talking donkey,[132] bread and wine, and a wooden cross to communicate love for

humanity (visual medium). In the fullness of time, God personified the oral, written, and

visual media of communication through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus

Christ.[133] In continuing the evangelizing mission of Christ, the church has used different

media to spread the gospel.

Living predominantly in an oral culture, the apostles and other disciples of Christ

spread the gospel by word of mouth, beginning from Jerusalem and spreading to other

parts of the Roman empire. However, reasons such as the desire to preserve the story of

Jesus' life, death and resurrection, the need to transcend time and space, and the reality of

original eye-witnesses of the Christ event dying, led the church to begin writing down the

gospel as it was handed on in various Christian communities. Technologies including

parchments, scrolls, books, and icons were used to transmit the Christian message for

liturgical use. In this first phase writing was done by hand-copying the bible and other

Christian literature for liturgical use. The invention of the printing press by Johannes

Guntenberg led to a rapid production and spread of the bible and other religious texts

across the world. More Christians gained access to the bible and moved from mere

listeners to readers.[134] In general, the written communication allowed the church to do

systematic reflections on the Christian faith and codify the Christian beliefs and

practices.[135]

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[132] Num. 22:21-39.

[133] Heb.1:1-2; John 1:1-18.

[134] Julie Lytle, *Faith Formation 4.0: Introducing an Ecology of faith in a Digital Age* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2013), kindle chapter 2.

[135] Ibid., chapter 3-4.

The invention of radio in the 20th century began another major phase of human communication, the age of mass media when the same message could be sent to thousands and millions of people at the same time via radio, television, or film. Recognizing the potential of these new technologies for evangelization, Pope Pius XI commissioned Guglielmo Marconi, the inventor of long distance radio transmission, to establish the Vatican radio for the spread of the gospel.[136] The Pope inaugurated the Vatican radio on February 12, 1931, gave the first message by radio "to all nations and to every creature,"[137] and called on all Catholics to use the mass media to proclaim the gospel. Churches in different parts of the world responded to this call and began to explore the potential of mass media for evangelization.

Even though there was some skepticism and, at times, fear on the part of some church leaders to embrace mass media, many saw these tools "as a way to reach, enlighten, and possibly convert an audience far larger than any church, tabernacle, or revival could ever accommodate."[138] Examples of initial efforts towards the use of mass media for evangelization include Archbishop Fulton Sheen's *Catholic Hour, and Life is Worth Living Television programs,* Mother Angelica's *Eternal Word Television Network* (EWTN) in the United States, and the Vatican Television. Pope Pius XII established the Pontifical Council for Social Communications (PCSC) to guide the universal church to use social media to spread the gospel. Many churches in Europe, South America, Africa,

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[136] The Vatican Press Office, *The Founding of Vatican Radio,* accessed March 20, 2016, Vatican.va

[137] Pius XII, *Miranda Prorsus: Encyclical*, accessed March 10, 2016. Vatican.va.

[138] Hal Erickson, *Religious Radio and Television in the United States, 1921-1991: The Programs and Personalities* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc, 1992), 2.

and Asia began to preach the gospel through radio, television, and other forms of mass media.

The New Media and Evangelization

The development of the Internet and its World Wide Web tools in 20th and 21st centuries has led to a revolution in mass media and ushered in another phase of human communication. The striking difference between the mass media of radio, television, film and the digital communication tools of the 21st century is signaled by the use of terms such as "new media" or "interactive media" to describe the 21st century mass media.[139] As passive media, radio, television, and film "lack opportunities for direct engagement and dialogical interaction with other readers or audience members as well as with producers. "[140] They are static and only allow for a one-way flow of information. The new media, however, allows for dialogue, conversation, and connection.

In general, the response of Christian churches towards social media has been explored from many different angles. William Fore, Jay Newman, William Kuhns, and other writers have discussed religion and media as opposing sources that are competing to control and shape culture. Donald Wildmon and David Porter also call attention to how social media is used as a propaganda tool to replace the Christian worldview with a secular understanding of life in society.[141] The revolution in communication technology was seen as ushering in "the final phase of the extension of man – the technological

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[139] Lytle. *Faith Formation* 4.0, kindle, chapter 4.

[140] Ibid.

[141] See Donald Wildmon, *The Home Invaders* (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1985). Also see David Porter, *The Media: A Christian Point of View* (London: Scripture Union, 1974).

simulation of consciousness,"[142] and the end of religious influence.[143] Other approaches, as seen in the works of Paul Soukup and Robert White, have focused on how religions can make best use of social media for the good of society.[144]

The church's initial response to the revolution in communication technology was one of suspicion and skepticism. However, the church's attitude has, over the years, evolved and become more positive. Now the church aims for a "deeper insight into the social role of communication," and encourages all Catholics to "integrate communication much more closely into the larger pastoral activity of the Church."[145] The church sees "the latest media of social communication [as] indispensable means for evangelization."[146] Today, the church sees social networks and other tools of social media as "portals of truth and faith; new spaces of evangelization;" [147] and believes firmly in the words of Pope Paul VI that, "the church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect" for evangelization.[148]

The church has and continues to take many steps to embrace the new media for

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[142] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 3.

[143] Rodney Stark, Secularization, R.I.P. *Sociology of Religion,* 60, no. 3 (1999): 246-273.

[144] Paul Soukup, "Church Documents and the Media" in *Mass Media, ed* John Colman and Miklós Tomka (London SCM Press, 1993).

[145] Ibid, 75.

[146] *Communio et Progressio*, 163.

[147] Benedict XVI, *Message for 47th World Communications Day, accessed* July 20, 2016, vatican.va.

[148] *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 45.

evangelization. "The Vatican created one of the Internet's earliest sites in 1995"[149] to

share church documents on the web. In addition, the church created an official YouTube

account for the Vatican in 2009; launched the Vatican web portal[150] and a Facebook page

in 2011; created a Twitter account in 2012; and the Pope App in 2013. Further, church

media institutions around the world, such as the News.va, the National Catholic Register,

New Advent, Pew Sitter, Catholic Herald.co.uk, Rome reports, Whispers in the Loggia,

Life site news, and Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) are using the new media

to engage the world. All over the world, many Catholic institutions, such as dioceses,

schools, parishes, and individuals have websites, Facebook, and Twitter accounts. Church

institutions and individuals are "friending" people via social media. It is not surprising to

hear church announcements such as "please friend us on Facebook and Twitter" or

"please go to our Facebook page and like this event."

Different conferences of bishops around the world continue to call on Catholics to

use social media to spread the gospel. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishop

and many individual dioceses have developed social media guidelines to help the church

make the best use of these tools for evangelization. Programs such as *Word on Fire* by

Bishop Robert Barron, and many blogs posts, Facebook posts, and Tweets of thousands

of the Faithful are examples of how the church is using the new media for

evangelization.[151] In Austria, works such as *Social Networking Policy* of the Bishops

conference, and the *Ten Commandments of the Use of Social Media* by Archbishop

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[149] Vogt. *The Church and New Media, 17.*

[150] This web portal is a type of news website and a hub for all Vatican's media content gathered in real time in one place and reaches people through different languages, such as English, Spanish, French, Italian and Portuguese.

[151] Vogt. *The Church and New Media*.

Eamon Martin, are few examples of steps that the church is taking to explore how best to use social media to share the gospel. [152] The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM)[153] and individual church officials in Africa have also called on Catholics to use their mobile phones, the Internet and its web tools to spread the gospel.[154] As a response, many churches in Africa are using Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and other forms of new media to reach people on the continent with the gospel. Such good efforts also abound in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. In addition to the various institutional uses of social media, much effort is being made to train ministers and church staff all over the world to lead Catholics in the search for more effective ways of using social media for evangelization.[155]

Despite all the blessings they bring to human communication, social media can pose challenges towards the development of Christian spirituality and have detrimental effects on the development of society at large. Digital technology, like any gift from God can and has been misused. News from around the world and authors, who offer a Christian perspective on social media, such as Eugene Gan and Criag Detweiler, are

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[152] For details of the Church's effort to integrate social media into ministry in Australia see Doherty, *Tweet Others as You Would Wish To Be Tweeted*. Also see Eamon Martin. *Ten Commandments of the Use of Social Media* (Catholic Herald: Registered in England and Wales, no. 288446, 2014). The Archbishop's ten commandments include: 1. Be positive and joyful, 2. Strictly avoid aggression and 'preachiness' online, 3. Never bear false witness on the Internet, 4. Remember 'Ubi caritas et amor,' 5. Have a broad back when criticisms and insults are made – when possible, gently correct, 6. Pray in the digital world, 7. Establish connections, relationships and build communion, 8. Educate our young to keep themselves safe and to use the Internet responsibly, 9. Witness to human dignity at all times online, 10. Be missionary.

[153] Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) is made up of all the Regional Bishops' Conferences in Africa as well as Madagascar and its surrounding Islands. It has its secretariat in Accra, Ghana.

[154] See Castor Goliama, *Where are you Africa? Church and Society in the Mobile Phone Age.* Oxford: African Books Collective, 2010).

[155] Zsupan-Jerome. *Connected Toward Communion,* kindle, chapter 6, loc. 2197.

filled with countless instances of how people use social media to bully and prey on innocent people, promote war, lure people into pornography, perpetuate all sorts of evil, and promote ideologies that go against the dignity of the human person.[156] It is therefore not surprising that the majority of the church's teaching on social media cautions Christians to use these tools from a Christian perspective and aspire to live in the digital age with a believer's heart.

Today, the new media influence every aspect of human life. "The tools we choose to use and how we use them affect how we think, how we make decisions, how we relate to one another, how we construct knowledge, even how we think about God."[157] As Elaine Graham points out, the success of the church's evangelization efforts today largely depends on a good understanding of how technology is changing our world.[158] Pope Francis observes that the "revolution taking place in communications media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge"[159] that call for fresh energy and creative imagination capable of revealing the beauty of God to our age. This call for a Christian reflection on these tools of social communication is a step in the right direction to help believers give "a soul" to these tools of communication."[160] This is what

[156] See Eugene Gan, In *Infinite Bandwidth: Encountering Christ in the Media.* (Steubenville, Ohio: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2010). Also see Criag Detweiler, *iGods: How technology shapes our spiritual and social Lives* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2013).

[157] Stephen Spyker, *Technology and Spirituality: How the Information Revolution Affects our Spiritual Lives* (Vermont: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2007), 75.

[158] Elaine Graham, "The Medium and the Message? Notes on Pope Francis. Theology of Communication". *Crucible: the Journal of Christian Social Ethics*, (2015), 20-30.

[159] Francis, *Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter*, accessed July 4, 2015, Vatican.va.

[160] Benedict XVI, *The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word*, accessed August 5, 2015, Vatican.va.

makes the call for a search for a theology of the new media even more urgent in our day. The next section of this chapter traces the church's search for a theology of social media in general and the new media in particular.

Section IV: The Church's Search for Theology of the New Media

Insights From Encyclicals, Apostolic Exhortations, and Conciliar Documents

Even though the concept of communication has always been central to Christian theology, Communications Theology, the branch of theology, which focuses specifically on the relationship between social communication and Christian spirituality in the Catholic circles, gained momentum only in the 1930s with the publication of the first official church document on social communications, *Vigilanti Cura: Encyclical on Motion Pictures*. As an institution, the Catholic Church's initial response to the technological revolution of the 20th century was one of skepticism and caution in which the church followed the new developments in social communication "with vigilant eye."[161] In these initial stages, each year, bishops and all pastors of souls were to obtain a pledge from their people in which "they promise to stay away from motion picture plays which are offensive to truth and to Christian morality."[162]

This cautionary attitude was followed by intense research that led to a deepened appreciation of not only the dangers, but also the blessings inherent in the advances in communication technology. The church's response began to focus more on these advances as "the gifts of God" as expressed in the second encyclical on social communications, *Miranda Prorsus.* Even though this encyclical continued the call for the

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[161] Pius XI, *Vigilanti Cura,* accessed March 10, 2016, Vatican.va.

[162] Ibid.

church to embrace the mass media with a maternal "watchful care", it put more emphasis on the need for the church to embrace and use mass media for the proclamation of the gospel.

A major step towards the search for a theology of modern media of communication was Vatican II decree, *Inter Mirifica*. Key concepts of the council such as "renewal, reform, aggiornamento (updating), openness, dialogue, and reading the signs of the times" guided the church's discussion and development of a more positive attitude towards social media.[163] In this document, the church not only welcomed but also "promoted with special interest," and called on "all the children of the Church [to] join, without delay and with the greatest effort ... work to make effective use of the media for social communication in various apostolic endeavors."[164] Even though many have criticized this document for its lack of definitive doctrinal teaching on social communication,[165] *Inter Mirifica* was a landmark in the search for a theology of social communication because it provided guidelines for "envisioning faithful practice and ethical praxis for church, culture, and society."[166]

The need to promote social communication with special interest began to take form in some concrete steps that were taken at the council. Not only did the Second Vatican Council reiterate the importance of communication theology in accomplishing

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[163] Zsupan-Jerome, *Connected Toward Communion,* kindle, chapter 1.

[164] Vatican Council II, *Inter Mirifica: Decree on the Mass Media*, accessed June 2, 2015. Vatican.va, 1-2.

[165] Andre Ruszkowski, "Decree on the Means of Social Communication: Success or Failure of the Council?" in *Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty Five Years After* (1962-1987), Vol 3, ed. Rene Latourelle (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1987).

[166] Zsupan-Jerome, *Connected Toward Communion*, kindle, chapter 2, loc. 873.

the mission of the church; but it also established the World Communications Day, the only feast day stipulated by the Council to continue the dialogue on faithful communicative practice and ethical praxis for church, culture, and society. The theological foundations of social communication envisioned by Vatican II were further developed into a more explicit doctrinal teaching in the post-conciliar document *Communio et Progressio.*

Even though this document like all preceding church documents on social communication has a cautionary tone, its overall tone is more positive towards modern media for communication. The document sees the unity and advancement of all people and society as "the chief aims of social communication and of all the means it uses."[167] Modern media is again described as God's gift to humanity for cooperation with God for the salvation of souls; and all decrees of Vatican II are described as providing theological foundations for a "deeper and more penetrating understanding of social communication and of the contribution, which the media uses can make to modern society."[168] Under the section titled *" The Christian View of the Means of Social Communication: Basic Points of Doctrine"* the church develops a theology of social communication around three theological concepts: Trinity, Christ as perfect communicator, and creativity. The church identifies the Trinity as the "source and model" of all communication and explains any use of social media in a way that does not promote the ultimate good of the human person as the effect of the fallen human condition. Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity and the Incarnate Word is the perfect communicator:

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[167] *Communio et Progressio,* 1.

[168] Ibid, 2.

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He gave His message not only in words but in the whole manner of His life. He

spoke from within, that is to say, from out of the press of His people. He preached

the Divine message without fear or compromise. He adjusted to His people's way

of talking and to their patterns of thought. And He spoke out of the predicament

of their time.[169]

The church goes on, in other sections of *Communio et Progressio* to call on all human

beings to see social communication and all of its media as a gift from God for

cooperation with God in creating a better world. The goal of this gift is therefore

communion with God and neighbor. The church teaches that, "by creating man in His

own image, God has given him a share in His creative power. And so man is summoned

to cooperate with his fellow man in building the earthly city.[170]

The church underlines the dignity of the human person, the common good, truth,

and freedom of choice as essential moral principles that must guide the use of social

media and calls on Christians to engage social media in all aspects of their lives and help

use it to transform the world. The theology of modern means of social communication

outlined in *Communio et Progressio* continue to be echoed in official church documents

on communication with each new document encouraging a more positive attitude towards

social media and providing insights and practical strategies for Christian engagement

with social communication. *In Aetatis Novae,*[171] the church seeks to translate the

theological principles outlined in previous documents into practical guidelines for

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[169] Ibid.

[170] Ibid, *7.*

[171] Aetatis Novae is a pastoral instruction on social communication issued by the Pontifical Council for Social Communication in 1992. See Pontifical Council for Social Communication. *Aetatis Novae*, accessed March 12, 2016, Vatican.va.

Christian engagement with social media. In this document, the church observes that "much that men and women know and think about life is conditioned by the media; to a considerable extent, human experience itself is an experience of media."[172]

Using a practical theological perspective of "see, judge, act" the document calls on Christians and all people of good will to be more involved in understanding and shaping social media through research, pastoral planning, formation of communicators, and engagement in dialogue in a way that will guide the use of media according to the teachings of the church for the realization of communion of peoples and cultures. In *Aetatis Novae,* the church moved beyond seeing media just as tools for communication and began to develop a keen awareness of media as a "comprehensive, thought-shaping, and culture making reality of our time."[173]

Papal and other church documents continue to call on Christians to be aware of their responsibility in realizing the blessings inherent in modern tools for social communication and encourage them to take concrete steps to engage social media with a Christian vision and hope. The Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops in 1994 and 2009 called on Catholics in Africa to use all the various tools for social communication to realize the evangelizing mission of the church. The post synodal exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* reminded Catholics in Africa that:

> today in fact the mass media constitute not only a world but also a culture and
> civilisation. And it is also to this world that the Church is sent to bring the Good
> News of salvation. The task of the agents of evangelization is to "enter this world

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[172] Ibid, 2.

[173] Zsupan-Jerome. *Connected Toward Communion*, 83.

in order *to allow themselves to be permeated* by this new civilization and culture

for the purpose of learning how to make good *use* of them.[174]

In his Apostolic Letter*, The Rapid Development*, Pope John Paul II urged

Christians not to be "afraid of new technology" but to use it in ways that help realize our

dignity and destiny as children of God. He offers a practical strategy of formation,

participation, and dialogue guided by gospel reflection, missionary commitment, and

pneumatological approach to communication, which allows for "attentive discernment

and constant vigilance."[175] This call for discernment and vigilance is an invitation for

Christians and all people to do a critical reflection on how the use of communication

technology influences people's understanding of the truths about God's self disclosure in

human experience. In order to make any theological claims about how God reveals

Godself through social communication, Christians need to venture into the media

landscape to find God and use technology in a way that enhances their relationship with

God, Church, family, friends, and society. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, this

requires setting "sail on the digital sea…facing into the deep with the same passion that

governed the ship of the church for two thousand years… living in the digital world with

a believer's heart."[176] Pope Francis continues to echo the need to use social media to

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[174] John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa: Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*, accessed June 20, 2015. Vatican.va, 71.

[175] John Paul II, *The Rapid Development,* accessed August 2, 2016.Vatican.va. 13.

[176] Benedict XVI, The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word, accessed August 5, 2015.Vatican.va.

build relationships and help people develop authentic relationships with Christ "as we seek to share with others the beauty of God.[177]

Insights from World Communication Day Messages

Besides papal encyclicals, apostolic exhortations, and conciliar documents, the messages for the World Communications Day celebrations from 1967 to 2016 also provide helpful insights into the church's theology of social media. All the messages underline social media as gift from God for evangelization. An analysis of the major themes in the messages indicates that the messages have been dedicated to developing some specific aspects of the role of social media in different areas of evangelization.

Thematically, the messages have presented social media as a tool for the development of nations and formation of public opinion with the truth and hope of the gospel; for the promotion of freedom, peace, justice and communion; the promotion of dialogue between religion and culture; development of the family; the protection and care of the elderly; promotion of the rights of women; protection and formation of the youth; the protection and education of children; and for the promotion of friendship and dialogue among all people. All the messages present social media as both a blessing and a challenge. Table 2 presents the theology of social media as presented in the Wor1d Communications Day messages.

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[177] Francis, *Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter*, accessed July 4, 2015. Vatican.va.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis of World Communications Day Messages (1967-2016).

Message Theme: Social Media as God's gift for….	Total Messages	Year
development of nations and formation of public opinion with the truth and hope of the gospel.	25	1967, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1977, 1986, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013
promotion of freedom, peace justice, and communion	10	1975, 1976, 1978, 1981, 1983, 1987, 1988, 2003, 2005, 2006,
promotion of dialogue between religion and culture	1	1984
development of the family	5	1969, 1980, 1994, 2004, 2015
promotion of the equality and right of women	1	1996
protection and formation of the youth	2	1970, 1985,
protection and education of Children	2	1979, 2007
protection and care of the elderly	1	1982
promotion of friendship/ authentic encounter	3	2009, 2014, 2016

Theology of the New Media in Practice: Evidence from Empirical Research

There is extensive literature on Christian churches and social media. A cursory search on the Internet shows thousands of churches have websites and social media sites around the world. However, not much empirical research exists on how the Catholic Church is using social media. The few studies that explore this subject focus on how Catholic institutions are using their websites to reach out to people. Karl Bridges analyzes the use of social media by Catholic organizations in United States, Canada, Ireland, and

the United Kingdom, and concludes that the participatory organizations use social media

mainly as a replacement for traditional publication channels to post church teachings,

homilies, weekly news, contact information, guidelines on how to become a member,

advertise upcoming events, and provide other forms of organizational information.[178]

Eileen Crowley makes similar findings in her study of how the church uses social

media for faith formation. Like Bridges, Crowley comments that too many parishes use

their websites to provide information such as mass times, portable document format

(PDF) of the printed bulletin, address and contacts of parish staff, information about

preparation for the sacraments, homilies, photo albums, and request for donations, rather

than using their website and other forms of social media to promote a participatory

culture that builds up the church community and society at large.[179]

In her study of social media use among Catholic youth in the diocese of Moshi in

Tanzania, Africa, Faustine Tarimo reports that the majority of the participants use social

media such as Facebook and smartphone apps to connect with friends and families to

share faith and explore politics, business, entertainment, and education. However, he

observes that the church still needs to develop a more participatory approach to social

media in order to reach the youth of today with the message of the gospel.[180]

The need for the church to develop a more participatory approach towards social

media use is also emphasized by Jacob Dankasa. He surveyed more than two hundred

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[178] Karl Bridges, "Use of social media by Catholic organizations," *New Theology Review* 26, no. 1, (2013), 1-10.

[179] Eileen Crowley, "The Role of Participatory Culture in Faith Formation" *New Theology Review* 28, no.1, (2015), 89-92.

[180] Faustine Tarimo, "*The Analysis of the Social Media among the Youth in the Catholic Diocese of Moshi and the Implications for Youth Faith Sharing*," masters thesis, John Carroll University, Ohio, 2016, http://collected.jcu.edu/masterstheses/15.

Catholic high school students in the USA on their Internet use, their readiness to participate in church blogs, and other online activities organized by the church to learn more about the church. The majority of the participants in that study, 80% said they use Internet on a daily basis. However, most of them indicated that they do not visit their church website for information about the church and would not participate in a parish blog to learn more about the church, if such a blog existed. Dankasa recommends that parishes need to ensure more interactivity on their websites and have a "designated church official, who will be live to answer questions and concerns of members through livechat."[181]

Findings from the above reviewed studies affirm the results from a 2012 research by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), which reports that a majority of American Catholics (96%) use social media not to search for religious content or engage in overt religious discussions; but mostly for everyday fun things such as music videos, comedy, movies and television, and comment on people's daily life activities. Only 6 % said they use social media to search for religious content. This suggests that the church cannot limit its use of the new media to posting church documents and hoping that people will search for them and be educated or even converted. Presenting the church's teachings in the form of music videos, movies, and commenting on the comedies, the fun, the joys, as well as the pains and sorrows of people's daily lives have the potential to ensure greater interactivity with the people of God.

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[181] Jacob Dankasa, "*New Media as Tools for Evangelization: Towards Developing Effective Communication Strategy in the Catholic Church*." masters' thesis., St. Cloud State University, Minnesota, 2014, ProQuest LLC (UMI 1526869), 51.

In order to deepen my understanding of how the church is using social media to reach out to people, I asked the three hundred participants in the survey I conducted as part of this research whether they follow their religious institutions on social media.[182] More than half (56%), said they follow the church and its institutions via social media. Among the 272 Catholics, 95% said they feel the church does not desire any relationship with them online. Some of the most recurring comments among the respondents were: "They never follow you back; nobody from the church comments on what is happening in my life; I just follow them to read things they post but they don't read what I post; I don't think they want a relationship with me; It's a one-way relationship, they don't really care about me, I think."

A Critical Reflection on the Church's Theology of the New Media in Practice A Bullhorn Approach?

Among other findings, the empirical studies reviewed above as well as those from my survey seem to suggest that the church sees social media mainly as God's gift to the church to transform the world and not so much gifts, which are equally meant for the transformation of the church. While the church's theology, in principle, teaches that social media are God's gifts to humanity for development of nations, formation of public opinion with the truth and hope of the gospel, promotion of dialogue between religion and cultures, the promotion of justice, peace, unity, friendships, and integral development of the human race through authentic encounter, its practice seems to suggest a bullhorn approach towards the use of social media.

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[182] About 90% of the respondents to my survey were Catholics. I provided a detailed description of this survey in Chapter 1 under methodology (descriptive reflection).

This approach to using social media shows a lack of understanding as to how communication in the new media works. It ignores the useful insight from the Social Exchange and Social Penetration theories discussed in section two of this chapter that people who engage in the communication via the new media expect a reciprocal relationship. Even though the church, in principle, aims at developing authentic relationships with people via these new media, its practices as reported in the findings of the studies above indicate that the church's bullhorn approach will only result in the development of superficial relationships as hinted by the Social Penetration theory and not the kings of family, kinship, friendship, and communal networks suggested as a possibility in the Social Network theory of social media.

While many success stories around the world suggest that the church has taken bold steps to use social media for evangelization, we need to do more as a church in harnessing the full potential of digital tools for communicating the gospel message as outlined in the church's own theology of communication. The question that we, as a church, need to address today is whether the current mode of the church's self-presentation and engagement on social media promote interaction and relationship building with the people of God as desired in the church's theology. In order to use the new media in a way that transforms our culture, "it is essential to 'open the windows' and make sure we are responding to the questions of our users, rather than engaging in a navel-gazing exercise."[183] The bullhorn or navel-gaze approach to social media communicates self-centeredness, "It's all about me" attitude, and promotes the sad reality

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[183] Monsignor Dario Viganò, the prefect for the Vatican Secretariat for Communications in a conference of church communication experts in Rome, on May 27, 2016. See *Address To Leaders of Communications*, accessed June 5, 2016, Vatican.va.

of networked individualism, which undermines the church's theology on social media and its universal mission of turning the world into a community of God's friends.

Transcending the Bullhorn Approach:

Embracing Social Media as a Gift for Two-Fold Transformation

In order to transcend this bullhorn approach, the church needs to foreground the theology of social media as a gift for a two-fold transformation of both church and society. Using social media in a way that will lead to the realization of the goal of the church's evangelizing mission and ensure that the Good News is having a powerful effect on people's conscience and transforming this century, the church requires to move beyond the theology of "inform in order to form" and embrace a new theology of social media as a tool to "inform to form and be formed."[184] This will call for a critical adaptation of the Social Network, Social Exchange, and Social Penetration theories into the church's theological reflection of the new media. Insights from these theories will help the church embrace and develop a keen awareness of the participatory culture of the digital era. In addition, insights from McLuhan's Media Theory provide a lens for understanding how the new media are changing our cultures today. As Henry Jenkins et al., observes, the media have created a new participatory culture that emphasizes:

> relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices. In a participatory

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[184] Andrew Fisher, "*Informing In Order To Form: The Roman Catholic Church and Media*," *masters thesis*, University of Missouri, Columbia, 2010, URL: http://hdl.handle.net/10355/8063. I borrowed the ideas of "inform in order to form" from Fisher's work.

culture, members also believe that their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another.[185]

Jenkins' definition captures some important ideas from the four theories of social media mentioned above. For the church, a successful use of social media for effective evangelization requires practical emphasis not only on the artistic expression of God's love, truth, and beauty among the people of God, but also the readiness of the church to be both formal and informal mentor. The church has both an opportunity and a challenge to explore how to be a formal presence, an institution with an official teaching from Christ, in an informal and playful atmosphere of social media.[186] It is important for the church to convey to people they engage as friends and follow via social media that their contributions matter because today, people accept "truth" that is not handed over with a top-down approach but rather "truth" that is presented in a round table and dialogical model where their voices are heard and shaped through conversation.

The church, therefore, needs to find new ways of reformulating the Truth about God, the human person, and society, with people in a way that allows them to express their lived experiences of God and what it means to be human without changing the message of the gospel. Participatory culture invites people not only to consume, but also to create, share, and collaborate in ways that make them feel that they are important nodes in a bigger network of love. For people in the digital age, "to participate is to act as if your presence matters; as if, when you see something or hear something, your

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[185] Henry Jenkins, Ravi Purushotma, Margaret Weigel, Katie Clinton, and Alice, Robinson. *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), xi.

[186] Zsupan-Jerome, *Connected for Communion*, kindle chapter 6.

response is part of the event."[187] In all aspects of ecclesial communication, it is very important for people to feel that their opinions matter and that the church really desires more than superficial friendships with them.

The Need For an Ecclesiology of Friendship

In addition to embracing the new media as gifts for the two-fold transformation, the church needs an ecclesiology of friendship in order to transcend the bullhorn approach to using the new media. In our digital culture, people desire friendship, sharing and participation. They love to follow and be followed. Transcending a bullhorn approach to social media calls for critically embracing these elements of participatory culture, elements that the church has always taught as essential for building the kingdom of God on earth. As Bishop Paul Tighe points out:

> *Friendship* as emerging from the act of 'friending' and connecting with people in a network is an entry point that leads deeper into true relationality *in imago Trinitatis. Searching* raises the deeper question of the desire for truth and our ongoing quest for it. *Sharing*...calls to mind our authentic gift of self and the integral standards of persons-in-communion. Finally, *following* as we commit ourselves to the digital presence of others invites the deeper themes of hospitality to others, receptivity, dialogue, and even discipleship.[188]

Even though our digital culture employs concepts of friendship, sharing, and following, these virtues are losing their real meaning in today's culture. Thus, the church needs to critically embrace these concepts by helping our digital culture rediscover the

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[187] Clay Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2010), 21.

[188] Zsupan-Jerome, *Connected for Communion*, kindle, chapter, 6.

Christian meaning of what it means to be a friend, to share, and to follow. As the Social Exchange, Social Penetration, and Social Network theories suggest, the only way the church can succeed in reaching people and developing a real relationship with them is to understand social media not as a tool for a monologue, but for dialogue among friends, and be ready to become a friend. A critical adoption of insights from the theories of social media requires that the church lives in the digital culture as both teacher and friend.

This will facilitate the realization of the two-fold transformation that God intends, the Church transforming the world and being transformed in the process by God's grace present in the world. It will also help the church move beyond the use of social media as tools for just the "transmission" of the gospel and embrace them as tools for building relationships. Transcending the bullhorn approach, calls for a return to the notion of communications as relation, a shared praxis, a participative and dialogical event. To that end, this dissertation argues that there is the need for an ecclesiology of friendship if the church is to succeed in being a friend and a teacher in our digital culture. "Christian church, to the extent that it becomes aware of its own identity as a worldwide network of friendship, can play a highly beneficial role in a world searching, often blindly, for its identity and unity."[189] The next chapter develops a practical theology of friendship in order to propose a framework for an ecclesiology of friendship for our digital age.

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[189] John of Taize, *Friends in Christ*, 11.

Chapter 3

FRIENDSHIP: THE SOUL OF DIVINE-HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

The love of friendship alone gives a wholly satisfactory account of love precisely because it embraces both giving and receiving.

----Liz Carmichael[190]

As I write this chapter on friendship, I am deeply saddened by the news of seven children of God, who have been gunned down in Minneapolis, Louisiana, and Dallas due to racial tensions in the USA. This event opens the wounds in millions of hearts over all children of God, who have been killed in wars, terrorist attacks, abortion, and all the evils that rob the world of the peace and joy that God intends for us.[191] In the face of all this evil, I am reminded of the testimony of Liz Carmichael who tells a story of how Christians (black Sowetans and white) struggled to live out their friendship in the racially broken Apartheid society of South Africa. Reflecting on how their desire and sacrifices for friendship prepared the way for the end of the Apartheid regime and gave way to the on-going reconciliation of the South African society, Carmichael comments: "…at that moment I knew that friendship was real and that it could be the shape of the future."[192] These words capture the sentiments and hopes of all women and men in history who have pointed to friendship as the cement that will hold the world together.[193]

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[190] Liz Carmichael, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love* (London: Bloomsbury T&T, 2004)*,* 4.

[191] I pray that God will grant eternal life to all those who have lost their lives in this racial fight and all types of evil around the world.

[192] Carmichael, *Friendship*, 1.

[193] In his search for solutions for world peace after the First World War, Woodrow Wilson, the 28th president of the United States (1913-192), is believed to have stated that friendship is the only cement that will ever hold the world together.

This chapter explores friendship as the soul of divine-human interaction and proposes a framework for identifying the marks of Christian friendship. It uses an interdisciplinary approach, one that combines theological, philosophical, socio-cultural, and psychological perspectives, to explore the nature and function of friendship. This approach is necessitated by the very nature of this work as an exploration in practical theology, a discipline that is primarily interdisciplinary. Also, the nature of friendship as a relationship that permeates all aspects of the human person makes it impossible for any "single discipline [to] encompass its influence."[194] I am using this approach aware of its limitation that it does not allow one to exhaust the understanding of friendship in one specific discipline. The discussion of friendship in this chapter is, therefore, not meant to provide an exhaustive explanation of friendship from the perspective of any single discipline, but integrated insights on this human relationship. In what follows, I explore philosophical, socio-cultural, and psychological as well as theological perspectives on the nature and function of divine-human friendship.

Philosophical Perspectives on Friendship

Many philosophers have explored the nature and function of human friendship. In Western Philosophy, prominent works in this area include that of, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and De Montaige. In this research I integrate views from the western classics, Confucius from the eastern classics, and African traditional thought on friendship. From the western classics, I focus mainly on the works of Aristotle and Cicero because their views on friendship as a virtuous relationship and its goal as the common good influence the development of Christian theology of friendship among the

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[194] Steve Summers, *Friendship: Exploring its Implications for the Church in Postmodernity* (London & New York: T& T Clark Continuum, 2009), 2.

theologians that I engage later in this work, namely Augustine, Aelred of Rievaulx and Thomas Aquinas. From Eastern philosophers, I explore the thought of Confucius on friendship because it provides a unique perspective on friendship as a relationship that can provide stability for social and political systems. He believes that it is through friendship with others that the self is cultivated; and he advocates friendship as a bridge between kinship and the larger society. From African traditional thought, I also integrate the notion of friendship as divine gift and covenantal relationship. These concepts provide cultural evidence that can be used together with the Christian view in understanding friendship as a gift. In what follows, I discuss how these philosophical perspectives provide insights for the practical theology of friendship I propose later in this chapter.

Aristotle on Friendship

Aristotle is considered the bedrock of western philosophical thought on friendship. His thoughts on friendship are presented in some of his most influential works including the *Nicomachean Ethics,* and *Eudemian Ethics.*[195] Aristotle believes that friends are fundamental to life because no one will choose to live without them. Friendship (*philia*) is important for the good of the individual and the survival of the city-state (polis).[196] He sees friendship as ubiquitous and necessary for all human beings as well as animals. It is a relationship that "unites families, political parties, social and religious organizations, tribes, even whole cities, and entire species" and is needed for

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[195] See Suzanne Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995).

[196] Alexander Nehamas, *On Friendship* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 15-16.

justice to prevail in society.[197]

For Aristotle, a friend is another self,[198] "a kind of mirror" through whom one sees oneself.[199] He argues that, "friendly relations with one's neighbors, and the marks by which friendships are defined, seem to have proceeded from man's relations to himself."[200] To love others is to love oneself, and if one does not have the right self-love, one cannot extend that to others. He argues that because a friend is another self, "I may as a matter of virtuous love, allow my friend to do an action that I might have done, or I may die so that he may live and continue to act."[201] It is one who is morally good to himself who can transfer that goodness to a friend. Aristotle talks of friendship as something that is intrinsically human; however, he does not explicitly talk about friendship between men and women outside of marriage or friendship among women.[202] His ideas are however foundational in modern and contemporary discussions on the role of virtue in all types of friendships among human beings.

Making an ontological argument based on our humanness, kinship, citizenship, and other common enterprises, Aristotle identifies three types of *philia*: friendship based on pleasure, friendship based on benefits, and friendship based on virtue.[203] Friendship

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[197] Ibid,15.

[198] Aristotle. *Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962): 1155a23-8, 116132.

[199] Ibid, 9. 1170b6-7.

[200] Ibid, 1166a1-2.

[201] Aristotle cited in Carmichael, *Friendship*, 22.

[202] Ibid.

[203] Aristotle defines virtue as "an excellence of character, moral or intellectual, developed by early training or mature choice; it is a habit or state, existing on the level of reason as distinct from passion" (*Nicomachean Ethics,* 11.1105b19-06a13). Also, other works that have explored

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based solely on benefits and pleasure are not perfect because such relationships are conditioned by what friends get from each other rather than loving people for their own sake. Such friendships dissolve easily when those conditions cease to exist. Aristotle states:

> Those who care for each other on account of benefit don't care for [each other] in themselves but only insofar as they obtain some benefit from them; so too in the case of pleasure: these people don't care for those they find entertaining in themselves, but on account of their being pleasant to them.[204]

Aristotle describes friendship based on virtue as the true, complete, and perfect friendship. It occurs "between people who are good and alike in virtue,"[205] people who are "mutually recognized as bearing goodwill and wishing well to each other."[206] Perfect friendships among friends should, however, combine all three objects of pleasure, benefit, and virtue. As Carmichael points out, friendship-love in Aristotle is ontological (based on a common mode of being), teleological (motivated by love as an attraction to goodness) and deontological (love as right action). Aristotle posits that friends should be equal and alike especially in virtue. Friendships with deities are impossible because they are superior to humans and are too remote.[207] While Aristotle associates friendship with

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Aristotle's treatment of friendship in both the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics,* conclude that the former focuses more on the degrees of friendships and different levels of attraction and intimacy in friendship than the later. For more discussion on this see Corinne Gartner, "Aristotle's Eudemian Account Of Friendship." *Doctoral Dissertation* (New Jersey: Princeton University, 2011).

[204] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2, 1155b13-1156a10.

[205]Ibid, 1156b07-08.

[206] Ibid, 1156a3-5.

[207] Carmichael, *Friendship*, 34.

virtue, he limits this to only a few philosophers who demonstrate heroic and altruistic

deeds towards other men and the state. His ideas greatly influenced the discussion of

friendship in the works of many philosophers including Cicero.

Cicero on Friendship

In his *De Amicitia,* Marcus Tullius Cicero[208] agrees with Aristotle that friendship

is natural to human beings because we are created to love. He sees friendship as a natural

bond of love between two or few people. Virtue is not only the attraction, but also the

cement and goal of friendship; and "without virtue, friendship cannot exist at all."[209] For

Cicero "friendship is nothing else than an accord in all things, human and divine,

conjoined with mutual goodwill and affection."[210] Friends are people who possess good

will towards each other and are similar in their views on and attitude towards the divine

and all human affairs. "Goodwill may be eliminated from relationship while from

friendship it cannot; since, if you remove goodwill from friendship the very name of

friendship is gone."[211] The qualities that attract one to a friend are those that one

possesses in oneself. Like Aristotle, Cicero argues that, " he who looks upon a true

friend, looks, as it were, upon a sort of image of himself."[212] Cicero is also against any

friendship based on benefits and pleasure because he sees virtue as the lure that attracts

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[208] Tullius Cicero, *De amicitia,* trans. William Armistead Falconer; Loeb Classical Library
(London: Heinemann, 1923*)*. Cicero was a practical philosopher who played a major role in
integrating Greek philosophy into Latin-speaking western thought.

[209] Ibid, 20.

[210] Ibid, 21.

[211] Ibid.

[212] Ibid, 23.

true and permanent friends to each other. Friends must be similar in virtue. He therefore cautions that similarity does not mean one should do everything a friend asks, except if the request is for a good thing. True friends never lead one another away from virtue.

For Cicero, superiors and subordinates can be friends and "those who are superior should lower themselves, so, in a measure...they lift up their inferiors."[213] Cicero, like Aristotle, does not discuss friendship between men and women, or among women and children. However, he emphasizes virtue as the key to all true friendships. In his concluding words in *De Amicitia*, Cicero writes, " this is all that I had to say about friendship; but I exhort you both so to esteem virtue (without which friendship cannot exist), that, excepting virtue, you will think nothing more excellent than friendship."[214] As evident in our discussion so far, classical western thought offers some important understandings of friendship in human society. Liz Carmichael gives a concise and insightful summary of the western classical legacy on friendship:

> Ontologically it requires, and can be engendered by, participation in some common mode of being. Teleologically, true friendship is motivated by the attractiveness of a good character. Deontologically, it is the expression of virtue in that being a good person implies being a friend to others-but not to the wicked. Perfect friendship is mutual relationship combining all three grounds…It is not a prerequisite that friends should be equal in all respects. The presence of goodness in one friend can and should engender excellence in the other.[215]

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[213] Ibid, 72.

[214] Ibid, 103.

[215] Carmichael, *Friendship*, 34.

Of particular interest to our discussion of friendship in this study are the ideas that friendship is a human universal, a virtuous relationship necessary for the survival of the human person and society, a relation which is possible with supernatural beings, such as the gods, a relationship that can exist between superior and subordinate, and the friend as another self. These ideas provide important philosophical perspectives that will be integrated into the framework of friendship proposed later in this chapter. Besides the western classical thoughts on friendship, other eastern philosophers have also taught friendship as an essential social institution and spiritual bond. One figure whose ideas on friendship provide useful insights for our discussion in this study is the eastern philosopher, Confucius (551-479 BC).

Confucius on Friendship

Confucius' thought on friendship is based on the place of friendships in the Five Relationships, around which the ancient Chinese conceptualized life and all human interactions, namely, "the relationship between ruler and subjects, father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, and the interaction between friends".[216] His views influenced the understanding of friendship in ancient and modern Chinese, Korean, Japanese and other Asian cultures.[217]

Confucius believes that it is through friendship with others that the self is cultivated. The full realization of the self comes from pouring oneself into others. He teaches that "wishing to establish oneself, one establishes others; wishing to enlarge

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[216] Aat Vervoorn, "Friendship in Ancient China", *East Asian History,* 27, no. 3 (2004): 4. Also see Kenneth Folsom, *Friends, Guests and Colleagues: The Mu-fu System in the Late Ching* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968).

[217] Hanz Li, "Culture, Gender, and Self-c1ose-other(s) Connectedness in Canadian and Chinese samples", *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 32 (2002), 93-104.

oneself, one enlarges others."[218] By insisting on loyalty and reciprocity as organizing

principles of social and political life, Confucius advocates an understanding of friendship,

(*you, peng,* or the compound *pengyou)*, which goes beyond its original meaning of ideal

relationship of trust, support, loyalty, and solidarity among family members or kinship

groups. He argues that friendship, as a virtuous relationship, should be extended beyond

the family to include all in society. Confucius proposes a model for good government and

the creation of a moral society based on the principles of friendship.[219] Friendships, for

him, are relationships of trust and loyalty between unrelated individuals, who share some

common interest and aspiration. It is the defining concept for true and trusting

relationship between the ruler and subjects, husband and wife, among two or a group of

people with common interest and aspirations, such as Confucius and his disciples, and

between one clan or state and another.

For Confucius, the solution to the problems in society lies in organizing socio-

political systems around friendship based on mutual support, respect, trust, and empathy.

Confucius "used the term *you* to refer to people who shared similar aspirations and ideals

regardless of whether they were kinsmen or not."[220] He argues that in a society organized

around friendship, "action does not spring from a desire for power or fearful obedience,

but rather from a wish to participate with like-minded individuals in social action that is

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[218] Anthony Marsella, George Devos, and Francis Hsu (eds.), *Culture and Self: Asian and Western Perspectives* (New York, NY: Tavistock Publications, 1985), 9. Also see Yuanguo He, "Confucius and Aristotle on Friendship: A comparative study," *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 2, no. 2 (2007): 291-307.

[219] Vervoorn, *Friendship in Ancient China,* 4-7.

[220] Ibid.

esteemed and socially beneficial."[221] The *shi or youshi*[222] were to be friends and teachers of the ruler. A good friend was also a good teacher.

 In both applications, inside and outside kinship groups, true friendship is one based on virtue. A friend should give good advice and provide guidance in a way that helps a friend succeed in moral self-improvement and conscientious public service.[223] A good ruler is one who treats his subjects as friends. Political and social roles should be given to those who are   morally upright and treat others as friends. For Confucius, friendship can be the bedrock of all social and political systems.

The idea of a friend as a teacher, friendship as directed towards "moral self-improvement and conscientious public service", cultivation of the self in relation to others, friendship as a bridge between kinship and the larger society, leadership as friendship, and social organization as an affinity based on friendship provide insights that inform my desire to explore friendship as a channel for extending kinship love of the church as family to all in society. To these I also add some views from African traditional thought on friendship as discussed in the following paragraphs.

Friendship in Traditional African Thought

Most African traditional thoughts on friendship are preserved and transmitted through oral medium, such as proverbs and other forms of folklore.[224] Even though not

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[221] Ibid, 13.

[222] The *shi or youshi were* scholar-knights who engaged in a kind of political friendship. They took official paid positions as friends and teachers/advisers of the ruler in Ancient China.

[223] Vernoorn, *Friendship in Ancient China*, 14.

[224] While one might not think of African traditional thought on friendship as "classic" in terms of written pioneering work, they are classic in the sense that they contain time tested wisdom about life handed on from one generation to the next.

much written literature exists on friendship in traditional African thought, many proverbs and a few written works provide important insights on friendship as a relationship that plays a very important role in African cosmology. Mario Aguilar observes that in traditional African society, especially among nomadic tribes such as the Nyakyusa of Tanzania, friendship is seen as essential for the survival and development of the entire society.[225] Benedict Ssettuuma also points out that, "the understanding of friendship in the African heritage is founded on the human person as a network of relationships incarnated."[226] In the words of Desmond Tutu, the centrality of communal life, of which friendship is an essential part, is captured in maxims such as "a person is a person through other persons" and "I am because we are." In Africa, "we say...I am human because I belong, I participate, I share...Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods."[227]

Friendship is considered an important social relationship next to kinship in many traditional cultures in Africa. The traditional African believes strongly that the individual attains fullness of life in communion with the supreme deity, other spirits, human beings, and the created universe.[228] For instance, in the Akan culture, one of the major ethnic groups in Ghana, friendship is not only among human beings, but is understood as a defining relationship between God and creatures. The love and compassion of the

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[225] See Mario Aguilar, "Localized Kin and Globalized Friends: Religious Modernity and 'Educated Self' in East Africa," *in The Anthropology of Friendship,* eds. Sandra Bell and Simon Coleman, 169-184 (UK: Oxford, 1999).

[226] Benedict Ssettuuma, "Friendship: An Effective Tool for Mission," *African Ecclesial Review* 52: no. 2 & 3 (2010), 60.

[227] Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Random House, 1999), 35.

[228] See John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969).

Supreme Being towards humans and other creatures is not only that of God as the grandparent of all that exists, *Nana Nyame,* but also that of a best friend who is always present in the lives of human beings to ward off evil and bring blessings.

One of the many names of God is *Nyankopon,* (the One Supreme Sky God and ultimate friend).[229] As seen in the many stories that seek to explain the etymology of *Nyankopon,* this divine attribute is not just a descriptor, but also an experiential knowledge of God's transcendence, immanence, and intimacy with all of creation. Friendship among human beings is expected to mirror God's love and concern for God's creatures. Among the Akan, friendship is conceived as an intimate, mutual, respectful, trusting, and reciprocal relationship. An Akan proverb, "*hu m'enyiwado ma me ntsi na atwe ebien nam* (To have someone blow off the foreign object in the eye is the reason why two antelopes walk together),[230] conveys the sense of dependency acquired through friendship and the centrality of friendship for the survival of individuals, clans, tribes, and entire communities.

Among the Ewe tribe in Ghana and Togo, the word for a friend, *xɔlɔ,* is a compound word made up of two verbs " to save" (*xɔ*) and " to love" (lɔ), which literally means "love that saves." One of the attributes for God in the Ewe language is "*Xɔla,"* which means *"Savior."* Thus, the compound word *"xɔlɔ"* (friend) has the same etymology as the word for savior *"xɔla."* Among the Eves, God is the Supreme Being, who saves people from evil spirits and all misfortune and brings blessings. Because God

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[229] See Anthony Ephirim-Donkor, *African Religion Defined: A Systematic Study of Ancestor Worship Among Akan*, 2nd edition (Lanhan, Maryland: University Press of America, 2013), 5. I agree with Ephirim-Donkor's argument that while there are divergent of opinions on the etymology of *Nyankopon*, the current meaning of the word "simply suggests God is the ultimate friend because *Nyankopon* is the conjugation of *nyanko (*friend) and *pon* (huge or great).

[230] Emmanuel Takyi, "Friendship with God in the African Context," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, 9, no 2 (2013), 70.

loves, friendship is expected to mirror this love and bring only the good to one's friend. Failure to seek the good of a friend is considered a betrayal, which brings sanctions from the Supreme Deity, the ancestors, and the community of the living.

The concept of human friendship as sanctioned by the Supreme Being or other spiritual beings permeates many other traditional cultures in Africa. Among the Yoruba of Nigeria, friendship maybe casual or covenantal based on trust, commitment, loyalty and forgiveness. A covenantal friendship is one that has it origins in the Supreme Being and is sanctioned by the earth (*ile*) and carries both divine and human repercussions for betrayal. In the Baganda tribe of Uganda, friendship is a sacred relationship. A true friend is considered a member of the clan; and trusted friendships are ritualized by a blood covenant or pact (*omukago*). As Emmanuel Takyi points out, among the Baganda:

> [friendship] is a life-for-life agreement where a person's individuality and personality are completely submerged in the pursuit of the other's safety and happiness. It is that which makes a stranger a true brother or sister, a full-fledged member of the family, with full rights and privileges just like the other members of the family.[231]

Among the Baganda and many tribes in Africa, therefore, friendships ritualized through blood covenants are transformed into kinship relationships. Yehudi Cohen observes that in some tribes, such as the Kwoma of New Guinea, friendships among non-kins ritualized through blood covenant created a kinship bond that came with the moral

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[231] Ibid, 71.

obligation to treat relatives of one's friends as one would treat family. For instance the incest taboo was extended to female relatives of men who entered such friendships.[232]

In developing practical theology of friendship, I integrate the understanding of friendship in African traditional societies, as covenantal-friendship aimed at mirroring the love and compassion of the Supreme Being for the survival of social relationships and protection against all forms of attacks, physical and spiritual that threaten the harmony of society. Even though these and the other philosophical perspectives discussed above provide important insights on the nature of friendship as virtue needed for the good of individuals and society, they do not explicitly discuss friendship across different lifespan. They do not also discuss practical steps involved in the initiation and maintenance of friendship, the nature of friendship as lived by women, children, and across sexes, or how friendship can at times produce social inequality. Also, they do not address friendship in the digital culture. For insight on these, we turn to contemporary socio-cultural and psychological theories and empirical studies that have explored these aspects of friendship.

Socio-cultural and Psychological Perspectives on Friendship

Many socio-cultural perspectives on friendship offer evolutionary explanations on the nature and function of human friendship and propose evolutionary inspired strategies for its enhancement. One theory that is used to explain the origins, the cost and benefit of friendship across the lifespan, is the *reciprocal altruism theory*, which holds that "altruistic tendencies towards non-relatives can evolve when the delivery of benefits is

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[232] Yehudi Cohen, "Patterns of Friendship" in *Social Structure and Personality*, ed. Yehudi, Cohen (New York: Holt-Rinehart-Winston, 1961), 351-357.

reciprocated at some point in the future."[233] David Lewis et al. argue that human friendships could have evolved out of the ancestral human need to come together to protect themselves against enemies and hunt together for game; and that "reciprocal exchange formed the basis not only for many ancestral friendships, but for the mechanisms that lead to friendships in modern environments as well."[234]

Others have explained friendship from the point of view of the *alliance model*. Even though the alliance model and the altruistic theory are not mutually exclusive, they have different emphasis. Unlike the reciprocal altruism theory, the alliance model does not focus on exchange of benefits, but rather on the ancestral need to overcome interpersonal and group conflicts. Proponents of this model, such as Peter DeScioli and Robert Kursban, hold that friendships developed out of the human need to have a network of support in order to survive the pressures and dangers of social conflict.[235] Other anthropologists, such as John Tooby and Leda Cosmides who argue against the altruistic theory, propose the theory of *positive externalities* as an alternative explanation for the origins and cost of friendship. They contend that true friendship might bring some benefits, but might not always be at a cost and in that sense cannot be said to be an altruistic behavior.[236]

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[233]David Lewis, Laith Al-Shawaf, Eric Russel, and David Buss. "Friends and Happiness: An Evolutionary Perspective on Friendship," in *Friendship and Happiness: Across the Life-Span and Cultures,* ed. Demir Melikşah (New York: Springer Science, 2015), 38.

[234] Ibid.

[235] Peter DeScioli and Robert Kursban, "The Company You Keep: Friendship Decisions from a Functional Perspective," in *Social Judgment and Decision Making,* ed. Joachim Krueger (New York: Psychology Press, 2012): 209-225.

[236] John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, "The Past Explains the Present: Emotional Adaptations and the Structure of Ancestral Environments," *Ethology and Sociobiology*, 11 (1990): 375-424.

Another anthropological explanation for friendship is found in the *mating opportunities theory*, which argues that "the frequency of mating relations within cross-sex friendship… suggests that cross-sex friendships may have evolved at least partly for direct mating purposes."[237] According to this theory, a male might become a friend to a female either because he is sexually attracted to her or because he wants her to teach him how to communicate with and relate to another woman he might be in love with; and a woman might also befriend a man for the same purpose. Research on cross-sex friendship mentions its benefits across the lifespan to include companionship, advice, financial and emotional support, and understanding the perspectives of the opposite sex.[238] Despite the specific focus each of the above anthropological theories has, they all provide a functional perspective on friendship as an important relationship, next to kinship, for the development and survival of human beings and society.

Further, some sociological theories of friendship focus on the importance of friendship for social cohesion, the cost and benefits of friendships, and how friendships produce social inequality. Among the most common sociological perspectives on friendship is Georg Simmel's *theory of two emotions* for social stability. He argues that friendship involves two emotions, faithfulness and gratitude, and that these emotions are important for the continuity of social relationships, institutions, and society.[239] Maurizio Ghisleni, Paola Rebughini and others have also explored the interactive nature of friendship from the perspective of network theory and argued that friendship is a form of

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[237] Lewis et al. *Friends and Happiness*, 41.

[238] Ibid, 45.

[239] Georg Simmel and Philosophie Des Geldes quoted in Silvana Greco, Mary Holmes, and Jordan Mckenzie, "Friendship and Happiness from a Sociological Perspective," in *Friendship and Happiness*, ed. Demir Melikşah (New York: Springer Science, 2015):19-35.

social networking, which provides social capital for people and opportunity for self-narration and maintenance of social structures. Within this perspective, friendship is seen as "a specific social relation based on an exchange of an intimate trust between individuals involved in the relationship."[240] Blake Ashforth, Ronald Humphery, Nina Bendelj and other sociologists have studied friendship from the perspective of work relation theory and concluded that friendships are vital at work places and impact workers' performance and satisfaction.[241] Silvana Greco, Mary Holmes, and Jordan Mckenzie observe that in general, contemporary sociological research on friendship shows that:

> Friendship networks can help some individuals 'get ahead' but keep others linked to violent or dangerous communities or make life difficult for the lack of the "right" connection. However, friendship can promote individual happiness by enhancing a sense of stable identity and allowing for emotional intimacy, expressed within trusting and reciprocal relationships.[242]

Furthermore, a plethora of research explores friendship in contemporary society from psychological perspectives. Theoretical frameworks in this regard have integrated views from *social-bond theory*, *peer relations theory*, and *interpersonal communication theory*.[243] The psychological approaches have investigated the structure, the behavioral,

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[240] Maurizio Ghisleni and Paola Rebughini, *Dynamics of Friendship: Recognition and Identity* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2006), 54.

[241] Blake Ashforth and Ronald Humphery, "Emotions in the Workplace: A Reappraisal," *Human Relations*, 48 (1995), 97-125. Also see Nina Bendelj, "Emotions in Economic Action and Interaction," *Theory and Soceity*, 38 (2009), 347-366.

[242] Silvana Greco, et al., Friendship and Happiness from a Sociological Perspective, 19-35.

[243] See Hary Sullivan, *Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* (New York: Norton,1953).

affective, and cognitive processes, as well as the phases (initiation, maintenance, and dissolution/stability) of friendship. In general, studies in this area present friendship as a relationship, which develops out of the human need for companionship, acceptance and emotional satisfaction and is influenced by different contextual and biological factors.[244]

Some researchers report the importance of positive and negative effects of friendship on the development of the human person across the lifespan. Those who have explored the impact of friendship on children conclude that the quality of friendship affects children's emotional security, capacity for trust and self-disclosure, capacity to cope with stress, self-esteem, how they respond to prosocial behavior, and their overall well-being.[245] Other studies have investigated friendship among adolescence and observed that friendship in this age group turn to be motivated by the need for interpersonal intimacy, which emerges in preadolescence. Adolescent friendship emphasizes support, intimacy, companionship, reciprocity, affection, understanding, and mutual liking. The kinds of friends one has during adolescence and the quality of a friend's character are said to have impacts on one's social adjustment during adolescence and beyond.[246] Opportunities for as well as constraints on friendship in adolescence is said to be predictors of personality traits and dispositions in later stages in the lifespan.[247]

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[244] See Rosemary Blieszner and Rebecca Adams, "Adult Friendship," in *Sage Series on Close Relationships,* eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan Hendrick (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1992), 1-124.

[245] Mark Holder and Ben Coleman, "Children's Friendship and Positive Well-Being," in *Friendship and Happiness*, ed. Demir Melikşah (New York: Springer Science, 2015), 81.

[246] Lina Saldarriaga, William Bukowski, and Carolina Greco, "Friendship and Happiness: A Bidirectional Dynamic Process," in *Friendship and Happiness,* ed. Demir Melikşah (New York: Springer Science, 2015), 59-78.

[247] Blieszner and Adams. *Adult Friendship.*

William Damon identifies three levels of friendships across the lifespan: Friendship as a "handy playmate" (4-7 years); friendship as mutual trust and assistance (8-10 years); and friendship as intimacy and loyalty (11- 15 years and beyond).[248] Other researchers have analyzed friendship among young and older adults and have reported older adults turn to have more complex and multidimensional friendships than middle-aged or young adults due to different psychological needs and social norms. Friendship in older adults is affected by factors, such as retirement, failing health, and widowhood. In general, findings from studies on friendship across the lifespan indicate that even though the nature of friendship varies across the lifespan, there are some commonalities. Among other things, friendship in all stages in the lifespan is considered beneficial and demands mutuality, reciprocity, and loyalty. In general,

> friendships promote well-being at different stages of development by giving individuals the sense that they are loved, understood, and appreciated…friends provide support to one another when facing developmental challenges…this relationship provides a context in which individuals can make improvements in aspects of their lives where they have experienced problems in previous development stages…Friendships have the potential to serve as corrective or enhancing interaction, since they help individuals overcome earlier adjustment difficulties or develop to their full potential.[249]

In addition, researchers who have explored the developmental phases of friendship identify some commonalities in how friendships develop over time across the

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[248] See William Damon. *Social and Personality Development: Infancy Through Adolescence* (New York: Norton, 1983).

[249] Saldarriaga et al., "Bidirectional Dynamic Process," in *Friendship and Happiness*, 65.

lifespan. In general, three major phases are identified as *initiation, maintenance, and dissolution or stability*,[250] which are further divided into sub-categories that include curiosity, attraction, uncertainty, exploration, mutuality, familiarity, vulnerability, and stability or dissolution.[251] At the *initiation phase*, friendships begin with uncertainty and curiosity because the potential friends do not know much about each other. Even though there is some attraction to the potential friend, trust is usually low at this initial phase. As the two move through exploration and get to know each other through self-disclosure, they become acquaintances or associates. They begin to undergo interpersonal growth and the friendship moves to the *maintenance phase* where they begin to evaluate each other's involvement and commitment to the relationship. This evaluation may be done consciously or unconsciously. Based on conclusions drawn from their evaluations, people decide to maintain or dissolve the friendship. When tested and proven, friendships can endure for years with hope for indefinite existence. In the stability phase, a dyadic friendship might enter into other networks of friends. Friendships might be dissolved directly or indirectly. They might also be dissolved voluntarily due to a variety of factors including lack of loyalty, mistrust, disagreements, and inactivity or involuntarily due to the death of a friend.[252]

Communication is identified as the major factor by which friendship is maintained though the various phases. The stability or dissolution of friendship largely depends on the type of communication that exists among friends. As the friendship grows

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[250] George McCall, "The Organizational Life Cycle of Relationships," in *Handbook of Personal Relationships,*ed. Steve Duke (Chichester, England: John Wiley, 1988), 467-484.

[251] Arthur VanLear and Nick Trujillo, "On Becoming Acquainted: A Longitudinal Study of Social Judgement Processes," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 3 (1986), 375-392.

[252] Blieszner and Adams. *Adult Friendship.*

in familiarity, it could also become more vulnerable and various kinds of conflict might arise. This is when communication becomes crucial for the stability of the friendship. Conversations among friends are essential for developing trust, understanding, and moving friendships from superficial to close and intimate relationships.[253] Some researchers have observed that, "even disturbing processes such as disagreements and conflict can have beneficial effects on friendship."[254] In order to ensure the stability of friendship, it is important for friends to "balance expressiveness (self-disclosure, directness, honesty, candor) with protectiveness (avoiding hurtful remarks or touchy subjects).[255]

In sum, the socio-cultural and psychological perspectives on friendship provide an important window into how people understand and live friendship in our world today. These insights are important for developing a practical theology of friendship for contemporary society. An important insight from these perspectives is how friendship affects human beings across the lifespan, how it influences relationships in the family, at school, in the work place, and other forms of social organization. Another important insight is the need to explore not only types, but also degrees of friendship. The yardstick of friendship in contemporary society seems to be the level of intimacy that friendships produce. People do not seem to draw a dichotomy between instrumental and non-instrumental, as the philosophical discussions have focused on, but rather degrees of friendship, such as casual, close, and intimate.

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[253] Robert Hays, "A Longitudinal Study of Friendship Development," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 48 (1985), 909-924.

[254] Blieszner and Adams, *Adult Friendship, 94.*

[255] Ibid, 98.

A unique contribution of the socio-cultural and psychological perspectives to the discussion of friendship in this dissertation is the idea that friendship can be a source of inequality and conflict in society. Even though the philosophical perspectives present friendship as a means of promoting social cohesion, they do not offer much understanding as to how friendship itself can also be the cause of social inequality and injustice. This is an important aspect about friendship that will be addressed in the practical theology of friendship proposed in this study if it is to be a theology that responds to the call of Christ to liberate the oppressed.

Despites the above-mentioned insights, the socio-cultural and psychological perspectives do not account for the spiritual dimension of this human relationship. Even though they provide useful functional insights into friendship, they fail to provide any account of the deep spiritual longings expressed through our desire for friendship and other forms of social interaction. The spiritual dimension of friendship needs to be uncovered in order to provide a more comprehensive account of friendship. To this end, we turn to the Christian understanding of friendship.

<div align="center">**Christian Traditional Thought on Friendship**</div>

Friendship in the Old Testament

The Christian Scriptures, Old Testaments (OT) and New Testament (NT), as well as theological reflections of many Christian women and men provide extensive insights into the Christian understanding of friendship. Jan Dietrich observes that "with rare exceptions, friendship with God has never been viewed as a topic in itself within the field of Old Testament studies" and that only few OT passages talk about friendship with

God.[256] However, Scripture sheds important light on the principles that govern divine-human friendship. Exploring the notion of friendship in OT and Ancient Near East (ANE) texts, Jan Dietrich identifies three principles that characterize friendship in the OT and ANE: First, as a helping relationship, friendship involves the virtues of loyalty, reliability, and trustworthiness. Second, as a relationship that transcends lineage and kinship ties, friendship involves the principle of outer-kinship. The third is the principle of coequality.[257] These three principles provide a lens for thinking about God's friendship with human beings in the OT. God made human beings in the divine image and likeness so that they can relate to God, who is also the most trustworthy companion and helper of human beings. God's friendship with human beings transcends earthly kinship.

Salvation history is the story of God's friendship with human beings[258] broken through the choices that Adam and Eve made; but restored through God's friendship with Abraham, his descendants, and the whole world through the Old and New Covenants.[259] Many Scriptural authors understood the friendship between Abraham and God as a covenantal love-relationship[260] initiated by God for the good of Abraham, his

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[256] Jan Dietrich, "Friendship with God: Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Perspectives," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*, 28, no. 2 (2014):157.

[257] Dietrich's sources include the OT books, such as *Proverbs, Sirach*, and ANE sources such as *Instructions of Ankhsheshonq, Epic of Gilgamesh, Instructions of Papyrus Insinger, instructions of Amenemope, and Eloquent Peasant.*

[258] In modern times, theologians such as Jeremy Taylor (1613-67), Thomas Traherne (1636-74) Richard Jones (1727-1800), and Mary Deverell (1774) saw salvation history, recorded in the OT and the Christ event in the NT as God's action in human history to restore man's friendship with God. For a detailed discussion on the views of these authors on God's friendship with humanity, see Carmichael, *Friendship,136-151*.

[259] Isa. 41:8-10; 2 Chron. 20:7; Exod. 33:11.

[260] Dietrich points out that the Hebrew word used to describe God's friendship with Abraham is the active participle of the verb "to love" (*ohew*), which in the OT also has the connotation of "law abiding" and therefore a covenantal relationship.[260] See Dietrich, *Friendship with God*, 168.

descendants, and all the nations on earth for the glory of God:

> Now the Lord said to Abraham, Go from your country and your kindred and your
> father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation,
> and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I
> will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you, I will curse; and in
> you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.[261]

Recounting God's act of salvation in the history of Israel, the author of 2 Chronicles refers to Abraham as a friend of God.[262] The Prophet Isaiah also calls Abraham "friend of God"; and explains God's friendship with Abraham as a justification for God's deliverance of Israel from exile in Babylon.[263] The inclusion of the people of Israel as friends of God is a prototype for the friendship between God and the entire human race.

God's friendship with Israel is also explained as a "guest-friendship", a notion which was common in OT and ANE cultures and expressed the quality of love and hospitality shown by a host and embraced by a guest. Dietrich observes that when Abraham welcomes God as a guest into his house in Genesis 18, Abrams reveals himself as a friend of God. In the same sense, when God hosts the people of Israel as foreigners on the land of Canaan in Leviticus 25, God reveals Godself as the friend of Israel. In the OT then, divine-human friendship is a reciprocal love-relationship initiated, sustained, and perfected by God through grace and the faith response of the human person. Besides divine-human friendship, the OT also contains many examples of friendship among

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[261] Gen. 12:1-3.

[262] 2 Chron. 20:7.

[263] Isa. 41:8.

human beings, such as the relationships between Ruth and Naomi, Job and his friends, David and Jonathan, and Hushai and David. True friendships mirror the love of God as an "intimate relation of reliability, trustworthiness, and veracity"[264] and are outer-kinship. A true friend is a helper in good and bad times.

Friendship in the New Testament

Even though God extends this friendship to all who fear him (Psalm 25:14) and those who seek Wisdom (Wis. 7: 27-28), OT friendship is not been conceptualized explicitly as love that includes the non-virtuous. It is in the NT that the idea of God as a friend to both the virtuous and the unrighteous becomes explicit. Jesus, God-incarnate, is called the friend of sinners and tax collectors (Mt. 11:19; Luke 7:34). While the Pharisees and Scribes meant this as derogatory comment, it reveals God's radical friendship-love for all especially those society consider unclean and unworthy. Raymond Brown and other biblical scholars note that in the NT the verb "to love" is expressed either as *agapan*, a word from which *agape* derives, or *philein,* related to *philos and philia.* Liz Carmichael points out that the NT writers used *philein* and *agapan* interchangeably as "synonyms with little or no differentiation."[265] For the NT writers, Christian love is friendship-love. The divine love communicated by Christ to humanity is presented as friendship love.

In Jesus, we see a sharp departure from the idea of friendship as limited to only the virtuous. Jesus models "open and public friendship [with] the unrighteous and

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[264] Dietrich, *Friendship with God*, 160.

[265] Carmichael, *Friendship*, 37.

undeserved;"[266] and expands our understanding of God as a friend, creator, judge, and redeemer.[267] Interpreting the traditional titles of Jesus within the model of friendship, *Jürgen* Moltmann observes that as a prophet, Jesus makes himself a friend to sinners, the poor and the outcast in order to bring them the Good News; as a priest, he sacrifices his life to bring them life; and as a king, he liberates humanity from sin and all forms of oppression and empowers them to be friends to one another.

Thus, "in his divine function as prophet, priest, and king, Christ lives and acts as a friend and creates friendship."[268] Jesus's model of friendship breaks down the barrier of the "equality principle." He calls his disciples friends and treats them as such. Jesus explains his ministry, death, and resurrection as acts of friendship for all humanity, which is experienced by all who accept his offer of love.[269] In Christian friendship, "there is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor there is male and female…all are one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28).

Moltmann concludes that Jesus enables and models a new type of open friendship, which is possible "between people who are diverse and unlike one another."[270] As Sallie McFague reflects, the story of Jesus as recorded in the NT is the parable of God as a friend. Jesus does not only reveal God as a friend, but also commands his disciples to be friends to all human beings. Over the centuries, many theologians have

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[266] *Jürgen* Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (SCM Press, London 1992), 257.

[267] Christopher, Heuerts and Pohl Christine, *Friendship at the Margins: Discovering Mutuality in Service and Mission* (Madison, WI: InterVasity Press, 2010), 20-21.

[268] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution of Messianic Ecclesiology* (London: SCM Press, 1975), 119.

[269] John 15:12-17.

[270] Zirschky, *Beyond the Screen,* kindle, chapter 8, loc. 2228.

reflected on the joy as well as the challenges of this Christian vocation to friendship. In what follows, I explore friendship as presented in the writings of some selected Christian theologians including, Augustine of Hippo, Aelred of Rievaulx, Thomas Aquinas, and Teresa of Avila.[271]

Augustine of Hippo: Friends are Gifts from God

Aurelius Augustine was born in 354AD in Thagaste, North Africa, now Souk-Ahras, about 60 miles from Bona (Ancient Hippo). He received a Christian education, but in early part of his adult life embraced Manichæism, a religion that taught dualism of two principal powers in charge of the world. Later he converted into Christianity and became the bishop of Hippo.[272] St. Augustine is one of the leading Church Fathers who provide important theological insights on friendship. His writings and theological reflections influenced western thought for the first thousand years of Christianity, and are still very important to Christian theology in our days. The letters he wrote to his female and male friends, including Proba, Paulinus of Nola, Marcianus, and Jerome reveal Augustine's thoughts on friendship.[273] In these letters and his theological works, such as *The Confessions*, and *City of God*, Augustine reflects on both the dangers and blessings of human friendship. His struggle with moral choices during adolescence, which he at times attributed to the influence of friends, led him to comment that "friendship can be a

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[271] These classics are representative of Christian reflections on friendship as found in patristic, monastic, scholastic, and mystical theology.

[272] See Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

[273] Carmichael. *Friendship*, 55-68.

dangerous enemy, a seduction of the mind lying beyond the reach of investigation."[274] He

also doubted true reciprocity of divine-human friendship[275] due to human weaknesses and

evils that plaque human intention and ability to love unconditionally Augustine was also

skeptical about cross-sex friendships. He encourages same-sex friendships centered on

and directed towards God. Marie Aquinas McNamara, Carolinne White, Liz Carmichael,

Paul Wadell, and other theologians who have explored Augustine's thought on friendship

provide important insights into his contribution to the development of Christian theology

of friendship. For Augustine, true friends are gifts from God.[276] He believes that:

> In this world two things are essential: life and friendship. Both should be highly
>
> prized and we must not undervalue them. Life and friendship are nature's gifts.
>
> God created humans so that they might exist and live: this is life. But if humans
>
> are not to remain solitary, there must be friendship.[277]

This does not mean that human beings do not exercise freedom in choosing their friends

but rather that friendship, like every other good thing, is a blessing from God. For

Augustine, "grace creates friendship."[278] This is based on his understanding that

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[274] Augustine, *The Confessions,* trans. Maria Boulding (New York: New City Press, 1997): I. ix.17.

[275] Carmichael, Friendship, 59, 224. In a further conversation between Rev. Dr. Liz Carmichael and I, she shed lights on how the culture of Augustine's day influenced his thought on cross-sex friendship. The great problem in the ancient world was that women did, on the whole, lead a very different life from men; very few of them were educated or took part in public life, so the question was: how could they possibly develop the kind of virtues necessary for 'true friendship'?! Augustine's views on women as friends was therefore influenced by his cultural context

[276] Marie Aquinas McNamara, *Friendship in Saint Augustine* (Fribourg, Switzerland: University Press, 1958).

[277] Augustine, *Sermon 299D*, 1 quoted in Bernard Brady, *Christian Love: How Christians Through the Ages Have Understood Love* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, V. 2003), 89.

[278] Carmichael, *Friendship*, 60.

everything good comes from God.[279]

Augustine also believes that friendship, as a divine gift, is meant to help human beings come to knowledge of God, of one another, and ultimately open the human heart towards participation in eternal friendship of the Trinity. He therefore argues that human friendships must be "modeled on God and seek God."[280] Human friendship must be a life of grace. Commenting on this idea from Augustine, Wadell observes that the "Trinity reveals God as a community of friendship, a communion of intimacy in which love is perfectly given and perfectively received" and human friendship is meant to mirror this Trinitarian giving and receiving of love through "practices of perfection in sanctifying ways of life."[281] McNamara points out that even though Augustine was influenced by Cicero's ideas on friendship as agreement in all things human and divine guided by charity and goodness, Augustine provides a new and Christian meaning of human friendship by arguing that friendship must transcend the natural virtues and happiness in this life and embrace a life of holiness, grace, and eternal happiness with God and the saints in heaven.[282] Unlike Cicero and other western philosophers whose ideas on friendship he Christianized, Augustine gives human friendship an eschatological dimension.[283]

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[279] Carolinne White, *Christian Friendship* in the *Fourth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 196. White, observes that Augustine's understanding of virtuous friendship was very much influenced by his reading of St. Paul's theology in I Cor. 4:7 that all good things are gifts.

[280] Ibid, 79.

[281] Ibid, 80-81.

[282] McNamara, *Friendship in Saint Augustine, 197.*

[283] Paul Wadell*, Becoming Friends*: *Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002) 92.

For Augustine, true intimacy among human beings is possible and serves a virtuous end only when it is linked with intimacy with God because God is the greatest good (*summum bonum).* Carolinne White observes that by presenting friendship this way, Augustine calls for loving God in our friends and helps us avoid the sin of "loving the creature more than the Creator"[284] as well as the sin of loving God and neglecting our friends. Augustine laments the pain of earthly friendships as they are limited and cautions against seeing earthly friendship as an end in itself. He believed that when directed towards God, Christian friendship leads to unity of souls with God.

Summarizing Augustine's contribution to the development of Christian theology of friendship, Carmichael observes that "he never urges us to welcome and celebrate friendship in Christ on earth as a foretaste of the eternal 'enjoyment of God and of one another in God' in heaven...[however] by making friendship a mystery of grace, Augustine made it 'a matter always of three persons and not simply of two human partners'."[285] Augustine's ideas of friendship as a gift and grace that transcends earthly life laid the foundation for later theological reflections on friendships as seen in the works of Aelred of Rievaulx.

Aelred of Rievaulx: Friendship is Christological, Communal, and Eschatological

While friendship was not proscribed in early days of monastic spirituality, personal friendships were generally seen as dangerous to community life and were discouraged in most monasteries in the west. In the medieval period, however, a more positive exploration of friendship as a way of living Christian love began in some

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[284] White, *Christian Friendship*, 202. Also see Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, 85.

[285] Carmichael, *Friendship*, 66-68.

monastic communities as seen in the works of Aelred of Rievaulx.[286] He was born in

Hexham, Northumberland in 1110. At age fourteen, he was sent to the court of King

David I of Scotland, but he abandoned all the pomp of royalty and the luxury of the

palace in search of a deeper relationship with Christ and entered the Cistercian monastery

of Rievaulx in 1147. His work on friendship was motivated in part by his search for a

"formula for friendship whereby [he] might check the vacillations of [his] loves and

affection"[287] as well as ways of promoting authentic Christ-centered community life in

the monastery of Rievaulx. His exploration of friendship resulted in two of his most

famous works, *Mirror of Love (speculum caritatis)* and *Spiritual Friendship (spiritali*

amicitia). His discussion on love in the former lays the foundation for his explorations of

friendship-love in the latter.[288]

Many scholarly works on Aelred point out that his thoughts on friendship were

influenced by Scripture, the works of Augustine, as well as Cicero; and were shaped by

medieval monastic theology, which emphasized experiential and symbolic learning, and

the epistemological role of love. Even though Aelred's reflection on friendship

summarizes the thoughts of philosophers and theologians before him, he offers his own

unique synthesis that adds to the tradition.[289] He focuses on the nature and origin of

friendship, its source and end, and addresses two important questions that did not receive

in-depth treatment in the writings of Augustine and others thinkers who preceded him,

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[286] Ibid.

[287] Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship: The Classic Text with a Spiritual Commentary,* ed. Dennis Billy (Notre Dame, ID: Ave Maria Press, 2008).

[288] Louis Bouyer, *Cistercian Heritage* (Westminster, Md: Newman Press 1958),155.

[289] Brian McGuire, *Brother and Lover: Aelred of Rievaulx* (New York: Crossroads, 1994).

namely, the fruition and excellence of friendship as well as how and among whom

friendship can be preserved unbroken even to the end.[290]

Aelred, adopts Cicero's definition of friendship, but points out that while Cicero's

treatise on friendship is educative and engaging, it lacks divine revelation because it fails

to identify God as the origin of human friendship. Unlike the dyadic friendship of Cicero,

Aelred teaches his brother monks that Christ is the source and goal of true friendship; and

that friendship as a spiritual relationship is triadic. At the beginning of his conversation,

Aelred tells his friend, "here we are you and I, and I hope a third, Christ, is in our

midst."[291]Aelred bases his theology of friendship on John 15 and observes that,

> friendship is a state boarding upon that perfection which consists in the love and
>
> knowledge of God, so that man from being a friend of his fellow-man becomes
>
> the friend of God according to the words of the savior in the Gospel: 'I will not
>
> call you servants, but my friends.'[292]

Charles Dumont observes that Aelred adopts Augustine's anthropology that God

intentionally created us to long for friendship with God and one another, and that Jesus

sacramentalizes human friendship.[293] God is, therefore, the origin and end of friendship;

and "whoever abides in friendship, abides in God, and God in them."[294] With some

hesitation, Aelred accepts Ivo's proposed formula: "God is friendship" (*Deus amcitia*

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[290] Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, trans. Mary Eugenia Laker, with and introduction by Douglas Roby (Cistercian Fathers 5, *Kalamazoo MI: Cistercian Publications 1977), 1.5.*

[291] Ibid, 51.

[292] Ibid, II.14.

[293] Charles Dumont, "*Aelred of Rievaulx's Spiritual Friendship" In Cistercian Ideals and Reality,* ed. John Sommerfeldt *(Kalamazoo MI: Cistercian Publications, 1978), 195-96.*

[294] *Spiritual Friendship*, I:70.

est),[295] and reflects that friendship is important because it is one of the most practical

ways of living the Christian sabbath, which he explains as sharing in the perfect love

(*caritas)* that exits among the Trinity of Persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Expanding on

St. Augustine's order of love, Aelred presents love (caritas) as God's eternal rest and

argues that God's "rest is not described as being in any creature, that you may know

precisely that he needs none of them, is self-sufficient in everything, and created nothing

to meet his own needs, but everything to satisfy his overflowing charity."[296] The re-

ordering of our love is the goal of Christian spirituality, and perfect love is our true

sabbath. For Aelred the three sabbaths, " the love of God, self, and neighbor are

interdependent and cannot exist alone, and they come to perfection together."[297]

Further, Aelred identifies the element of love as *attraction, intention, and fruition*;

and reflects that it is only when human love is healed through grace that it produces fruits

that are good for the person.[298] He draws a difference between the love of Christian

charity, which must be extended even to enemies and the love that exists between friends

and suggests that there can be love without friendship but it is impossible to have true

friendship without love.[299] Aelred also discusses the "conditions and characteristics

requisite for unbroken friendship" and identifies the stages through which two people

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[295] Ibid, 1. 69-70.

[296] Aelred of Rievaulx. *Mirror of Charity*, trans. Elizabeth Cornnor, Cistercian Fathers 17, (Kalamazoo, MI*:* Cistercian Publications 1990): 1.19.55.

[297] Carmichael, *Friendship,* 75-78. Also see *Mirror of Love* 111. 3-5.

[298] Ibid.

[299] *Spiritual Friendship*, 3. 2

become friends including *selection, probation, admission, and perfect harmony of life.*[300]

Aelred cautions that due to our fallen human nature and its constant struggle with sin, we can tolerate some faults in our friends but should not overlook irascibility, suspicion, a loose tongue, and fickleness because friendship built on these vices will not stand. He proposes loyalty, discretion, right intention, and patience as the yardstick for friendships that can lead to growth in virtue and perfect harmony of life.[301] Aelred reflects:

> true friendship advances by perfecting itself, and the fruit is derived from feeling the sweetness of that perfection. And so spiritual friendship among the just is born of a similarity in life, morals, and pursuits, that is, it is a mutual conformity in matters human and divine united with benevolence and charity.[302]

Furthermore, Aelred identifies three types of friendships as carnal, worldly and spiritual friendships. He rejects the first two and describes them as false friendships because even though people involved in such relationships might consider themselves friends because of their common association, they are not friends since true friendships cannot be based on vice. Friendship based on the fleshly desires and worldly attractions, intentions, and benefits will only lead to sin. Aelred argues that "he does not love his fellow man who loves iniquity";[303] and "no union of will and ideas can exist between the good and wicked."[304] Aelred further posits that only spiritual friendship, one based on

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[300] Ibid, 3.56

[301] Ibid, 3.22-65

[302] Ibid,1.46.

[303] Ibid, 1.35.

[304] Ibid,1.59.

virtue, is true friendship. Such friendships are eternal and bind lovers together through joys and sorrows. He considers friendship one of the highest goods because in it "eternity blossoms, truth shines forth and charity grows sweet."[305]

Even though he calls for a virtuous friendship, Aelred does not suggest that one should be a friend to only those who are perfect as Aristotle, Cicero, and many traditional texts on friendship admonish. "On the contrary, friendship for him, is an instrument that helps people grow in holiness and travel along the road to perfection."[306] Aelred, like Augustine, sees true friendships as a necessary way of enjoying perfect friendship with God in eternity; but Aelred "adds his own distinctive conviction that a foretaste of this joy can and should be experienced on earth".[307] Friendship, insofar as it is directed towards enjoying our friends "in the Lord", in joyfulness of spirit, in wisdom, justice, and sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30)",[308] can be a relationship "by which spirits are bound by ties of love and sweetness, and from many are made one."[309] Aelred reflects that spiritual friendships are Christological, they 'begin in Christ, continue in Christ, and are perfected in Christ."[310] Friends who help each other grow in virtue "will joyfully partake in abundance of the spiritual fruit of friendship, awaiting the fullness of all things in the life

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[305] Ibid,1.68.

[306] Dennis Billy, *Spiritual Friendship: The Classic Text with a Spiritual Commentary* (Notre Dame IN: Ave maria Press, 2008), 78.

[307] Carmichael, *Friendship, 78.*

[308] Ibid 79.

[309] *Spiritual Friendship*,1.21.

[310] Ibid, 1.57.

to come".[311]

Another important insight that Aelred provides is the possibility of cross-sex (female-male) friendship. Dennis Billy observes that Aelred takes a position on cross-sex friendship that "stands in stark contrast with many of his contemporaries."[312] Aelred reflects that the biblical account of woman being taken from man's side communicates the fact that human beings "are equal and, as it were, collateral and that there is in human affairs neither superior nor inferior, a characteristic of true friendship."[313] By this he implies the collaboration between a man and a woman in all things including friendship. This and other insights discussed thus far mark Aelred's unique and significant contribution to Christian understanding of friendship. As Carmichael points out, "Aelred's writings offer "a unique contribution, an experiential, practical theology of love whose originality lies in his belief that Christian life on earth should afford an experience of eternal union not only with God in prayer but also between human beings."[314] In sum, Aelred sees spiritual friendship as a communal, Trinitarian, Christological, and an eschatological reality.

Teresa of Avila: Practical Challenges and Joys of Christian Friendship

While Augustine and Aelred of Rievaulx shed light on the spiritual origins and nature of human friendship and how it could be lived primarily among monks; Teresa of Avila provides practical insights into the struggles as well as the joys of developing spiritual friendship with God and fellow human beings. Her theological reflection on

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[311] Ibid, 3:134.

[312] Billy. *Spiritual Friendship*, 16.

[313] *Spiritual Friendship*, 1.10.

[314] Carmichael, *Friendship*, 78.

friendship does not only add a female voice to the Christian classics on friendship, but also provides us with one of the most practical theological perspectives on Christian friendship as lived by a nun in a cloister with other nuns. She also reflects on cross-sex friendship between male and female Christian friends.

Teresa of Avila has no treatise on friendship but her writings, such as *The Book of Her Life, Meditations on the Song of Songs, The Way of Perfection,* and *Spiritual Testimonies*, provide rich narratives and theological reflection on her own struggles as she learned to develop Christian friendship at different stages of her life. She provides deep insights on practical ways of becoming "friends of Christ that we may be friends of one another."[315]

St. Teresa talks about many years of her struggle and internal "conflict between friendship with God and friendship with the world."[316] She writes about harmful influences which bad companions had on her life as well as how a good company of a friend helped her "get rid of the habits that the bad company had caused."[317] She points out that "spiritual friendship is extremely important for souls not yet fortified in virtue."[318] She also observes that the struggle in developing spiritual friendship does not always involve making a choice between virtuous and non-virtuous friendships; but also how to redeem virtuous friendships from attachments and reorient them in ways that set one free from "excessive love" for one person, which makes it impossible for one to love

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[315] Susan Cordsen, "Teresa of Avila and Friendship," *Review for Religious*. 63, no.1(2004), 65.

[316] Teresa of Avila, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, The Book of Her Life; Spiritual Testimonies: Soliloquies*, vol.1. trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. (Washington: ICS Publications, 1976), 8.3.

[317] Ibid 2.4 and 3.1.

[318] Ibid 7.6.

others. She further emphasizes that it is not easy to always tell the difference between spiritual and sensual love or "when sensual love is mixed with spiritual love."[319]

St. Teresa teaches that reorienting virtuous-but-attached friendships requires the grace of God derived from mental prayer, which is "nothing else than intimate sharing between friends [you and Christ]."[320] She reflects that close friendship with Christ sets one free to love others more effectively. In addition, the reorientation of virtuous-but-attached friendship requires self-knowledge, awareness, and patience.[321] She explains that this reorientation does not mean cutting friends off but taking practical steps, such as limiting time spent together, in order to reduce the attachment. St. Teresa also advises that this "should be done delicately and lovingly rather than harshly."[322] Even though challenging, it is important for one to be detached from friendships that might not be sinful but interfere with love for God and others because "all must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, all must be helped."[323]

Furthermore, St. Teresa uses the Pascal Mystery of Christ to explain the temptations, pain, and suffering that come from developing spiritual friendships. For her, the pain that comes from the self-denial involved in seeking detachment from a virtuous friendship is a participation in the Cross of Christ. Reflecting on Jesus as the perfect friend, who sacrifices his comfort and joys to love and form us into friends of God and

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[319] Teresa of Avila, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila: The Way of Perfection, Meditations on the Song of Songs, The Interior Castle*, vol.2. trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. (Washington: ICS Publications, 1980), 6.2.

[320] *The Book of Her Life* 8.5.

[321] Ibid 4. 6-8.

[322] Ibid 4.9.

[323] *The Way of Perfection* 4.7.

others, St. Teresa asks: "what better friendship than that [Jesus] desires for you what he desired for himself."[324] St. Teresa cites the example of her great affection for her spiritual director and friend, *Jerónimo Gracián,* who was there for in her when she experienced "great loneliness" to give her comfort, but she had to learn to accept the fact of him being absent most of the time. She talks about how this friendship brought her much joy and learning to detach from it brought her much sorrow.[325] St. Teresa encourages us to embrace such pain and work constantly to reorient our friendships so that our love will be "with no self-interest at all", desiring nothing but "to see the other soul rich with heavenly blessings."[326] St. Teresa, the mystic, was able to blend her practical experience of friendship with the mystical experiences she had of friendship with Christ.

Thomas Aquinas: Christian Love (*Caritas*) is Friendship

Many theologians have explored Thomas Aquinas' contribution to the development of Christian theology of friendship. In general, they point out how St. Thomas relies on Aristotle in developing his ideas on friendship. He uses Aristotle's idea of friend as "another self " to develop the idea of *similitude* (likeness), unity/union, and *extension* to explain charity as friendship-love directed towards God and all that belongs to God.[327] As Carmichael observes, St. Thomas makes a unique contribution to the development of Christian theology of friendship because he is "the only scholastic to

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[324] Ibid 17.7.

[325] *Spiritual Testimonies, 53.*

[326] *The Way of Perfection,* 7.1.

[327] David Gallagher, "Desire for Beatitude and Love of Friendship in Thomas Aquinas," *Medieval Studies* 58 (1996) 1-45.

define Christian love, *caritas,* fully and in every respect as friendship, *amicitia.*"[328] Thomas divides love into three levels: love as *amor* (love based on felt senses), *dilectio* (love directed by will and reason), and *amicitia* (friendship-love that is virtue, that includes *amor* and *dilectio* and creates a society by embracing the beloved and all that belongs to the loved one).[329] For St. Thomas, friendship love invokes *societas, communicatio, habitus* and *inclinatio.*[330] He argues that,

> Friendship is the most perfect among the things pertaining to love and it includes all the aforementioned…*caritas* must be placed in this kind of genus, it is being a certain friendship of human beings towards God through which they love God and God loves them.[331]

Furthermore, St. Thomas identifies four objects of friendship love as "God, self, neighbor, and our own body,"[332] and reflects that, "God is our chief friend (*Deus maxime est amicus*)",[333] and must be loved above all. The love of God includes loving all that belongs to God. In this sense, friendship with God demands that we become friends with all humanity since all belongs to God. Friendship directed towards God is therefore both particular and universal. After love for God comes love for self, which must be done in charity since wrong self-love leads to sin, but right self love allows one to love a neighbor and still love the self by not making any choices that can cost one the enjoyment

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[328] Carmichael, *Friendship,* 105.

[329] Carmichael, *Friendship*, 107.

[330] Jean-Pierre Torrell, *St. Thomas Aquinas,* Vol. 2*: Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

[331] Aquinas Thomas., *Sentences* III. d.27. q.2a.1. cited in Carmichael, *Friendship*, 107.

[332] Carmichael, *Friendship,* 117.

[333] Aquinas Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, II b. Q 27. Art 8.

of the beatitudes. Using Aristotle's idea of friend as "another self" Thomas reflects that

friendship love directed toward the neighbor as "self-love" must be based on *caritas*.

St. Thomas observes that even though natural friendship originates from God, it

cannot be called virtue unless it is directed towards God, and is transformed and

perfected by *caritas*.[334] He makes a distinction between "friendship-love" (love for the

person) and "desiring-love" (love that seeks to acquire good for them).[335] He agrees with

Aristotle that friendship is primary directed towards the virtuous, but he adds that

friendship as charity, Christian love, must be extended to the non-virtuous and even

enemies.[336] He reflects that, "we love sinners" because they are made in the image of

God; and we do so "not so as to will what they will, but rather, to help "them will what

we will" so that we can rejoice together.[337] In this sense an enemy is a potential friend.

St. Thomas adapts Augustine's ideas on *caritas*, and Aristotle's ideas on civil

friendship, *philia,* to his interpretation of Jesus' words on friendship in John 15:15. He

discusses Jesus' friendship with humanity as love that is directed not only to the virtuous,

but rather primarily to those who do not deserve it, humanity who would have otherwise

remained enemies of God. St. Thomas believes that friendship between God and

humanity is reciprocal because God initiates it by inviting us into friendship with Christ

and gives us the grace to respond, become friends of God and all human beings. He

reflects that friendship directed towards God is natural and free. It involves self-

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[334] Carmichael, *Friendship*, 111-113. Also see Paul Wadell. *Friendship and Moral Life* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

[335] Ibid, 115.

[336] Carmichael, *Friendship,* 113-123.

[337] *Summa Theologica,* II-II.25.11ad 3.

revelation, sharing of life and conversation through contemplation, self-sacrifice, forgiveness, and demands obedience to God's will.[338] Thus for St. Thomas, "Caritas signifies not only the love of God, but also a certain friendship with him, which implies, besides love, the mutual return of love...this fellowship… begun here through grace, [and is] perfected in the future life, through glory.[339]

Summary of the Christian Traditional Thought

In this section, we have explored biblical concepts of friendship and other theological reflections on human friendship. Among other things, the Christian tradition provides important insights into friendship-love: Friendship as a covenantal relationship, friendship as a gift from God, friendship as a sacrament of God's love, friendship-love as caritas, love that is both universal and particular; extended to the virtuous and the non-virtuous, virtue, benefits, and pleasure as essential for the development and sustainability of friendship, the need to reorient virtuous-but-attached friendships, the need to see the challenges and the pain of developing Christian friendship as a participation in the Paschal Mystery of Christ, as well as the eschatological nature of Christian friendship.

Traditional Christian thought offers much explanation of the spiritual nature of human friendship and makes a unique contribution to the discussion on friendship by uncovering its true meaning as love that is directed towards God and extended to all, both the virtuous and non-virtuous. However, the traditional Christian thought on friendship fails to provide an adequate account of how this gift is lived out practically in human society and the challenges that need to be overcome in order to do so more successfully

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[338] Carmichael, *Friendship*, 107.

[339] *Summa Theologica*, 1-11, 65.5. Cited in Carmichael, *Friendship*, 107.

in our digital culture. For Christian theology to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how friendship impacts the development of the human person across sexes and the lifespan, theologians need to integrate insights not only from philosophical perspectives but also, the socio-cultural and psychological perspectives that provide insights into the functional aspect of human friendship. Furthermore, any framework for the development of contemporary practical theology on friendship will not be complete if it does not capture what people living in this digital age think about friendship. It is to mitigate this limitation that I conducted the survey on friendship, which I described in chapter one under methodology. In what follows I present what participants in this study think of friendship in our digital culture.

<div align="center">

Participants' Perspectives on Friendship[340]

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Nature and Importance of Friendship

Analysis of the responses from the three hundred participants in this research shows that 56 % of the participants see friendship as extremely important in their lives. Approximately 37 % see it as very important and 7 % consider friendship to be moderately important in their lives. This confirms what has been reported in the literature that friendship is universal and no human being would choose to live without friends. The results also indicate different understandings of friendship that might be identified with the different conceptualizations of friendship as discussed under the philosophical, socio-cultural, psychological, and theological perspectives.

Some participants made specific references to some philosophers as they explained friendship: "I understand friendship as Aristotle defined it, i.e. an intentional

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[340] The perspectives presented here are based on responses that participants in this research gave to the survey questions. See Appendix A.

in-dwelling of souls in each other. I believe that friendship is proper to man and as such, is unique to humanity."[341] Almost all participants see friendship as private and voluntary that "you choose to be a part of;" and differentiated it from other institutionalized relationships such as "familial relationships that you would usually have no choice over". Most participants also see friendship as a dyadic relationship. However, few commented on friendship as involving more than two people and at times even a network.

Types and Degrees of Friendship

Participants talked about both types and degrees of friendship. Most of them explained friendship as a relationship that has different levels. Friendship may be immoral or antisocial bonds; casual, superficial, close, very close or intimate. It ranges from "mild acquaintanceship, worldly relationships as "friends with benefits" or "different types of immoral buddies" to deep relationships similar to the Christian agape love. As one participant shared:

> When I was in grade school, friendship was someone offering to share an orange with me or play basketball together. Later, I thought friendship was with others who were engaged in similar negative attitudes and behaviors as I was. Then there were professional friendships with others interested in or perhaps obsessed with the same kind of work I did. Now I think that true friendship can be found only to the extent that I am friends with Jesus and he grants it in times with others -- even in the sharing of food or working as a team with others to accomplish something worthwhile.

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[341] In presenting the contemporary views on friendship gathered from my survey, I provide all direct quotations verbatim in order to preserve the voices of the participants.

Most Common Descriptors of Friendship

In response to a survey item that asked them to mention three qualities of those they consider a friend, the participants presented friendship as a relationship of mutual agreement carved around respect, commitment, trust, joy, listening, self-giving, genuine care, availability, compatibility, honesty, prayerfulness, understanding, humility, loyalty, Fear of God, confidentiality, support, and agape love. Table 2 presents the most common words the participants used to describe the qualities of a friend.

Table 3. Most Common Descriptors of Friendship by Participants

Descriptor	No of times Mentioned
1. Caring	176
2. Love	157
3. Trust	142
4. Honesty	140
5. Listening/Understanding/Non – Judgmental	139
6. Loyalty	127
7. Companionship/Availability	72
8. Fun/Sense of Humor	70
9. Compatibility	42
10. Respect	33
11. Commitment	15
12. God-fearing	15
13. Confidential	13
14. Humble	10
15. Forgiving	5
16. Prayerful	2

In general, almost all the participants consider friendship to be a virtuous relationship. The words of one participant captures the views of those who define friendship as a virtue: "friends help/inspire me to live virtuously; they are a support in the day to day struggles, and also share my joys. We have common values and goals." Another participant noted, "a friend does not enable you or encourage you in doing destructive actions; being a true friend and aiding your friend require being a person

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seeking to live a virtuous life and encouraging your friend to reach his highest state of virtue."

Furthermore, the majority of participants require a true friend to be non-judgmental. A friend is a confidant who understands one's strengths and weaknesses and strives to bring out the best in a friend through encouragement and truthful, but loving feedback that seek builds the friend up. One person observed, "in friendship, there is no judgment; a friend is someone who accepts and loves me the way I am." Friendship involves the sharing of similar values, ideas, hobbies or likes, intentionally spending time together, and talking about personal things at an intimate level. It is celebrating another person's successes and being there for them during their failures. It also involves sacrifice that helps a person to grow emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. In addition, being a friend involves loving, trusting, listening, giving, caring, accepting and respecting each other's differences. As one participant writes, "a friend is one who listens and hears me; one who allows me freedom yet gives suggestions." It is an honest exchange of people whereby they support each other in good and bad times. While the love of friendship is not dependent on happiness, it must provide the groundwork for it.

Disagreements in Friendship

Another noticeable element is the emphasis almost all participants place on disagreement and conflicts as essential elements of friendship. Contrary to Cicero's definition of friendship as "agreement in all things human and divine," participants in this study did not think that friends must seek to agree in all things. Most of them commented that disagreement is important for growth and transformation of friendship. For some participants "friends are like iron sharpening iron." They may bring friction and heat, but

the goal is always the good of the other. Friends may or may not agree on all topics, but the relationship is secure and safe based on a deep understanding of the other. One participant commented, "friends never judge, though they may disagree. Most often you can agree to disagree and in that way, never let your differences get in the way of your friendship. Friends can be critical, but never mean." They value each other's opinions even though they may have major differences in beliefs. In the words of another participant, a friend is one who doesn't always agree with me, but is honest enough to tell me truth and still accepts me as a sacred creation, no matter what."

In this sense, friendship provides a window into different experiences, perspectives, and points of view. For many participants, friendship is "a special bond between people of any sex, race, color, or creed, based on truth, mutual likes and dislikes". One participant noted that, "real friends want the best for you and are willing to sacrifice time, effort, resources, or risk credibility or misunderstanding for that. They listen attentively. And they will dare to tell you when there's still chocolate on your mouth." For most participants, true friendship has an assumption of stability or continuance in spite of occasional ups and downs. It is a dialogue that is unconstrained by political correctness. Friends do not have to agree on everything, but they are able to talk about anything.

God as a Friend

The majority of participants (89%) see God as a friend and give a number of reasons including the fact that God shows them unconditional love, listens to them, does not condemn them, and walks with them. God accepts them as they are and shares in the difficult times as well as joyful moments. Some described God as a perfect friend:

"Ultimately, God wills our good more than any other being in existence. In fact, God is the friend par excellence because he willed us into existence." Others see God as a friend because God encourages them to be "better" human beings and is ever forgiving. One participant wrote: "God is my friend because we talk, we spend time together, I know He loves me and the goal of my life is to love Him in everything I do" Another said, "I can talk to him about everything and he has my best interests at heart. He has been taking care of me my whole life". Most participants, who see God as a friend, also identify friendship as a special gift from God, a means of expressing God's love to humanity through mutual love and care.

Only few (11%) do not consider God a friend. Those who do not see God as a friend gave a number of reasons including not believing in God and seeing God as a distant being. Others saw God as a parent, a father, who cannot be a friend. One participant noted: "I do not know God personally, nor do I necessarily believe in God, if there is a God I see him more as a father figure who looks after us and tries to guide us in the right way." Some also do not see God as a friend because friendship, for them, is possible only between two people who are equal.

Friendship on Social Media: Divergence of Opinions

In addition, participants have divergent of opinions on friendship on social media. The majority of them, (94%), do not see online friendship as real and consider most of their online contacts as acquaintances, not real friends. In the words of one participant, online friendship is "a numbers' game; it is not real, a statistic of popularity that has no substance without a foundation of a personal relationship in the real world". Another wrote: "It's a joke. Haha, it feels edited to me. It feels inauthentic. Social media distances

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me from truly feeling connection with another, and also from seeing how someone is reacting to me." Some believe that "the best sign of a good relationship is no sign of it on Facebook". Such participants see online friendship as "a mask" because people can easily lie about their identity and convey false emotions in the virtual space. They also argue that, "media contacts do not satisfy the desire for trust and interaction. They are a poor substitute for real time together, you cannot have substantial conversations; and people are not commitment."

Few participants (7%), however, see online friendship as authentic loving relationship with people they might never meet in person. One participant stated: " It is a soul-filled relationship with someone you haven't met in person but have grown to know well, admire, respect, love, and cherish." Another observed that "social media can connect you to friends you might have never met in person. In terms of globalization and understanding others, platforms like Facebook and others can bridge physical gaps that otherwise would have been insurmountable." These participants saw online friendship as a good way for maintaining contact with friends who are geographically separated and developing authentic relationships with people anytime anywhere. For such participants, "being someone's Facebook friend or twitter follower shows people that you care about their lives and want to know what's happening in their world. It is a way of "sharing life experiences and ideas with others." For them, online connections who are not known are potential friends to be made. One person commented: "Some people instead of only liking your posts, actually message you to get to know you and you can develop friendship from that." In this sense, social media enables deeper connections with close friends, sustains weak connections with casual friends, and offers the possibility of

inviting those "casual friends" into deeper friendships. These participants presented

online friendships as opening a door to new relationships and making it easy to rekindle

old ones. One participant noted:

> If I am really close with someone already, then friendship on social media
>
> becomes an opportunity to only continue to affirm and support another. If I am
>
> not as close with the person in daily life, then friendship on social media is a way
>
> for me to stay connected by seeing what is going on in that person's life. Even
>
> though social media friendship is less personal, it is a way of showing people that
>
> you care about them. It provides opportunity to show them that you don't feel
>
> animosity towards them. It means you will occasionally like their posts; and
>
> following their posts shows that you respect what they have to say.

Challenges in Friendship (Face-to-Face and Online)

In addition to their views on online friendship, participants also reflected on what

they see as some of the most common challenges of friendship (face-to-face and online)

in contemporary society. Almost all of them mention lack of face-to-face personal

interactions, lack of trust, lack of loyalty, lack of genuine support with no strings

attached, lack of conversation, lack of commitment, and lack of understanding of true

friendship as some of the challenges of friendship in contemporary society. One

participant noted, "we simply do not make time for others unless it is benefiting us.

Aristotle's friendship of utility thus is the deepest level many friendships reach today."

selfishness is plaguing our society and taking a toll in our friendships. We're focused

completely inward and constantly worried about how we're being perceived, especially

with the prevalent immediate posts of social media."

Others mentioned, distance, selfishness, superficiality, anonymity online, dismissal of all things spiritual and moral, the polarization of society on many levels, political correctness, and the fear to be vulnerable and genuinely open to others. The following words from one participant sums up the general views people expressed about the challenges of friendship in contemporary society:

Online 'friendship' may be much easier for people who prefer not to show themselves, who are not comfortable with intimacy, who are reluctant to communicate directly, who are unable to connect on a deeper, personal level, but difficult for those seeking the opposite. Face-to-face friendship is challenged in today's world because it needs time and commitment in order to be maintained. So many people seem to be 'too busy', striving to be successful in their jobs, striving for self-promotion, and maintaining a personal agenda. We are less other-directed. It's easier to type out a few lines or send a photo than to have a personal, in-depth conversation.

In summary, participants in this study expressed different views that could be identified with various understandings of friendships discussed under the philosophical, socio-cultural and psychological, as well as the theological perspectives. Two of these are worth highlighting. One is the role of communication and disagreement in the development and stability of friendship. Unlike Cicero's notion of friendship as an agreement in all things human and divine, most participants see disagreement as an important element for interpersonal growth and maintenance of friendship. This is a useful insight for the development of practical theology of friendship. Understanding how to promote healthy disagreements among friends is vital for the development of a

theology that seeks to uncover how the gift of friendship is realized through the daily life experiences of God's people in this digital age.

Another insight is the divergence of opinions on online friendship. The fact that the majority of participants in this study lament the superficiality of online friendship calls for reflection if the church is to succeed in harnessing the blessings of social media as God's gift for our age, as discussed in chapter two. There is a need for theological reflection on how to give a "soul" to online friendship in order to bring the blessings that some of the participants identified, namely, using modern technology to maintain and strengthen old friendships and develop new friends in different parts of the world. In what follows, I integrate these perspectives to propose a framework for identifying the marks of Christian friendship that might help respond to the challenges of developing authentic friendships in our world today.

Framework for Identifying the Marks of Christian Friendship

Integrating insights from Christian traditional thought, philosophical, socio-cultural and psychological perspectives as well as the views of participants in this study, I propose a framework that sees Christian friendship as a divine gift of reciprocal love-relationship. It is triadic, covenantal, and sacramental. It is love that is particular, universal, transformative, and directed towards the good of the human person, society, and the glory of God. Christian friendship is ontological (it is based on some common ground of shared being), deontological (it is goodness in action), and teleological (it is directed towards others with the goal of attaining mutual joy and fulfillment).[342] It is a Gifted-We relationship. Integrating insights from the various perspectives discussed in this chapter, I propose five marks of Christian friendship, namely, friendship as a divine

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[342] Carmichael, *Friendship*, 199.

gift; friendship as a triadic and covenantal relationship (*iGodyou*); friendship as a Sacrament (*kerygma, diakonia, and leitourgia)*; friendship as Love that is particular and universal; and friendship as love that embraces the virtuous and non-virtuous.

Friendship as a Divine Gift

All the perspectives discussed in this chapter present friendship as a human universal. A practical theology of friendship for our age, where the world is becoming a global village, needs to articulate not only how precious the gift of friendship is, but also the source and the goal of this gift. Friendship is God's initiative for bringing people together for the ultimate good of the human race and the glory of God. It is a gift from God meant to lead all human beings back into a deeper relationship with God and with one another. The true friendship that every human being longs for finds its fullest expression in the type of friendship modeled by Christ.

Friends are blessings from God, who gifts them to us and helps us discover them along different paths. Understanding friendship as a divine gift is the first step towards redeeming friendship from its privatization and dehumanization in our digital culture. When we come to appreciate friends as gifts from God, we can help all human beings to grow in our enjoyment of God and of one another. However, the presentation of friendship as a gift must incorporate not only its spiritual understanding, but also its functional understanding as presented in some of the socio-cultural and psychological theories. This must be a critical adaptation that embraces useful insights that do not contradict Christian anthropology.

For instance, from an understanding of friendship as a gift from God, Christian theology can appropriate the perspective from the *mating opportunities theory* that cross-sex relationship is God's gift for us to understand the opposite sex and, at the same time, correct the error in this theory that the primary purpose of human friendship is dating and that human beings invented this relationship to meet mating needs. Such practical theology will help remove the phobia and suspicion that many have about cross-sex relationships and develop healthy Christian cross-sex relationships in our culture today. In another sense, accepting the insight that dating should involve friendship, Christian theology can help young men and women redeem dating from what it may have been turned into in our digital culture, " a hug up" relationship rather than the authentic friendship that it was meant to be.

In addition, adopting perspectives from the *positive externalities theory*, Christian theology can offer practical understanding of friendship as a free gift, which does not always involve a cost. People already have an experience of doing things for friends in ways that involved no cost. Christian theology needs to tap into this experiential knowledge that people already have and help them discover the grace of God present in every human being, which enables us to live this kind of friendship. A critical adaptation of such insights on friendships from the social sciences will help develop a practical theology of friendship as God's gift that has both spiritual and social functions. It will also help us correct the erroneous tendencies in such theories that see the human person as the origin of the gift of friendship

Friendship as Triadic & Covenantal Relationship (*iGodyou*)

Second, contrary to the predominant notion of friendship as a dyadic relationship Christian friendship is triadic and covenantal. God's friendship with Abraham was not dyadic but triadic, involving not only Abraham and God, but also all the nations on earth. It was through this friendship that God blessed Abraham and all his descendants (both old and new Israel). The joy of friendship lies in discovering its mystery as a triadic relationship that brings not only two people, but three (I, God, and You) together. Aelred of Reivaulx rightly points out that when friendship is centered on Christ it becomes a loving relationship among three and not two. This affirms the experience of St. Teresa of Avila that triadic friendship built on Christ, sets a person free to love others more effectively. For St. Augustine, despite all its limitations, human friendship as covenantal relationship never come to an end because it is a committed love that culminates in its perfection at the end of time. Not even death can destroy the commitment of a triadic covenantal friendship for:

> We do not lose them [friends] but send them ahead to the place for which we
> ourselves are heading; there our love for them will be stronger and our
> understanding of them deeper, for nothing will remain hidden from our closest
> friends in that place where everyone is our most intimate friend.[343]

The Christian notion of friendship as a triadic covenantal relationship also finds practical expression in some cultures in Africa. Friendship sealed as blood covenant in traditional African cultures become a triadic covenantal relationship. They bind not only two people but also their families. Fidelity in such friendships brings blessings to the parties involved and their families; while infidelity and betrayals carry serious

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[343] St. Augustine quoted in White, *Christian Friendship*, 206.

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repercussions. A critical adaptation of this African understanding of friendship as blood covenant will help make more concrete the social aspect of Christian friendship. Practical Christian theology of friendship can correct the erroneous view that friendship should literary involve an exchange of human blood, while, at the same time, appropriating the cultural value of this African traditional understanding that friendship with people involves friendship with their families. Embracing such understanding of friendship will help Christian friendship become a practical bridge that links families and the larger society together in a way that creates the world into one community of God's friends. Pursuing these practical ends will help actualize the spiritual and social dimensions of Christian friendship.

Understanding friendship as a triadic and covenantal (*iGodyou)* relationship has the potential to redeem friendship from its current privatization, trivialization and dehumanization in the digital era. It will help recapture friendship as a sacred relationship and enable people to develop a deeper appreciation of God's presence in human friendships, and the essence of both face-to-face and online friendships as the creation of network of friends of God on earth. In this sense, friends on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or any other social network will not be reduced to numbers that can be added or deleted as one chooses. Embracing friendship as an *iGodyou* relationship will help develop a deeper appreciation of the ontological grounds for human friendship (that all are made in the image and likeness of God, the *imago dei*); its deontological nature (that friendship is a gift of love meant for the ultimate good of one another); and its teleological nature (that friendship is love directed towards God and others). Such understanding of friendship will help Christians avoid the network individualism that plagues our culture today.

Friendship as a Sacrament

Third, Christian friendship is one lived as a sacrament. Jesus, God made man, reveals God's love in the form of human friendship and raises friendship to the level of a sacrament. In explaining God's love as friendship-love, Christ sacramentalizes human friendship as a means of grace and commands his disciples to make this grace present to the world. Christian friendship is therefore a physical sign of divine love, a means of grace that makes present what it signifies, the union of God and humanity.

It is important to emphasize that the sacramental nature of friendship does not imply equality of human friendship with the divine. Christ's love is without sin, perfectly directed towards God the Father and the entire human race through the power of the Holy Spirit. Only Christ's friendship-love is the perfect image of God's love (John 1:18). Our friendship is that of a fallen race; it is limited and imperfect. Thus, describing human friendship as a sacrament is not an attempt to exalt human friendship as divine. Rather it is a way of presenting human friendship, with all its limitation and imperfection, as channel of God's love and grace. Human friendship always remains subordinate to Christ's friendship with humanity; however, insofar as Christ commands friendship love as a way of bringing God's love to the world, Christian love does not point to itself, but the love of God and makes that present anytime that Christians succeed in mediating God's grace to humanity. The sacramental nature of friendship is expressed though three primary forms of friendship-love: Friendship as love that reveals God's will to others (*Kerygma*), friendship as love in service of humanity *(diakonia);* and friendship as eucharistic intimacy (*leitourgia).*

Friendship as Revelation of God's Will (Kerygma)

Christian friendship focuses on truth and justice.[344] The proclamation of this truth

is what has traditionally been called *kerygma,* a word that was originally used by the New

Testament writers to mean both the content and the proclamation of the gospel of Christ

in a way that brings God's salvation to the world.[345] The Apostles and early Christians

understood their mission as a duty to share the truth of the gospel with the world through

friendship love. They understood the words of Jesus, "I have called you friends because I

have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father…This I commend you,

love one another",[346] to imply an invitation to live out their friendship as love that

proclaims the Father's will, justice, and mercy as revealed in the life, death, and

resurrection of Christ.

This command, also captured in the great commission as announcing the gospel to

the whole world,[347] is seen as the fundamental vocation of all Christians.[348] As Pope

Francis observes in his Apostolic Exhortation, "every Christian is a missionary to the

extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus."[349] Anyone who

has truly experienced God's saving love and become a friend of Christ is commanded to

invite others into this friendship. Thus, as love that points to and makes present the love

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[344] Carmichael, *Friendship*, 200.

[345] Examples of the usage of kerygma can be seen in Matthew 12: 41, Luke 11:32, Romans 16:25, and I Corinthians. 1: 21.

[346] John 15:15.

[347] Matt. 28: 16-20.

[348] Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*,11.

[349] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, accessed July 4, 2015. Vatican.va

of Christ, Christian friendship is essentially *kerygmatic*, a proclamation of God's truth as revealed in the gospel to others through words and deeds.

This kerygmatic love is the only friendship that can satisfy the desire for honesty, which is fundamental to all human friendship as evident in different perspectives on friendship. As participants in my study commented, when lived as true kerygmatic *love*, a Christian friendship can be compared to an "iron sharpening iron". It may involve friction and heated arguments, but the goal is always the good of the other. The friends may disagree and be critical, but never mean. They are honest enough to tell each other the truth by pointing out weakness; but still accept each other as sacred creation of God. Through such kerygmatic friendship, Christians live out the prophetic and kingly roles of Christ, by helping people find Jesus as the Way to life and the Truth that sets people free from all sorts of bondage, including sin.[350]

Christian friendship as kerygmatic love therefore involves not only teaching but also learning. It calls for teaching the way Jesus did, which is by first listening to people's stories of pains, fears, anxieties, hope, and allowing his heart to be taught and moved by the stories before showing people what way leads to the truth that brings life. In allowing himself to be moved by people's stories, Jesus first opened up to be taught by the Father through the people. It is only after he learned from the Father that he could teach others. The truth in this is captured in the words of Pope Francis when he reflects that, "*the Church does not evangelize unless she constantly lets herself be evangelized*".[351] In our digital culture it is not enough for Christians to seek to teach others the truth of the gospel

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[350] Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*.

[351] *Evangelii Gaudium,* 174.

without first opening themselves up to what God might be teaching them through the different cultures and life experiences of people both offline and online. When lived this way, Christian friendship as *kerygmatic love* becomes a transformative praxis, a lifelong search to know others and be known by them in ways that bring God to people and people to God.

Friendship as Charity (Diakonia)

Furthermore, the sacramental nature of friendship-love is expressed as *diakonia*, love that is essentially oriented towards service of all humanity as God's people. This captures an important aspect of friendship as presented in all the perspectives, as love expressed towards the other in charity. In order to signify and make present the friendship of Christ, "all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:44-45). St. Augustine reflects that "If you see charity, you see the Trinity."[352] Pope John Paul II reflects that Christian love is essentially one that expresses "respect for the rights and needs of everyone, especially the poor, the lowly and the defenseless."[353] In his Encyclical, God is Love (*Deus Caritas Est*) Pope Benedict XVI observes that the "Church's charitable activity [is] a manifestation of Trinitarian love."[354] Charity is as important as the verbal preaching of the gospel in expressing the sacramentality of Christian friendship. If the friendship love of Christ is truly to be revealed, then "within

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[352] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII, 8, 12: CCL 50, 287, quoted in Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est,* accessed Febraury 15, 2015. Vatican.va.

[353] John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint,* accessed June 20, 2015. Vatican.va.

[354] Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est,* accessed Febraury 15, 2015. Vatican.va, 19.

the community of believers there can never be room for a poverty that denies anyone what is needed for a dignified life."[355]

Through service rendered to others for the glory of God, Christian friendship is lived out as a participation of the priestly ministry of Christ, who lays down his life in service of others to help them live life to the full. Christian friendship as charity is thus an ever-needed way of life. "There will never be a situation where the charity of each individual Christian is unnecessary, because in addition to justice man needs, and will always need, love."[356] It is through this type of friendship that we learn to look at the "other person not simply with [our] eyes and [our] feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ. His friend is [our] friend."[357] Christian friendship cannot be lived in a way that provides access to others and prevents others the access to resources or means of social mobility. When lived as true service to all, Christian friendship becomes *diakonia* in the true sense of charity that provides equal access to all and helps overcome the inequality and injustice in society.

Friendship as Eucharistic Intimacy (Leitourgia)

Above all, the sacramental nature of Christian friendship finds its fullest expression in the Eucharistic intimacy, when the entire people of God gather and are united both physically and spiritually to Christ and to one another in an unbreakable union. Jesus explains his friendship with humanity as a Eucharistic intimacy in which he reveals God's eternal plan and love to human beings, lays down his life for their

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[355] Ibid, 20.

[356] Ibid, 29.

[357] Ibid, 18.

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salvation, constitutes them into a community of God's friends, the church, and commands

them to bring this same love to all (John 15:12-17). In the Eucharist, friendship with God

and others is brought into its ultimate expression on earth, where Christ reveals the

Father's will to us and calls on us to reveal it to one another; he breaks his body and

pours out his blood for us; and he calls us to lay down our lives for one another in

imitation of him. The Eucharist is therefore the visible sign of intimacy found in

friendship with God and others because it is constitutive of the ecclesial communion

commanded by Christ.[358] Friendship as Eucharistic intimacy is both physical and

spiritual.

     While all three forms of intimacy are possible in a face-to-face encounter, only

intimacy of *kerygma* and *diakonia* are possible online. The intimacy of *leitourgia,* as the

re-enactment of Christ's paschal mystery and an encounter with the real presence of

Christ in the Holy Eucharist, requires a physical gathering of God's people at the altar.

Thus, while Christians can use online communication to express friendship love through

sharing the truth of the gospel and reaching out to others in different kinds of service, it is

only when we gather at the feet of the cross at the altar that we live our friendship in its

perfect form on earth as *leitourgia,* union with others and God in the real presence of

Christ in the Holy Eucharist. This is the perspective that contemporary philosophical,

anthropological, sociological, and psychological theories need to integrate from

Christianity in order to provide a more adequate understanding of human friendship as

both a spiritual and social encounter.

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[358]Vatican Council II*, Lumen gentium,* accessed August 11, 2016*,* Vatican.va.,
1 and 9.

Friendship as Love that is Particular and Universal

Another mark of Christian friendship is that it is both particular and universal. Most of the perspectives on friendship reviewed in this study present friendship as love that is primarily directed towards particular persons, things, or a group of people, such as a tribe, clan, or country. The focus is primarily on "the individual 'quiddity' of persons."[359] Participants in this study mainly present friendship as an individualized and private relationship. Christian friendship is particular and universal, open and public as is modeled after the friendship of Jesus with his disciples.

Christian friendship is primarily directed towards God and all that belongs to God; it is expressed through an individualized relationship with God and others, both known and unknown, since all belong to God. St. Thomas Aquinas reflects that the love of God includes loving all that belongs to God; and that friendship with God demands that we become friends with all humanity. Friendship directed towards God is therefore both particular and universal. In the words of Teresa of Avila, "all must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, all must be helped."[360]

This does not however imply a utopian kind of friendship where one claims to love all people and ends up directing love to no particular persons. As Carmichael rightly observes, it is counter-Christian "to have too high and narrow a doctrine of friendship, making it exclusive, or to forget friendship altogether in pursuit of universal neighbor-love."[361] Christian friendship directed toward an individual cannot be exclusive in the

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[359] Carmichael, *Friendship*, 200.

[360] Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection* 4.7.

[361] Carmichael, *Friendship*, 198.

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sense of its making it impossible for one to love others. Such exclusive friendships lead to fear of those who disagree with us and the perception of such people as strangers and enemies.[362] Exclusive friendships lead to attachments that make it impossible to freely love God and others.[363] "The praxis of friendship requires that in addition to forming friendship with people close by, we should make efforts to cultivate a much wider network of deepening friendships in different continents and cultures"[364] and create the world into one community of God's friends.

Today's digital culture provides unique opportunities as well as challenges for living Christian friendship in its particular and universal form. It provides opportunity to connect with old friendships who are either close by or at a distance, and make new friends with people we might otherwise never have met face-to-face. Christian theology needs to integrate insights from contemporary psychological perspectives in order to adequately account for how support, intimacy, companionship, reciprocity, affection, understanding, and mutual liking influence the develop of friendship online in different cultures and across the lifespan and help people live friendship as both spiritual and social interaction.

Friendship as Love that Embraces the Virtuous and Non-virtuous.

Finally, Christian friendship is love that embraces both the virtuous and non-virtuous. One thing that all the perspectives discussed in this research have in common is their emphasis on friendship as involving virtue, benefits, and pleasure. However,

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[362] Ibid

[363] Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection* 4.7.

[364] Carmichael, *Friendship*, 199.

Christian friendship embraces both the virtuous and non-virtuous. In Jesus, we see a sharp departure from the idea of friendship as limited to only the righteous. Jesus models "open and public friendship [with] the unrighteous and undeserved"[365] and expands our understanding of God as a friend, creator, judge, and redeemer.[366]

He calls his disciples friends and treats them as such. Jesus explains his ministry, death, and resurrection as acts of friendship for all humanity, which is experienced by all who accept his offer of love. In Christian friendship, "there is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor there is male and female…all are one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28). "Christian friendship does not make people's goodness a prior condition. The love of friendship is creative of personhood, rejoicing in each person's potential and suffering when that potential is missed or marred."[367] It is love that requires, faith in the fundamental goodness of the human person as made in the image and likeness of God and has the potential to grow into that image and likeness. It also requires trust, commitment, loyalty and forgiveness.

Christian friendship is stepping into people's lives to do things with them. It involves the readiness to love even when it hurts, to be there even when it hurts to walk along. It also involves the vulnerability of allowing people to step into your life to know and do things with you. "Every friendship should make our world bigger, and Christian friendship should link us to the kingdom of God. Ultimately, the purpose of friendship in the church is not primarily our mutual edification but to make us the kind of community

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[365] Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life.*

[366] Heuerts and Pohl, *Friendship at the Margins.*

[367] Carmichael, *Friendship*, 198.

that can faithfully enact God's narrative of love, healing, and redemption in the world."[368] This aspect of Christian friendship is another unique characteristic that other perspectives on friendship need to incorporate in order for them to provide a more comprehensive account of friendship in a way that makes it truly transformative of human society.

In sum, practical theology of friendship that is capable of responding to the challenges of our digital culture needs to unveil the beauty of human friendship as a gift from God, a triadic and covenantal relationship, a sacrament that is lived as *kerygma, diakonia*, and *leitourgia*, love that is both particular and universal, and love that embraces both the virtuous and non-virtuous. The praxis of such practical theology calls for an ecclesiology of friendship, which provides a corporate understanding of the church as a friend and helps Christians live out a spirituality of friendship in our digital culture. Based on these marks of Christian friendship, the next chapter, develops the essential elements of an ecclesiology of friendship as (1) A church that celebrates the other as a gift; (2) a church that listens; (3) a church that is bold to correct in love; (4) a church that is just; (5) a church that is friend to sinners; (6); a church that makes the Eucharist more accessible to God's people; and (7) a church that does things *with* and "*hangs out*" with people.

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[368] Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, 117.

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Chapter 4

TOWARDS AN ECCLESIOLOGY OF FRIENDSHIP

"The Christian church, to the extent that it becomes aware of its own identity as a worldwide network of friendship, can play a highly beneficial role in a world searching, often blindly, for its identity and unity."

~*John of Taize*[369]

This chapter responds to the need for an ecclesiology of friendship identified in previous chapters. It proposes a corporate understanding of the church as a friend in order to help Christians develop a spirituality of friendship, which is essential for transcending a bullhorn approach to social media, redeeming friendship from its privatization and dehumanization in our digital culture, actualizing the blessings inherent in social media as a gift for a two-fold transformation of church and society, realizing the church's nature as a sacrament of Christ, the friend, and achieving its mission of transforming the world into one community of God's friends. The marks of Christian friendship discussed in chapter three and Avery Dulles' seven criteria for developing ecclesiology provide a framework for this ecclesiology of friendship. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first explains the correlation between the church's self-understanding and its communicative practices;[370] the second proposes an ecclesiology of friendship based on the above-mentioned framework; and the third section undertakes a critical reflection on

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[369] John of Taize, *Friends in Christ*, 11.

[370] By ecclesial communicative practices, I am referring to all the means that the church uses to proclaim the gospel of Christ in the world. It refers to all verbal and nonverbal means of evangelization.

existing models of the church in relation to ecclesial communicative practices and explains how the ecclesiology of friendship complements and enhances the existing models by providing a lens for reimagining the relational aspects of the existing models in a way that resonates with our digital age.

Section I: Ecclesiology and Communicative Practices of the Church

The church in every age has sought a deeper understanding of its nature and mission in the world. This search is the focus of ecclesiology,[371] a branch of theology that studies "the set (sets) of experiences, understandings, symbols, words, judgment, statements, decisions, actions, relationships, and institutions which distinguish the group of people called the church."[372] The history of the church shows that to a large extent, "the vitality of the Church [in each era] has depended very much on adapting its gospel witness to the forms of communication of [that] particular era."[373] When faced with communication crisis in a particular era, the church has always responded by developing an ecclesiology that responds to the social realities of the time in order to develop new religious symbols that express the cultural and religious spirit of the time but remains true to the gospel and Christian tradition.[374]

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[371] Ecclesiology as an academic study, a branch of theology in Catholic circles began only in the middle ages. James of Viterbo's treatise on *Christian Government* (1301-1302) and John of Torquemada's *Summa on the Church* (1436) are considered some of the earliest works in Catholic systematic reflection on the nature and mission of the church.

[372] Komonchak, *Foundations in Ecclesiology*, 57.

[373] Robert White, "The New Communication Emerging in the Church," *Catholic International,* 12, no. 4 (2001), 18.

[374] Ibid.

In order to express the identity and mission of the church and help Christians develop a spirituality that will enable them to communicate the gospel in the Greco-Roman world, the New Testament writers used models,[375] such as people of God, body of Christ, temple of the Holy Spirit, and kingdom of God.[376] To develop a spirituality that will help the church communicate the gospel in the divided empire of the 4th century, the early Church Fathers in the First Council of Constantinople developed an ecclesiology of the church as One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic.[377]

Over the centuries, biblical, liturgical, doctrinal, and sacramental interpretations have been offered to help the church deepen its self-understanding and respond to particular challenges in and outside the church.[378] From the seventeenth to the early part of the twentieth century, the church emphasized the ecclesiology of the church as a perfect society developed in the works of Robert Bellarmine, the teachings of the First Vatican Council, and other official documents of the church, such as Pius XII's *Mystici Corporis Christi* (Mystical Body of Christ).[379] The church presented "itself as a more perfect sub-society upholding traditional order, preserving the timeless wisdom of the

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[375] Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*. expanded ed. (New York: Doubleday Image, 2002), 9. Like Avery Dulles, I prefer the word *model* because it reflects my belief that the church is a mystery. As a schematic description, a model provides only an analogical interpretation of reality. The church is a mystery that can only be represented by analogy. "The Church is not fully intelligible to the finite mind of man."

[376] See Yves Congar, *The Mystery of the Church* (London & Baltimore: Geoffrey Chapman & Helicon Press, 1960).

[377] The First Council of Constantinople was organized in 381 AD. The Catholic Encyclopedia describes the 4th Century as a time of great crisis for the church due to controversies about the divinity of the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity and the divisions that existed in the empire during the time of the Roman emperor Theodosius. See The Catholic Encyclopedia, *The First Council of Constantinople,* accessed May 15, 2016,http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04308a.htm.

[378] James Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessel: The Church as a Human Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), 5-10.

[379] Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi,* accessed March 10, 2016. Vatican.va.

past, and maintaining the institution of family and community." This was to achieve two primary objectives: Firstly, to respond to the reformist ecclesiology of the church as essentially an invisible reality, and secondly, to find effective ways of communicating the gospel in a world that was becoming increasingly pluralistic and secular.[380]

Aggiornamento (accommodating/updating),[381] which was one of the major terminologies of Vatican II, underlines the goal of all activities of the Council as finding ways of "proclaiming the Gospel to every creature" in the modern world.[382] The church's search for a deeper understanding of its nature as seen in models, such as the church as the kingdom of Christ, sheepfold, a piece of land to be cultivated, the village of God, the building of God, our mother, and spotless spouse of the spotless Lamb,[383] was meant to help Christians deepen their understanding of what the church is and is called to be for the modern society. Even though none of the models is meant to be taken in isolation as an exhaustive explanation of the church's nature and praxis, each of these models provides some particular perspective to guide the church in communicating the gospel to the modern world.[384]

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[380] White, The New Communication Emerging in the Church, 20.

[381] The word was used in the Second Vatican Council figuratively to mean "opening up the windows of the church". Karl Barth, one of the prominent protestant theologians invited to the Second Vatican Council asked one of the fathers what *aggiornamento* meant and was told it means "accommodating or updating". He then asked a very important question that I think must guide all applications of the teachings of the council: "Accommodating to what?". See Karl Barth, *Ad Limina Apostolorum: An Appraisal of Vatican II*. trans. Keith Crim (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1968), 20.

[382] Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 1

[383] Ibid

[384] Avery Dulles, *The Reshaping of Catholicism: Current Challenges in the Theology of Church* (Harper & Row: San Francisco, 1998).

The explorations of the church as family,[385] the church as denomination and association,[386] the church as basic ecclesial communities, and the church as a contrast society,[387] are also ways of communicating the identity and mission of the church. This correlation between ecclesiology and the church's communicative practices cannot be ignored in the church's search for effective ways of communicating the gospel in our digital culture. The burning question of how best the church might use modern communication technology to proclaim the gospel in our world today should be preceded by a more burning question: *"What type of church is God calling the church to become in our digital culture*?" This is crucial because what the church does, and how it does it, always flows from an understanding of what the church is, and ought to be.

As Pope Francis reflects, "the revolution taking place in communications media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge" and we need to respond to these challenges with fresh energy and imagination in order to share the beauty of God with others.[388] Understanding the relationship between the church's self-understanding and communicative practices will allow the church to identify and articulate models of communication, which are experiential, Christian in meaning, and resonate with contemporary society. In what follows, I propose an ecclesiology of friendship as a model that might help the church to respond to the communication challenges of our time.

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[385] Ecclesia in Africa, 1.

[386] van der Ven, Ecclesiology in Context.

[387] See John Fuellenbach, Church: Community for the Kingdom (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

[388] Francis, Message for the 48th World Day of Communications.

Section II: The Church as a Friend

In his monumental work, *Models of the Church,* Avery Dulles proposes seven criteria for developing a new ecclesiology: it (1) should have basis in Scripture, (2) must be based on Christian tradition, (3) provide church members a sense of their corporate identity and mission, (4) foster the virtues and values that Christians generally admire (5) resonate with the religious experience of the human person today, (6) should have theological fruitfulness in the sense of its ability to address problems in ways that previous models do not, and (7) must be fruitful in enabling Church members to relate successfully to those outside their own group.[389]

The marks of Christian friendship, upon which the ecclesiology of friendship is built, indicate how this model meets these seven criteria. The understanding of friendship as a divine gift in the Old and the New Testaments provides a Scriptural basis of the ecclesiology of friendship proposed in this dissertation. The triadic, covenantal, and sacramental nature of Christian friendship helps provide the members of the church with a sense of corporate identity as covenanted people of God and a Eucharistic community, in which members are unceasingly being drawn into a deeper communion with God and with one another.

The emphasis on friendship-love as *kerygma* (love that speaks the truth of the gospel in love), *diakonia* (love that is directed towards God and fellow human beings) and *leitourgia* (love which in its earthly form comes to ultimate expression in the Eucharistic celebration) locates this ecclesiology of friendship in the Christian tradition and gives members of the church both a sense of identity and mission. The sacramental

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[389] Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 183-84.

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nature of this ecclesiology also underlines the eschatological aspect of the Christian

community, as communion of saints prefigured on earth and destined for eternal and

perfect union with God at the end of time.

In addition, the marks of Christian friendship as love that is particular and

universal, and love that embraces the virtuous and non-virtuous indicate how the

ecclesiology of friendship fosters virtues and values that Christians admire. These marks

also resonate with how people experience the love and mercy of God and enable the

Faithful to relate to people who are outside the structures of the church. Finally, as we

shall discuss in the final section of this chapter, the ecclesiology of friendship

complements and enhances existing models of the church by providing a lens for

reimagining the relational aspects of these models in a way that helps the church respond

to the communicative challenges of our day. To the extent that the ecclesiology of

friendship complements and enhances existing models and helps address new

communicative challenges of our digital culture, it is theologically fruitful. In what

follows, I propose seven essential elements of the ecclesiology of friendship.

A Church that Celebrates the Other as God's Gift

As revealed in Christ, God's friendship with humanity involves both giving and

receiving. God offers us the gift of God's self and accepts the gift we have to offer, our

humanity. God's friendship is also triadic. Christ loves us in order to bring us to love God

and others. Christian friendship is, therefore, a triadic and reciprocal relationship that

celebrates the other as a gift from God. The other is a gift that reveals some aspect of the

mystery of God that one is yet to encounter. An ecclesiology of friendship, therefore,

implies the church seeing itself as both a bearer and receiver of God's grace, a church that is capable of hosting God in others and being hosted by God through them.

In Christian anthropology, all human beings are made in the image and likeness of God (*imago dei*).[390] This provides an ontological basis for the friendship that exists between the Creator and all human beings. God created us for friendship with God; and even though we lost this friendship through disobedience, God did not abandon humanity "to the domain of death".[391] "In the beginning, God made human nature one and decreed that all [God's] children, scattered as they were, would finally be gathered together as one."[392] Throughout the history of salvation God has and continues to give each human being the grace to search for and embrace the restoration of this friendship which finds its ultimate expression in friendship with Christ, and frees one to become a better friend to God and others.

All human endeavors, social, economic, political, and religious, are expressions of the human hanger for friendship with God. All human beings, in this sense, are on the same journey in search of friendship with God. All Christian churches, world religions, and different cultures of the world are God's gifts to bring all people back into

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[390] The theology of *imago dei* is found not only in Christianity but also in Judaism and Sufi Islam. In the Christian tradition, *imago dei* has been explained from both the substantialists perspective (the view that human beings have some substance of God in us) and relationalist perspective (that God made us to be in relation with God and relate to one another as God relates to us). For more discussion on the human person as *imago dei see* Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*. Vol. 1, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964); Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith,* trans. William V Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1978); and Jürgen Moltmann, *Man*, trans. J. Sturdy (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974).

[391] Eucharistic Prayer IV. This is one of the prayers that the priest, standing in place of Christ, leads the congregation to pray during Mass.

[392] Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 13.

communion with God and with one another. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that:

> The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself… in many ways, throughout history down to the present day, men have given expression to their quest for God in their religious beliefs and behavior: in their prayers, sacrifices, rituals, meditations, and so forth. These forms of religious expression, despite the ambiguities they often bring with them, are so universal that one may well call man a *religious being.*[393]

All religions and cultures of the world, therefore, contain evidence of the human hunger for friendship with God as well as elements that can bring people back into communion with God. The Second Vatican Council affirms this when it teaches that the church of Christ subsists in the Catholic church; however "many elements of sanctification and truth are to be found outside her structure"[394] and that "the church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in [other] religions."[395] Even though the council rightly teaches that these gifts "impel towards catholic unity", it is only through embracing the gift that the Catholic Church, other Christian churches, and other religions bring through friendship-love that the desire for catholic unity will become a reality.

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[393] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 27-28.

[394] Ibid., 8.

[395] Vatican II. *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

The desire for catholic unity will be realized when the church succeeds in becoming a friend to others and seeing them as bearers and receivers of God's gifts.[396]

An ecclesiology of friendship, therefore, requires not an "*I am better than you*", but " *I need you as much as you need me*" attitude. As in any true friendship, the church as a friend cannot focus only on the gifts that God brings to humanity through the church, but it must also be open to the gifts that God brings the church through other churches and religions. Notwithstanding "the doctrinal differences needing to be resolved",[397] it is only when the church understands itself as a friend who is called to be both a host and a guest in friendship with other Christian churches and world religions that it can help overcome "the burden of long-standing misgivings inherited from the past, and of mutual misunderstandings and prejudices, complacency, indifference, and insufficient knowledge of one another"[398] which mar our Christian witness in the word and undermine its mission.

In *Dominus Iesus* the Church rightly invites an ongoing theological reflection on "the existence of other religious experiences and on their meaning in God's salvific plan… and in what ways the historical figures and positive elements of those religions may fall within the divine plan of salvation."[399] However, this exploration cannot be reduced to intellectual discussions; I strongly believe that it is only when Christians embrace followers of other religions in friendship love we can develop a deeper

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[396] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 246.

[397] John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, 2.

[398] Ibid

[399] Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus,* accessed August 25, 2015. Vatican.va, 14.

understanding and appreciation of how God has and continues to reveal Godself in other religions of the world. "If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another."[400] This openness to what others have to offer the church is, therefore, *sine qua non* for the church to bring humanity together as friends of God and of one another.

A Church that Listens

One common element of friendship as it is understood in almost all cultures of the world is listening. A true friend is one who listens. This universal quality of friendship mirrors divine-human friendship as presented in the Scriptures. A church, which mirrors God's friendship with humanity, is one that listens. In the Old Testament, one of the fundamental ways that God showed God's friendship with the people of Israel was listening to their cry and coming to their rescue. When "the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help, their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God; and God heard their groaning and remembered his covenant with Abraham" (Exodus 2:23-24). This act of listening is what God demanded that the people of Israel reciprocate as an evidence of their friendship with God. The command "Listen, O Israel" (*Shema Yisrael*),[401] recited daily by the Jews was a constant reminder to listen to God, who had treated them as friends by listening to their cry (Ex. 3: 7).

The New Testament writers also highlight the importance of listening in divine-human friendship. God explicitly makes listening to Jesus an essential requirement for belonging to the New Israel, the church: "This is my beloved Son; listen to him" (Mark

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[400] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 246.

[401] Deut. 6:4.

9:7). In his human form, Jesus' friendship with his Father and the disciples was based on dialogue and listening. It was through dialogue that Jesus learned to embrace the Father's will. When he had to face the ultimate horror of the Cross, Jesus engaged the Father in a dialogue: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will but yours be done."

Even though the Father's will called for suffering and death on the Cross, Jesus could accept it freely because it was communicated to him through dialogic-love, in which the Father listened to the son's cry and sent an angel to strengthen him (Luke 22: 39-46). The Father's love, expressed through listening, encouraged Jesus to also listen to the Father. This love based on listening is what Jesus made present in his friendship with the disciples as evident in his conversation with the woman at the well (John 4), Zacchaeus (Luke 19), Mary and Martha (John 11); the twelve in Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:13-20), and in his discourse at the last supper. All the parables and teachings of Jesus were preceded by his listening to the Father and to the pain, fears, joys, and hopes of the disciples; and he makes listening a central part of this friendship by attributing the change in status of the disciples, from slaves to friends, to their listening and embracing all he has revealed to them from the Father (John 15:15).

An ecclesiology of friendship therefore requires the People of God to listen to Christ and to one another. Such listening "is more than simply hearing... [and involves] an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness [friendship] without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur."[402] First, it involves all the People of God, ordained and non-ordained Faithful, listening to the voice of God as contained in Holy

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[402] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 171.

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Scriptures and the Christian tradition; second, it calls for the ordained listening to the voice of Christ as he speaks through the Faithful whom they are called to serve; third, the Faithful listening to the ordained who serve them in *persona Christi* (in the person of Christ); fourth, the Church in Rome listening to the particular churches spread throughout the world and vise versa; fifth, the Catholic church, as a whole, listening to other Christian churches; and sixth all Christian churches listening to other religions, and different cultures of the world. As Pope Francis reflects:

> ... a listening church, [requires] mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. Faithful people, the College of Bishops, the Bishop of Rome: we are one in listening to others; and all are listening to the Holy Spirit, the 'Spirit of truth' (Jn 14:17), to know what the Spirit 'is saying to the Churches' (Rev 2:7).[403]

It is worth noting that the church has practiced this vocation to listening through the various councils, synods, conferences, different organizational structures in dioceses and religious communities, as well as various types of interreligious dialogue. However, much still needs to be done. If the church is to succeed in promoting friendship among those who are within the structures of the church and develop friendship with those who are outside its structures, the church needs to practice more personalized listening. Theories about the initiation and successful maintenance of friendship indicate that developing friendship involves uncertainty, exploration, mutuality, familiarity, and

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[403] Pope Francis' address for the commemorative ceremony for the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops (Working translation prepared by Fr. Thomas Rosica, CSB, Rome. October 17, 2015), accessed June 24, 2016. Vatican.va.

vulnerability, which require listening if friendships are to attain stability and avoid dissolution.[404]

As seen in the different levels of disagreements and, at times, even conflicts that have erupted in the church's councils and synods, becoming a listening church is a painful process. Listening might be feared as a tool for getting the listeners to change their mind. It also calls for the creation of safe spaces, which might be perceived by some as compromising Christian zeal and tolerating or even condoning doctrines or lifestyles, which are "unchristian". Further, listening also involves the vulnerability of opening up one's heart towards the other. However, when embraced and done as friendship-love under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Christian listening leads to "growth and awaken a yearning for the Christian ideal: the desire to respond fully to God's love and to bring to fruition what [God] has sown in our lives."[405] An ecclesiology of friendship through which all people of God listen to God, to one another, and indeed all humanity, will help members of the church live out the spirituality of caring for one another as the way Christ cares for us.

A Church that is Bold to Correct in Love

Most traditional and contemporary conceptualizations present friendship as a relationship based on the virtues of love, honesty, and loyalty. Friendship is generally said to have the potential to serve as corrective interaction. In Christian friendship, one that truly mirrors the friendship of Jesus with humanity, this potential becomes actualized. True friends are expected to guide each other on the paths of virtue and promote the good of their friends and society. Friends protect each other from danger by

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[404] VanLear and Trujillo, *On Becoming Acquainted*,

[405] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 171.

being honest and speaking the truth to each other in love. Christian friendship is, therefore, love that proclaims the truth of the gospel in order to help humanity realize its ultimate goal of communion with God and one another in Christ. An ecclesiology of friendship therefore requires the church to be kerygmatic and boldly speak the truth of the gospel in love. In the words of one of the participants in this study, "As a friend, the church must be critical but never mean."

As an institution commissioned by Christ to proclaim the truth of the gospel to all cultures in the world, the church has the fundamental duty of helping all human beings answer the question of life: "*What good must I do to have eternal life*" (Matt. 19: 22). "No one can escape from this fundamental question.[406] Even though " the splendor of the truth which shines forth deep within the human spirit"[407] makes the answer possible, human beings, as a result of our fallen nature, are not always able to choose good and avoid evil. That is why Christ, "the true light that enlightens everyone" (John 1:9) formed the church as a friend to help "people grow in holiness and travel along the road to perfection."[408]

In doing this, the church needs to reveal both the good as well as the evil in the world so that all human beings can be guided by the light of truth that leads the world to eternal life in Christ. The church will not be a friend at all if it does not condemn sin and evil and point to the good. In order to be a true sacrament of Christ, the Friend, the church "cannot do other than proclaim the Gospel."[409] As Aelred of Rievaulx rightly

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[406] John Paul 11, *Veritatis Splendor,* accessed September 1, 2015. Vatican.va,1-2.

[407] Ibid, 2.

[408] Billy, *Spiritual Friendship*, 78.

[409] *Dominus Iesus*, 5.

argues, "he does not love his fellow man who loves iniquity."[410] The church must shed

the light of Christ on sin so that people become "children of light'' (Eph. 5:8) through

"obedience to the truth" (1 Pet. 1:22)." However, this must be done in a way that does not

make people feel condemned but encouraged to overcome sin. Speaking out boldly

against sin in a way that brings out the love and hope found in gospel, requires assuring

the world that:

> temptations can be overcome, sins can be avoided, because together with the
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> commandments the Lord gives us the possibility of keeping them: 'His eyes are
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> on those who fear him' (Sir. 15:19-20)… Keeping God's law in particular
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> situations can be difficult, extremely difficult, but it is never impossible.[411]

Speaking the truth of the gospel in friendship love will help people experience the

church not only as an institution that educates humanity on the truths about life, but also

as a friend who walks with all along the path of life; one who gives a human face to

God's love, and helps all people embrace God's law as words of love meant for the

restoration of our friendship with God. The truth might hurt; but when it comes from a

trusted friend, it can be accepted. "Boldness about the truth is one way of distinguishing"

a true friend from an imposter.[412] The church, as a friend must boldly speak the truth at

all times. "This is a costly, even dangerous, commission because we live in a world that

often prefers to repress the truth rather than be judged by it";[413] however it is only

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[410] Billy, *Spiritual Friendship*, 1.35.

[411] John Paul 11, *Veritatis Splendor*, 102.

[412] Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, 151.

[413] Ibid.

through the realization of this mission that the church can truly present Christ as a friend to humanity.

A Church that is Just

Another important element of the ecclesiology of friendship is justice. Whether it is understood as "another self", "blood-covenant that transforms strangers into family", " a social contract for survival", or a "triadic covenantal relationship", friendship requires fairness. A true friend never cheats a friend and cannot stand by when a friend suffers any form of injustice. True friendship always rests on the golden rule and requires treating others as one would treat oneself. The human desire for fairness in friendship is a gift God bestowed on all human beings in order to empower all to live in right relationship with God and with one another.

In salvation history, God reveals God' friendship with humanity as a just friendship, one in which God never denies humanity that which is truly ours, namely, our freedom, dignity and right as children of God. "Justice is the virtue of living in right relationship-a kind of friendship really-with God, with other human beings, and with the whole of nonhuman creation."[414] It is the virtue of justice, which Thomas Aquinas defines as " the constant and steadfast willingness to give to each person what is his or hers by right."[415] It is justice that gives a soul to Christian charity. As a true friend of humanity, God could not stand aside and watch humanity and creation get destroyed under the yoke of Sin and all its resultant suffering. The story of the exodus and the entire history of salvation show how God shares in the joys and sufferings of God's friends,

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[414] Ibid, 141.

[415] Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*, IIb. Q58. Art 1.

humanity. God's friendship is manifested in God's justice towards humanity in which God fights for the oppressed in order to convert the oppressor back into a being created to love God and neighbor. God's justice is therefore God's friendship love towards both the oppressed and the oppressor.

Vatican II teaches that "the Church encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering Founder."[416] Christian charity, as justice for the poor and the oppressed, is therefore not become an optional lifestyle of the church as a friend, but its very essence. The church as a Sacrament of Christ, the Friend, must make present the justice of God in the world by fighting all forms of oppression. As Paul Wadell rightly puts it, "the doing of justice is not the application of religious faith, but its substance; without it, God remains unknown."[417] The church cannot call itself a true friend of God and God's people "without working to reform any institution [including itself], structures, and practices that perpetuate injustice."[418] As Leonardo Boff reflects, the coming of Jesus into the world was not just to take up our human nature; but also our deepest longings and to teach us not how to escape from this world, but rather how to embrace and transform it into a new order, abolishing sin and all forms of oppression and suffering.[419] "The message of Jesus is of a radical and total liberation of the human condition from all its alienating elements."[420] Susan Wood rightly argues that:

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[416] Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 198.

[417] Ibid, 143.

[418] Ibid, 149.

[419] Boff, *Jesus Christ liberator*.

[420] Ibid 80.

…the church, which speaks to others about justice, must be just itself in its own institutions and in its dealings with its members and with others outside the visible boundaries of the Roman Catholic Church. Not to do so prevents the church from being a clear and unambiguous sign of the presence of Christ in the world.[421]

To be a friend like Jesus, the church must join the oppressed in liberating all human beings from oppression. "Only on the basis of this real and sincere closeness can [the church] properly accompany the poor on their path of liberation"[422] and successfully mirror Christian friendship as a transformative love for the realization of the human hope and dream of a better world in which God, the human person, and all created things have a place.

The ecclesiology of friendship, therefore, calls for constantly seeking the root causes of all forms of oppression, religious, political, economical, social, psychological, physical, and spiritual, in order to help liberate humanity from anything that takes away our dignity as children of God. It is only through such friendship based on justice for the poor and oppressed that the church can respond to God's call to say "no to an economy of exclusion, the new idolatry of money, financial system which rules rather than serves, inequality which spawns violence, selfishness and spiritual sloth, a sterile pessimism, spiritual worldliness, and the wars that plague our world today."[423]

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[421] Susan Wood, "Continuity and Development in Roman Catholic Ecclesiology*," Ecclesiology,* 7, no.2 (2011): 11.

[422] Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

[423] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 53-109.

To actualize itself as a just friend, the church must always be the "Church which is poor and for the poor."[424] A church, which is a true friend, is one that is able to find Christ in the poor and the oppressed, able to lend its voice to their causes, "to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with [the church] through them."[425] It is only when the church is just towards humanity and all nonhuman creation that it can be said to be just towards God and achieve its identity of establishing the kingdom of God here on earth and lead all humanity into eternal union with God at the end of time.[426] The church cannot be called a friend if it fails in this vocation to justice because:

> test of true religion is measured ….in our becoming a just people, a community passionate about justice not as an alternative to true worship but as both a precondition for it and an expression of it. Without justice, we can chant and sing all we want and bathe ourselves in incense, but we will remain ignorant of the God we claim to praise, and the emptiness of our prayers will reflect the depth of our delusion. Apart from a commitment to justice, our friendship with God [and humanity] is sheer pretense and our promises of faithfulness lies.[427]

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[424] Ibid, 198.

[425] Ibid.

[426] Francis, *Laudato Si,* accessed September 20, 2016, Vatican.va, 2.

[427] Wadell, *Becoming friends*, 144.

A Church that is a Friend of Sinners

If there is one unique contribution that Christianity has made to the understanding of friendship, it is the notion of friendship as love that embraces both the virtuous and non-virtuous. It is only in Jesus that friendship can be extended to sinners and even enemies (Matt. 5: 44). Jesus is the friend who came not to call the righteous but sinners.[428] For Jesus, friendship with sinners is not just tolerating them, pointing out their sin, or wishing them well, but rather entering into their lives to walk with them out of sin and the suffering it brings them.

In Jesus, we come to understand a true friend, not as one who only calls people out of sin, but most importantly as one who holds a sinner's hand in friendship love and helps the person walk out of sin. Jesus' love for sinners was genuine friendship, one that was even considered scandalous by the self-righteous of his day. He stopped for sinners, sat with them, ate with them, conversed with them, and allowed them to touch him. Even though Jesus understood their condition, his attitude was "*tell me more; help me understand*"; and as they shared their stories and lives with him they, and not Jesus, came to a better understanding of how sin was destroying their lives, how God's law brings the joy and peace they had been looking for, and how walking away from their old ways and embracing new life in Christ restored their dignity as children of God. Jesus' genuine friendship with sinners is what led to the conversion of many including Zacchaeus (Luke 19), the woman caught in adultery (John 8), the woman at the well (John 4), and Peter after his denial of Jesus (John 21).

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[428] Matt. 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32.

This radical and seemingly "scandalous" love for sinners is what the church, as sacrament of Christ, is called to make present in the world. The teaching that the Church embraces sinners in its bosom[429] is strongly felt in the liturgical life of the church, thanks to the gift of the Sacrament of Penance and the other Sacraments that bring the mercy of God to the sinner; however, many people do not feel this embrace beyond the liturgical celebration in their relationship with their church communities. Many clergy and lay accused or convicted of public sin have been ostracized by their friends and church communities. They feel abandoned and displaced in the church, which should be a bosom for sinners. Friendship with sinners does not mean that clergy or lay convicted of any crimes should not be sanctioned by the church or the state; however, that like Jesus, the church community while rightly condemning the sin must continue to reach out in friendship to the sinner.

Like these clergy and lay in the church, many outside the structures of church also feel condemned and unwelcomed by the church. A church, which brings the friendship love of Christ to humanity must not only welcome sinners, but must go in search of them. This must be done in a way that foregrounds both the sin and most importantly the grace of God still at work in the sinner. Learning from Jesus, the church's way of welcoming sinners cannot always begin with a discussion of the person's sin. As Jesus did in the case of Zacchaeus, the church should not be afraid to first sit at table with the sinner without an explicit discussion of the person's sin. The story of Zacchaeus shows that, at times, the very love that a sinner experiences at the table is what the Holy Spirit uses to elicit an act

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[429] Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium,* 8.

of contrition and lead a sinner to conversion of the mind and heart. Commenting on this mission of the church to be a friend to sinners, Pope Francis notes:

> This is the mission of the Church: the Church heals; it cures. Sometimes, I speak of the Church as if it were a field hospital. It's true: there are many, many wounded! So many people need their wounds healed! This is the mission of the Church: to heal the wounds of the heart, to open doors, to free people, to say that God is good, God forgives all, God is the Father, God is affectionate, God always waits for us.[430]

Pope Francis' analogy of the church as a hospital for sinners suggests that, sometimes, the church needs to see the sinner as a patient in need of a Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) before it engages the person in a discussion of what life choices need to be avoided and embraced for total healing to occur. This calls for discernment on the part of the church. Jesus' approach to the sinner teaches us that sometimes there is the need to engage the sinner in a conversation right away in order to do a proper diagnosis as Jesus did in the case of the rich young man (Mark 10:17-31); but other times one needs to start with a kind of CPR before a conversation about life choices. It is only through openness to the Holy Spirit that the church can discern which approach is needed at what time and succeed in bringing the friendship love of Jesus to the sinner.

A Church that Makes the Eucharist More Accessible to God's People

In addition to seeing others as a gift, listening, speaking the truth boldly in love, being just, and welcoming sinners, another important mark of the church, as a friend, is making the Eucharist more accessible to God's people. While all the other elements in

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[430] Pope Francis' homily on May 2, 2015 in the Santa Marta Chapel, Rome, accessed April 4, 2016,http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/01/22/pope_francis_thursday_mass_in_santa_marta/11 19389.

the ecclesiology of friendship are important, Eucharistic intimacy is the source and summit of Christian friendship. In the Eucharist, we celebrate "a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is eaten, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us."[431] It is in the Eucharistic celebration that the temporary and eschatological aspects of Christian friendship are brought together in a physical and mystical union. The Eucharist is therefore the fullest expression of the triadic and covenantal nature of Christian friendship because it brings together, the union of God, the saints in the making (the church on earth gathered at the altar), and the saints in Heaven. Vatican II teaches that:

> Our union with the Church in heaven is put into effect in its noblest manner especially in the sacred Liturgy, wherein the power of the Holy Spirit acts upon us through sacramental signs. Then, with combined rejoicing we celebrate together the praise of the divine majesty; then all those from every tribe and tongue and people and nation who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and gathered together into one Church, with one song of praise magnify the one and triune God. Celebrating the Eucharistic sacrifice therefore, we are most closely united to the Church in heaven in communion.[432]

In the Eucharistic intimacy the church, in the most complete form on earth, expresses Christian friendship and truly becomes the Body of Christ, mystical communion, sacrament, servant, herald, and community of disciples. In all cultures of the world, true friends share a table fellowship. While one might rightly argue that "the

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[431] Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 47.

[432] Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 50.

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Eucharist is not [just] a meal among friends",[433] it is the ultimate celebration on earth of the mystery of the New Covenant that makes all who partake in it friends of God and friends of one another. As covenantal love, the Eucharistic celebration is the ultimate expression of Christian friendship on earth.

It is therefore important that the Church called to be the sacrament of Christ, the Friend, ensures that all humanity have access to the Holy Eucharist. Without this intimacy all the other forms of intimacy the church develops with humanity come to nothing. They will be nice gestures but not evangelical and will not lead to the ultimate goal of Christian friendship, which is communion with God and with one another. It should therefore break the heart of the church that many children of God are not able to experience this Eucharistic intimacy. As Pope Francis reflects:

If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life. More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are

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[433] Benedict XVI made this observation in a homily he gave via satellite for the closing Mass of the 49th International Eucharistic Congress on Sunday, June 22, 2008 in Quebec City, Canada. The Holy Father made this comment to warn against reducing the Eucharist to just a casual meal among friends and forgetting its essential nature as a mystery and a covenant. However, when celebrated as covenantal love, the Eucharist helps us live out the spirituality of Christian friendship. It is in this sense that the Pope ended his homily by addressing all who had gathered for the Eucharistic Congress as "Friends." See, Benedict XVI, *Homilies of Pope Benedict XVI for the 49th International Eucharistic Congress on Sunday, June 22, 2008 in Quebec City*, Canada, accessed March 22, 2016, Vatican.va.

starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: 'Give them something to eat' (Mark 6:37).[434]

Jesus is longing to "eat the Passover" with all who will embrace his friendship (Luke 12:15). The church needs to find ways of helping all humanity experience this Eucharistic intimacy. This is not a call for "open communion"[435] as Jürgen Moltmann proposes in *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*. Neither does it suggest an invitation to let people have Jesus on their own terms instead of the terms of Jesus. Rather, it is a call for an unceasing search for and practical actions towards the realization of the "catholicity" of the church as expressed in Jesus' prayer that all may be one and be consecrated in the truth."[436]

The church cannot overlook the reality of sin or lack of faith and the danger these pose to the souls of those who approach the Eucharist unworthily;[437] however, the church, as a friend, cannot rest until it can find solutions to anything that stands in the way of those who are not able to embrace the friendship of Christ as expressed in the Eucharistic intimacy. Not all people may accept the church's friendship, even though we pray and hope for that; but the church cannot stop searching for ways of making all people feel that they can be friends with the church so that all who freely choose will see in every interaction with the church that this is a possibility. The church cannot rest until

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[434] *Evangelii Gaudium*, 49.

[435] Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit,* 244-246. Here Moltmann proposes an "*open communion*", which seems to downplay the power of sin and lack of faith to bring damnation to those who receive the Eucharist unworthily as Scripture and tradition affirm.

[436] John 17: 19-23.

[437] 1 Cor. 11: 27. Also Allen George Cantrell. *The Didache: The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (London: Astolat Press, 1903) 9, 5; 10,6 ; and 14,1.

all humanity rests in the bosom of our Lord Jesus Christ. When humanity could not go to God because of our sin, God came to us by taking our sin upon himself in Christ. Christ, who knew no sin, became sin so that we can become God's righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). That is what friends do. They bear all things together.

For Christ, no situation is beyond redemption. No sinful situation should be allowed to become a permanent block between a human person and the encounter with God in the Eucharist. The church will realize itself as a friend by making the Eucharist more accessible to God's people. This is a difficult task because not all will readily embrace friendship with the church. Some will continue to reject the open arms that the church offers in friendship. Others might even see this offer of friendship as a chance to abuse and persecute the church. This offer of friendship might even seem like a lamb running into the midst of wolves; but that precisely is the nature of the church's vocation (Luke 10:3). However, as in every aspect of the church's mission, the church must trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to make this possible. If the church gives up on the search for ways to make the Eucharist more accessible to people, the church would be telling the world that sin and not the grace of God has the final say in the destiny of the children of God. That would be a false witness to the power of Christ, the friend, who never gives up on humanity; but leaves the ninety-nine to look for the one lost sheep (Matt. 18:12-14).

In the search for ways to accomplish this difficult task of bringing all to experience the friendship of Christ as a Eucharistic intimacy, the church needs to deepen its understanding of the Holy Eucharist not only as a mystery that must be approached in the state of grace; but also as the mystery that brings the grace that a sinner needs to walk away from sin and embrace friendship with God. Thomas Aquinas refers to the Eucharist

as the sacrament of supreme charity; it "belongs to Christ's love, out of which for our salvation he assumed a true body of our nature. And because it is the special feature of friendship to live together with friends."[438] The church needs to deepen its understanding of how this "supreme charity" can be made more accessible to all, especially those who for some sinful situations in their lives might be considered unworthy of this intimacy even though they need this charity the most.

A Church that Does Things *With* and "Hangs out" *With* People

Last but not least, in our digital age, a church, which is a friend, is one that "hangs out" with people. In contemporary usage, to "hang out" means to spend time with people and do things with them. Friends in contemporary society are people who do things together. Hanging out means doing things not only *for* a friend; but also *with* one's friends. Liz Carmichael in *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love* tells a story about an experience of a group of Anglican nuns in England, which powerfully communicates people's desire to see the Christian community as a church which does things *with* people:

> During a march against unemployment in the English Midlands, a group of Anglican nuns walked beside one of the unemployed. He turned to them and said, 'I can't get over you sisters walking with us. The church has done things *for* us but has never done things *with* us.[439]

This comment captures the desire of many children, teenagers, young and old adults in our world today. When it comes to doing things for people (charitable works in different parts of the world), one can confidently say that the church comes second to

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[438] *Summa Theologiae*. III, Q. 75 a.1

[439] Carmichael, *Friendship*, 196.

none. The church is extremely good as doing things *for* people, but not so much *with* people.

Responses from the participants in this dissertation regarding their views on the church as a friend, affirm the comment that the man made to the nuns. While many people appreciate what the church does for them, they also long for the church to do things *with* them. Half of the participants in this research (53%) who see their church or religious institution as a friend gave reasons that include the feeling of being heard, being connected to the leaders of the church as friends, the church helping them grow into a deeper relationship with Jesus, knowing people in the church who care about them, communicating with the church on regular basis, feeling connected to the church especially in times of pain, receiving instruction for life, and the church being reliable and honest concerning truths about life. Most of the participants said they see the church as a friend because the community makes them feel at home, they find joy in the church, they feel inspired and supported, and they do things with friends in the church. The words of one participant capture this sentiment:

> The church is a friend because, I receive inspirational messages everyday on my news feed from the church, which helps remind me that I am not alone in everything that I do…The doors are always open. Many in my church community are some of my closest friends. We have fun. I feel at home. They bring me so much joy.

Contrary to this sentiment, 47 % of participants who indicated that they do not see their church or religious institution as a friend said they consider the church mainly as institution, which provides information in a formal and not personal way. It is an

institution that teaches people and not one that relates to them on a personal level. A comment from one participant summarizes this view "It is just an institution to me. They teach; they don't want your friendship. They are not friends. They don't do things with you. Friends do things together. I do not see it as personal." Others said they do not see their church as a friend because they feel that their relationship with the church is not reciprocated, and they do not feel connected to people in the church. One person commented, "I do not know any of the people who run the church, they don't care about me." Another said, " they know nothing about me. I don't believe they know me. I don't receive any personal return from them maybe because of the number of followers." The views from all the participants in this research, both those who see the church as a friend and those who do not, signal one fact: People desire a church that does things *with* them beyond the Sunday gathering.

In addition to a church who does things with them, many people today desire the church to be a friend who can be "playful"; one that can have fun with people. In describing a church that parents desire today, Meredith Chapuis comments: "When families visit your church they may…express a desire for their kids to grow spiritually…but what they often don't say that is also highly important to them is… they want their kids to have *fun* while at church.[440] It is not only children who desire to have fun at church, many young people of this digital age believe in friends who "do life together" by "hanging out" both in person and online. The young people of today expect

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[440] Meredith Chapuis made this comment as part of her blog post on April 10, 2015. She is Children's Ministry Director at Grace Hills church in Northwest Arkansas, USA. See Meredith Chapuis, *What Parents Desire,* accessed September 5, 2016, http://kidminspiration.com/tag/meredith-chapuis/

their communities to be places of fun. They are looking for communities that afford them

relationships and presence that go beyond "see you next Sunday". They are looking for

communities that know what is going on in their Facebook status feed, one that

comments on their pictures as well as the ups and downs of their lives on Twitter and

Instagram. They desire a community that likes and comments on their posts. The young

today are "interested in full-time intimate communities of people who are present with

one another in the realities of life."[441] They desire a community that will be with them

through the mundane as well as the spiritual.

Furthermore, many people today desire a church that knows how to interact with

them both online and offline; a church that comments on the fun, the joys, as well as the

pains and sorrows of people's daily lives. As Mary Carter Waren rightly observes, in the

joys and sorrows of life there is one question on people's mind: "*Where are you*

Church?"[442] In today's digital culture, people are looking for a church that can be both

formal and playful. A church that has enough interest in their lives to the extent that it

follows them beyond the Sunday Mass. In today's digital participatory culture, the church

cannot just assume people's friendship; it must indicate that it wants to be a friend to

people by searching for, and following them, and sharing in their daily lives. This is a

healthy challenge and a great opportunity for the church to step put of its walls and "*do*

life with people". As Bishop Tighe rightly observes, in following people in the digital

environment, " we commit ourselves to the digital presence of others [and are invited to

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[441] Zirschky. *Beyond the Screen,* kindle, chapter 2.

[442] Mary Carter Waren, a theologian at the School of Theology and Ministry at St. Thomas
University, Florida, always invites her students to develop a Christian spirituality that responds to
that burning question on people's heart "Where are you Church?"

reflect on] the deeper themes of hospitality to others, receptivity, dialogue, and even discipleship."[443]

From the discussion so far in this section, we have discovered seven elements of the ecclesiology of friendship based on the marks of Christian friendship we developed in chapter three. These seven marks are not meant to be read as an exhaustive list of the essential elements of the church as a friend; but rather as a set of elements that might inform an ecclesiology of friendship that complements existing models of the church to reveal the relational nature of the church in our contemporary society. Therefore, the ecclesiology of friendship proposed here must not be taken in isolation, but as a complement to the traditional models of the church. The next section explains how this ecclesiology of friendship might complement the existing models by serving as a lens for understanding their rationality.

Section III:

Ecclesiology of Friendship as a Lens for Understanding the Rationality of Traditional Models of the Church

Throughout its history, the church has developed many different ecclesiologies as a way of finding more effective ways of communicating the gospel in different eras. The different models work together and reveal the continuity of Catholic ecclesiology. Each new model seeks to build on preceding ones by affirming the strengths and correcting the limitations in previous models. Reflecting on different ecclesiologies of the Christian churches, Avery Dulles identifies the predominant models of the church, from the New Testament times until the Second Vatican Council, as institution, mystical communion,

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[443] Zsupan-Jerome, *Connected for Communion*, kindle, chapter 6.

sacrament, herald, servant, and community of disciples.[444] Dulles' work is monumental not only because it transformed the dominant comparative and, at times, polemical approach to ecclesiology, but also because of the depth of theological reflection he provides on the strength and limitations of the different models of the church. His work also provides people across different Christian and theological traditions, language and framework to talk about the various aspects of the church as they experience it.

Even though, Dulles' *Models of the Church* is, at times, criticized for lack of enough emphasis on the role of divine initiative in establishing the kingdom on earth, for its silence on cultural specific and non-western images of the church, as well as the use of models as a paradigm, Dulles' work, no doubt, remains a classic contribution to ecclesiology for people of different Christian traditions. I adopt his categorizations as a way of capturing some of the main models that have been used to explain the church over the centuries in both Catholic and other Christian traditions. My goal here is to identify the central description of the church in these categories and provide a critical reflection on how the model of the church as a friend might be used as a lens to deepen our understanding of the relational aspect of these models in a way that helps to live out their spirituality as transformative love in our digital culture.

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[444] Dulles, *Models of the Church*. I adopt this categorization because it provides a window into the church's self-understanding over the centuries and shows how the most recent Catholic understanding of the church expressed in Vatican II, namely, the church as mystical, sacrament, Body of Christ, and People of God, seek to reveal the strengths and correct the limitations in preceding models. Also, Dulles in *The Church and Communications* discusses how these models of the church might influence ecclesial communication.

The Church as Institution

It is a great blessing that Jesus established the church as an institution. "The Church of Christ could not perform its mission without some stable organizational features."[445] The New Testament, especially the Pauline and Pastoral Epistles, present the church as an institution led by the apostles, prophets, teachers and presbyters. Scripture, therefore, provides the basis for the Catholic teaching on the church as an institution. In the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen gentium*, the Second Vatican Council declares:

> This Sacred Council, following closely in the footsteps of the First Vatican Council, with that Council teaches and declares that Jesus Christ, the eternal Shepherd, established His holy Church, having sent forth the apostles as He Himself had been sent by the Father; and He willed that their successors, namely the bishops, should be shepherds in His Church even to the consummation of the world. And in order that the episcopate itself might be one and undivided, He placed Blessed Peter over the other apostles, and instituted in him a permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and communion.[446]

The model of the church as an institution conceptualizes the church in terms of its hierarchical structures and the divine authority given to its leaders to teach, govern, and effect the sanctification of souls. The institutional model of the church rightly explains the petrine office, the episcopacy, and the sacraments of the church as having a divine

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[445] Ibid, 27.

[446] Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, accessed August 11, 2016. Vatican.va.18.

origin (*de jure divino*).[447] Even though other structures of the church might be of human

origin (*de jure humano*) they are nevertheless vital for the life and mission of the church.

This model became a predominant paradigm of the church in the middle ages, especially

during the counter reformation. In this model, profession of faith, obedience to the

hierarchy, and communion in the sacrament are essential ways of experience God's

grace.

In the immediate years leading to Vatican II, Robert Bellarmine's ecclesiology of

the church as a *Perfect Society*, was the predominant imagery used to explain the

institutional nature of the church. Bellarmine argues that the church is not an invisible

unity of those who believe in Christ, as some reformists believe, but rather a visible and

perfect society, which is "as visible and palpable as the community of the Roman people,

or the Kingdom of France, or Republic of Venice."[448] Bellarmine's comparison of the

church to these visible societies of his time was meant to underline the visible structures

of the church as essential for establishing God's kingdom on earth. He reflects that the

church has within it all that it needs to bring salvation to humanity.[449]

The ecclesiology of the church as an institution has important implication for the

communicative practices of the church. It affirms the authority and power given to the

church's hierarchy to communicate the gospel through teaching, governing, and

sanctifying in order to bring humanity to salvation in Christ. From the perspective of

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[447] ibid, 21.

[448] Robert Ballarmine, *De controversiis,* tom.2, lib. 3, cap. 2 (Naples: Guilaino 1857, Vol. 2, 75). quoted in Avery, Dulles. *Models of the Church*. Expanded ed. (New York: Doubleday Image, 2002), 8.

[449] Wood, *Continuity and Development: 5-8.*

Christian communications theory, the hierarchical model has the strength of providing a concrete link to the Trinity, who is the source of all human communication. The message and the mandate to proclaim it come from Christ who entrusted this to the bishops, just as the Father entrusted this message to him.[450] In addition, the institutional model provides Catholics with "a strong sense of corporate identity" and great awareness of their vocation to communicate the gospel to all human beings to profess faith in Christ through communion in one institution.[451]

In *The Church and Communications*: *Vatican II and beyond,* Avery Dulles analyzes the institutional model of the church from the perspective of communication. He observes that this model leads to an institutional/hierarchical model of communication, which "is narrowly concerned with the authority of the office and the obligatory character of official doctrine. It tends to view communication, in the theological sense, as a descending process beginning from God and passing through the papal and episcopal hierarchy to the other members of the Church."[452] In this model, the church's communication is mainly understood in terms of " the Church's authoritative teaching"[453] usually expressed in the form of official documents, pastoral letters, and announcements.[454] Unfortunately, the hierarchical model of communication, many times,

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[450] *Lumen Gentium*, 19-20

[451] Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 35.

[452] Avery Dulles, "The Church and Communications: Vatican II and beyond," in *Reshaping Catholicism. Current Challenges in the Theology of the Church* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), 112.

[453] Warren Kappeler III, *Communication Habits for the Pilgrim Church: Vatican Teaching on Media and Society American University Studies* (Peter Lang, New York: International Academic Publishers, 2009), 24.

[454] Ibid, 114.

undermines rather than enhances the mission of the church. As Bishop Emile De Shedt of Bruges reflects in his address to the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, the institutional model of the church at times leads to "clericalism, juridicism, and triumphalism."[455] The hierarchy is seen as authoritative teacher (*ecclesia docens*) and the rest of the faithful as learners (*ecclesia discens*).[456] This is contrary to how communication is understood in today's participatory culture as a dialogue in which each interlocutor is both learner and teacher.

For instance, Vatican I teaches that "there is in the church the power from God whereby to some it is given to sanctify, teach, and govern, and to others not."[457] This produces the danger of seeing the hierarchy of the church as always being at a giving end; and the proper response to the church's communication as "submission and faith" [458] in whatever the legitimate authority says, but not in dialogue. Within such interpretations, the model of the church as an institution runs the danger of reducing communication to a one-way transmission of information rather than a two-way dynamic relationship that transforms all involved in a communicative event. As Pope Francis unceasingly reminds the hierarchy of the church, in order to reveal the beauty of the institutional model and live its spirituality of mediating God's voice and love to the world, there is need a to redeem the institutional model from any interpretation that leads to clericalism and a one-

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[455] Bishop Emile De Shedt's speech during the Second Vatican Council in *Acta Concilii Vaticani, II, Vol. I, Part 4* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis, 1971, 142-44) quoted in Dulles, Models of the Church, 35.

[456] Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987),530.

[457] Vatican Council I, NR 369, cited in Dulles. *Models of the Church*, 30.

[458] Ibid.

way approach to communication.[459] Jesus did not just bless us with the beautiful gift of the church as an institution, but also commanded the apostles to live out the spirituality of this gift, teaching, governing, and sanctifying with the friendship love of Christ. The ecclesiology of friendship proposed in this dissertation will help reveal the beauty of the institutional model of the church because it provides a model through which the institution can be given a human face and a human heart. When the spirituality of the church as an institution is lived out in friendship-love, the institution will be appreciated as the living organism that it is, one that possesses the heart and arms of Christ to embrace all.

It is important to note that the ecclesiology of friendship proposed here is not Quakerism. It does not imply a rejection of the creed, the Holy Eucharist, or the hierarchical structure of the church as a blessing from Christ. Instead of the Quaker doctrine that "Christ has come to teach his people himself",[460] the ecclesiology of friendship proposed here holds that Jesus instituted Peter and the twelve apostles as well as their successors, the bishops, to guide members of the church in the church's mission of teaching the gospel to all cultures of the world. Christ teaches; but he teaches through the hierarchy and all the members of the church. The ecclesiology of friendship, rather than denying the divine authority of the petrine and episcopal office, provides a practical model for living out the spirituality of this divine office the way Christ himself lived it, in

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[459] Pope Francis describes the spirit of clericalism as an evil that is destroying the church today. See *Homily of Pope Francis*, accessed December 16, 2016, http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/12/13/pope_clericalism_distances_the_people_from_the_church/1278688.

[460] Lewis Benson, "George Fox's Teaching about Christ," *Quaker Religious Thought*, 39, no. 3 (1974): 26.

friendship love with his disciples and the whole of humanity. As participants of this study

commented, many see the institutional church as one that does not care about the

relational aspect of the gospel. This image is unfortunate; and the church must find a way

of revealing the beauty of the institutional model to people. Friendship might help to do

this. When the hierarchy of the church communicates as friends to people inside and

outside the structures of the church, they will succeed in embracing others as gifts from

God and draw humanity in a deeper relationship with God and with one another.

The Church as Mystical Communion

The ecclesiology of the church as a mystical communion combines perspectives

from the biblical understanding of the church as Body of Christ, and People of God. The

model of the church as People of God has "its roots in the Old Testament, where Israel is

constantly referred to as the nation of God's special predilection", and the New

Testament description of the Christian community as the new Israel and People of God of

the new Covenant.[461] The Body of Christ model is based on the Pauline Epistles where

the church is described as a living organism with Christ as the head, and the members of

the church make up different parts of the body. Even though the church is the body, it is

always subordinate to Christ as the head and does not claim of itself what is unique to

Christ as God. Pope Pius XII 's encyclical *Mystici Corpori Christi* identifies the body

solely as the Catholic Church and even teaches that the "mystical Body which is the

Church should be called Christ";[462] However, Vatican II adds that outside the structures

of the Catholic Church "many elements of sanctification and truth are to be found, which

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[461] Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 44.

[462] Pius XII, *Mystici Corpori, 34*

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as proper gifts to the church of Christ, impel towards catholic unity. "All [people] are called to belong to the new people of God."[463]

This ecclesiology of Mystical Communion seeks to reconcile the two aspects of the church as an institution and community. It understands the community as people gathered around the altar with Christ, the head, represented primarily by the bishops as successors of the apostles. The communion of particular churches represented by the local bishops in union with the Pope as the vicar of Christ, is considered the physical manifestation of the *communio* ecclesiology. Dulles, citing Jerome Hamar, one of the main proponents of *communio* ecclesiology, reflects that the church as "the mystical body of Christ, is communion which is at once inward and external, an inner communion of spiritual life signified and engendered by an external communion in profession of faith, discipline, and the sacramental life."[464] Dulles observes that:

> The two models of Body of Christ and People of God both illuminate from different angles the notion of the Church as communion or community. The Church from this point of view, is not in the first instance an institution or a visibly organized society. Rather it is a communion of [people], primarily interior but also expressed by external bonds of creed, worship, and ecclesiastical fellowship.[465]

Dulles observes that one limitation of the ecclesiology of mystical communion is that it "fails to give Christians a very clear sense of their identity or mission. Since we

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[463] Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 13.

[464] Jerome Hamar, *The Church is a Communion* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1964), 93. Cited in Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 41.

[465] Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 47.

cannot take it for granted that evangelization, baptism, or church membership coincides with the bestowal of the Holy Spirit, the motivation for Christian mission is left obscure."[466] This limitation can be addressed if Christians would live communion as Christ modeled it in his friendship with his disciples and the whole of humanity. Lived as Christian friendship, the ecclesiology of communion rather than obscuring a Christian identity and mission, will reinforce them. Christians will come to understand their identity and mission as people who are sent to their kind, sinful and wounded, but fundamentally precious in the sight of Christ, who lays down his life for all humanity. Such understanding of *communio* ecclesiology will deepen the awareness of Christians that we are expected to walk with others into the Church, but not just call them into it.

Reflecting on the implication of *communio* ecclesiology for communication, Matthias Scharer and Bernd Hilberath observe that the current "communication structures of the Roman Catholic Church fall short of the theology proclaimed by the Second Vatican Council's people-of-God theology/communio theology"[467] because it is too inward focused and explains only how communication occurs within the church. Like Dulles, Scharer and Hilberath comment that the *communio* ecclesiology does not provide an explicit way of communicating beyond the walls of the church. In order to address this limitation they recommend that,

> in the future, *communio* theology and its corresponding structures of
> communication must be expanded to take into account the Globe [the broader
> context beyond the structures of the church] which defines the borderline wherein

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[466] Ibid., 52.

[467] Scharer and Hilberath. *Communicative Theology,* 89.

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Christian men and women live their faith. [Because] the world is not "outside" the church; [and] lack of faith is not "outside" faith.[468]

In this dissertation, I reflect that expanding *communio* ecclesiology to include Christian friendship with all humanity will help develop a communication theory that explains how church communication occurs *intra and inter* the ecclesial community. When Christians understand their mission as unveiling the mystery of Christ as an invitation into friendship with God and all humanity, *communio* ecclesiology will be understood as a "Gifted We"[469] relationship, which does not eliminate the distinct roles of the different groups in the church, but celebrates them and invites all into communication, both those who are in the walls of the church and those who are yet to enter it. When the model of the church as communion is lived out in the world as true friendship modeled by Christ, there will be no "tension between the church as a network of friendly interpersonal relationships and the church as a mystical communion of grace"[470] because then friendship will be lived as a means of grace.

The Church as Herald

In this model, the primary focus is on the Church as a herald of God's word and the faith response that results out of that. The sacrament, hierarchy, and doctrines are important, but they occupy a secondary position in this model. "The mission of the church is to proclaim that which it has heard, believed, and been commissioned to

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[468] Ibid., 92.

[469] Ibid., 93-95.

[470] Ibid.

proclaim."[471] It differs from the communion ecclesiology because of its emphasis on faith and proclamation of the word and not primarily on interpersonal relationships. It is kerygmatic and "the basic image is that of the herald of a king who comes to proclaim a royal decree in a public square."[472] Vatican II implies this model in *Dei Verbum and Ad Gentes*, when it teaches that through revelation "the invisible God out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends",[473] and that "all baptized believers are bearers of the message", a mission the church fulfills as it "continues unceasingly to send heralds to proclaim the Gospel."[474] In this model, the word of God is a concrete event and an encounter that produces faith and demands a response. The goal of the church is to herald the message and it cannot take responsibility for people's lack of response to the gospel.

Dulles underlines the strengths of this model as including a strong biblical foundation as seen in the great commission, a clear sense of identity and mission for the church, its ability to point to God's sovereignty, and the need of the human person for God. However, this model is criticized for placing less emphasis on the incarnational aspect of the Christian faith. From the perspective of communication theology, this model influences the kerygmatic communicative approach in the church, which sees communication as a mission of the baptized bringing the gospel to those outside the church. The world is an object that the church acts upon. The baptized transmit the gospel to the world. As in the case of the hierarchical model, the exclusive emphasis on transmission in the herald models has the danger of reducing communication into a one-

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[471] Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 68

[472] Ibid.

[473] Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 2.

[474] Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, 2, 114.

way, bullhorn approach rather than a dialogue that promotes interpersonal relationships and leads to a deeper encounter of the presence of God in both the one who brings and the one who receives the gospel.

Living the herald model as kerygmatic friendship-love that reveals God's love to others in friendship will help overcome this danger of reducing the world into an object or a project to work on in Christian evangelization. When kerygma is lived in friendship love, one walks with people and helps them discover and embrace God's will in truth and love. In this way the Christian mission will not be reduced to only a verbal proclamation. It will be lived as transformative action in which Christians hold people's hand and walk with them out of sin.

The Church as Servant

The ecclesiology of the church as a servant has its basis in many biblical references to Jesus as the Servant of God *par excellence.* The Christian church understands the words of the prophet Isaiah about the Servant of God to be a prophecy about Jesus. He is the chosen servant in whom God delights,[475] the God, who became man not to be served; but to serve and lay down his life for the salvation of souls.[476] "The so-called Servant Songs in Isaiah are [therefore] applicable to the church as well as to Christ."[477] The church was instituted by Christ to serve. Over the centuries, the concept of *diakonia* (service) has been used to express this model. In modern Christian discourse,

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[475] Isa. 42-53.

[476] Matt. 20:28.

[477] Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 92.

the ecclesiology of the church as a servant is expressed through the notion of "servant church".

In his review of works on this ecclesiology, Dulles identifies explicit theological reflection on the church as servant to include Cardinal Cushing's pastoral letter, *The Servant Church,* Gibson Winter's *The New Creation as Metropolis* in which he calls for a "servant church",[478] and Harvey Cox's *The Secular City* in which he argues that "the church's task in the secular city is to be the *diakonos* of the city, the servant."[479] Other influential works on the church as a servant include Bishop John Robinson's *The New Reformation* in which he argues that "the house of God is not the church but the world. [Because] the church is the servant, and the first characteristic of a servant is that he lives in someone else's house, not his own",[480] and Richard McBrien's *Do we need the Church*[481]*,* which calls for a servant church.

The model of the church as a servant emphasizes the church's vocation to bring the gospel to the world through works of charity. Contemporary perspectives on the ecclesiology of the church as a servant can be found in many official documents in the Catholic Church. Even though the Second Vatican Council does not explicitly use the title servant church, this model is implied in many official documents of the church. John Paul II emphasized this ecclesiology in his social encyclicals. In *Laborem exercens* (On Human Work), he calls for a church that serves through work and encourages all human

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[478] Gibson Winter, *The New Creation as Metropolis* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 55.

[479] Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 134.

[480] John Robinson, *The New Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 92.

[481] Richard McBrien, *Do We Need the Church* (New York: Harper & Row), 98.

beings to see their work as service to God and fellow human beings. John Paul II notes

that it is the "particular duty [of the church] to form a spirituality of work which will

help all people to come closer, through work, to God, ...to participate in his salvific plan

for ... the world and to deepen their friendship with Christ."[482] In *Sollicitudo rei socialis*

(On the Social Concern of the Church) he makes an even stronger call for the church to

embrace its nature as a servant who relieves the pain and suffering of the world. He

reflects that the church has to relieve:

> "the misery of the suffering, both far and near, not only out of her 'abundance'
>
> but also out of her 'necessities;' [and that] faced by cases of need, one cannot
>
> ignore them in favor of superfluous church ornaments and costly furnishings for
>
> divine worship; on the contrary it could be obligatory to sell these goods in order
>
> to provide food, drink, clothing and shelter for those who lack these things.[483]

In *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI reflects that, "with the formation of [the]

group of seven [deacons in Acts of the Apostles], "*diaconia*"—the ministry of charity

exercised in a communitarian, orderly way—became part of the fundamental structure of

the Church."[484] For Pope Benedict, "the service of charity is also a constituent element of

the Church's mission and an indispensable expression of her very being."[485] Like his

predecessors, Pope Francis has repeatedly called for a departure from a "self-referential

church" and a return to a church that serves others. All his teachings and lifestyle aim at

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[482] John Paul II, *Laborem exercens*, accessed March 10, 2016. Vatican.va.24.

[483] John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, accessed March 10, 2016. Vatican.va. 31.

[484] *Deus Caritas Est*, 21.

[485] Ibid, 25.

foregrounding the traditional title of the Pope as the servant of the servants of God

(*servus servorum Dei*).[486] His words to a journalist in a recent interview: "I am not a star,

but the servant of the servants of God" sums up his ecclesiology of the church as a

servant.

Avery Dulles identifies the strength of this model to include the fact that "the

church's mission, in the perspective of this theology [of the church as a servant] is not

primarily to gain new recruits for its own ranks, but rather to be of help to all [people]

wherever they are."[487] In addition, the servant church model promotes the "secular-

dialogic" model that Vatican II calls for by encouraging an approach to ecclesial

communication, which see the non-Christian world not as "raw material for the Church to

convert to its own purposes, nor as a mere object of missionary zeal, but as a realm in

which the creative and redemptive will of God is mysteriously at work."[488]

However, Dulles also identifies the limitation of the servant model to include the

fact that in contemporary society, the word 'servant' "connotes work done not freely but

under orders" and is demeaning or servile.[489] He calls for a careful nuance of the concept

of service in order to make the ecclesiology of servant church relevant to the ears of the

modern person. To that end, the spirituality of Christian friendship, proposed in this

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[486] Pope Francis said this in a press conference with journalist on his visit to the USA: He was responding question posed by Mathilde Imberty of Radio France: "Holy Father, you have become a star in the United States. Is it good for the Church if the Pope is a star?", Vatican Radio, Sep 28, 2015,http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/09/28/pope_francis_i%E2%80%99m_not_a_star,_but_the_servant_of_servants_o/1175317.

[487] Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 89.

[488] Dulles, *The Church and Communications*, 118.

[489] Ibid, 91.

dissertation, will help reveal the strength of the church as a servant, since Christian

friendship is love that is primarily directed towards the other. The model of the church as

a friend complements the notion of the church as servant by helping address the linguistic

limitation identified by Dulles in the term "servant" for our modern society. In the

ecclesiology of friendship, charitable deeds are ordered only to the extent that they are

demanded by Christ, who first loved us. Good deeds done for a friend become a grateful

response to love already received. In this sense, love is ordered by Christ and not by the

human person who is the recipient. Good works, understood as friendship love, are free

and non-servile; they become ways of sharing the friendship of Christ with others.

The Church as Sacrament

In this model, the church is understood as a special sign of grace. The church as a

sacrament is therefore the "visible form of an invisible grace" for all people in all

cultures. It is "the mystery or sacramental presence of the ultimate, consummated

kingdom" of God.[490] Vatican II explains the sacramentality of the church to mean the

church being a sign of intimate union with God and humanity, a universal sacrament of

salvation, and a visible sign of saving unity.[491] The works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Karl

Rahner, and Yves Congar, provide various implications of understanding the church as a

sacrament. These theologians point out that even though the church is a sacrament, it is

not equal to Christ in terms of how it signifies; he alone effects grace because the church

is sinful while Christ is sinless and perfectly reveals God and effects salvific grace on

earth. Pope Benedict XVI underlines an important implication of the sacamentality of the

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[490] Dulles, *Models of the Church*,105.

[491] Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 1, 9, and 48.

church as expressed through the liturgy. He observes that the principles of good worship, "full, conscious, and active participation" which draw human beings into deeper relationship with God in the liturgy must also be lived out in all aspects of the church's mission in the world.[492]

From the perspective of communication, the model of the church as a sacrament implies that "religious communication occurs not only through words but equally through persons and events."[493] The church's liturgical celebrations are therefore communicative events, "sacramental mode of communication" where "sacred signs produce their saving effect thanks to the power of Christ."[494] Dulles identifies the strengths of this model as including its ability to bring together the visible and the invisible dimensions of the church and provide urgency to the church's missionary work in the world. He, however, observes that one of the main limitations of the sacramental model is that it does not provide explicit ways of responding to the challenges of living out the grace that the church celebrates in the liturgy.

There is the need to develop this theology of the church in ways that address this limitation. To this end, this dissertation proposes the ecclesiology of the Church as Sacrament of Christ, the Friend, as a complement to the existing model. The emphasis on spiritual friendship provides a way of modeling the communion we encounter in the liturgy. Living the sacramentality of the church as Christian friendship will help Christians translate their encounter with Christ in the liturgy into practical daily

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[492] Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est,* 20-35.

[493] Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*, 2.

[494] Dulles, *The Church and Communications*, 117.

relationship with one another. In this way, what the church signifies and makes present in the celebrations of the sacraments can become embodied through the spirituality of friendship love as a practical bridge between our experience in the liturgy and the daily witness of transformative practice that the liturgy is meant to engender.

The Church as Community of Disciples

In addition to the five models of the church discussed above, Dulles proposes an ecclesiology of community of disciples as a model for integrating the strengths in the five models. He sees 'the notion of 'community of disciples', as an inclusive one, which even though by itself is not adequate in expressing the "full reality of the church" has "potentialities as a basis for a comprehensive ecclesiology."[495] As in the case of the other models, Dulles traces the foundation of the model of the church as community of disciples in the Scripture. It reflects the goal of Jesus' own public ministry of forming a "contrast society symbolically representing the new and renewed Israel."[496]

Dulles must be praised for the addition of this sixth model to the original five because of its special emphasis on discipleship. This model effectively presents the church as the post-Easter community of disciples and a Christianized society. The model also emphasizes discipleship as sacramental life with a focus on Eucharistic intimacy as its goal, and a life that invites one into an ongoing conversion and evangelization. Dulles reflects that this model "motivates the members of the church to imitate Jesus in their

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[495] Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 198.

[496] Ibid, 200.

personal lives. It also makes them feel at home in a church that must always find its way in a rapidly changing and fluid situation."[497]

This dissertation suggests that an ecclesiology of the church as a sacrament of Christ, the Friend complements and enhances the model of community of disciples by providing a theological imagination of discipleship as friendship and helping Christians live out discipleship in practical friendship with God and with one another. It is in this sense that this dissertation makes a humble but significant contribution to the discussion on the search for ways of integrating the strengths in the existing models of the church. In addition, the model of the church as a sacrament of Christ, the Friend, provides a clear way of bringing "out the necessary solidarity and cooperation between Christians and other groups."[498] This affirms an observation that Dulles makes:

> For blending the values in the various models, the sacramental type of ecclesiology in my opinion has special merit. It preserves the value of the institutional elements because the official structures of the Church give clear and visible outlines. So that it can be a vivid sign. It preserves the community value, for if the Church were not a communion of love it could not be an authentic sign of Christ. It preserves the dimension of proclamation, because only by reliance on Christ and by bearing witness to him, whether the message is welcome or rejected, can the church effectively point to Christ as the bearer of God's

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[497] Ibid, 213.

[498] Ibid, 215.

redemptive grace. This model preserves the dimension of worldly service, because without this the church would not be a sign of Christ the servant.[499]

Dulles read "the signs of the times" when he added the sixth model of the church as community of disciples due to the emphasis on discipleship in all Christian traditions in recent decades. I propose that given the emphasis on friendship in our digital culture, reimagining discipleship as friendship with God and others will be reading the signs of our digital age in a way that might help to communicate the gospel *ad intra and ad extra* (inside and outside) the ecclesial community. The concept of friendship provides a way of overcoming the temptation of reducing the sacramental nature of the church to only its spiritual dimension, and helps bridge the yawning gap, that many a time, exists between what we pray and what we live. When lived as the friendship love of Christ, the ecclesiology of the church as a sacrament of Christ, the Friend, will help create the community of disciples not as an exclusive society, but an inclusive Christianized community and a network of the friends of God.

In sum, this chapter has proposed an ecclesiology of the church as a friend as a relational model that might help Christians live out the spirituality of the existing models of the church in a way that helps the church respond successfully to the communicative challenges of our participatory culture. The chapter proposes that the ecclesiology of friendship requires a church that sees others as a gift, a church that listens, a church that is just, a church that is bold to speak the truth in love, a church that makes the Eucharist more accessible to the people of God, and a church that does things with people and "hangs out" with them. The next chapter discusses the implication of this ecclesiology of friendship for the communicative practices of the church in the digital age.

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[499] Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 189,

Chapter 5

IMPLICATIONS FOR ECCLESIAL COMMUNICATION

"The church's corporate actions and those of individuals associated with the church constitute a public communicative symbol."[500]

~Robert White

This last chapter addresses the implications of the ecclesiology of friendship for ecclesial communicative practices. As Avery Dulles rightly reflects, the "Church is communication" because it "exists in order to bring people into communication with God, and thereby to open them up to communication with each other."[501] In this sense, everything the church says and does aims at communicating the gospel of Christ to the world. "When we talk about the communicative mission of the Church, we are not talking about one mission among many others. We are in fact talking about the fundamental reason why the Church exists."[502] All of the church's verbal and non-verbal actions can be considered part of its communicative practice. However, time and space will not permit a discussion on every aspect of the church's life. This chapter therefore focuses on four specific areas of ecclesial communication, namely, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, interpersonal communication for those in church leadership, the Eucharistic celebration, and digital evangelization. In what follows, I explain how friendship might provide a lens for reimagining these ecclesial communicative practices.

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[500] White, *The New Communication Emerging in the Church*, 6.

[501] Dulles, *The Church is Communication*, 6-7.

[502] Bishop Paul Tighe, the former secretary for the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, made this observation during his address during a seminar organized for all new bishops by the Vatican on September15, 2015. See Congregation for Catholic Education, *Seminar for New Bishops*, accessed August 7, 2016. Vatican.va.

Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue as Friendship

Ecumenism in Friendship

Division among different Christian churches continues to be one of the major undermining factors of collective Christian witness in our world today. In *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the Second Vatican Council rightly laments: "such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature."[503] This sad reality should break the heart of all Christians and keep us awake until the hope for Christian unity becomes a reality. "The restoration of unity among all Christians [was] one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council;"[504] and continues to be for the church today. It is no surprise that the Catholic Church and the other Christian churches have and continue to work tirelessly towards Christian unity. One of the principal communicative practices of the church today is the ecumenical movement, which involves dialogue, prayer, and many joint initiatives aimed at promoting unity among the various Christian traditions.

Since the 1950s, many praiseworthy efforts have been made at global, regional, and local levels towards Christian unity. Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and various regional and diocesan offices for the promotion of Christian unity have engaged different Christian traditions through prayers, joint declarations, and many collaborative efforts towards unity. Even though much has been achieved, complete and visible Christian unity still remains a challenge. As the president of the Joint Working Group of the World Council of Churches rightly observes, "After so many years of

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[503] Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio*: Decree on Ecumenism, 1.

[504] Ibidem.

doctrinal controversies, attitudes [are] not easily transformed." There is a need for the churches to "broaden our mutual understanding, deepen the spirit of fellowship and strengthen our commitment to work together."[505] For the church to "deepen the spirit of fellowship," which is very much needed for true unity, our approach to ecumenism must go beyond intellectual discussions and become more of a dialogue of life.[506]

In addition to doctrinal discussions, we need "personalized ecumenism." The instances where the church as a corporate entity visits other Christian churches during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity are good practices. However, such encounters need to be translated into a spirituality that goes beyond prayer sessions. Ecumenism should be a way of life enacted in the daily interactions that help Catholics develop true friendships with people of other Christians traditions. While it is true that ecumenism must involve "dialogue between competent experts from different Churches and Communities [and] meetings, which are organized in a religious spirit, [at which] each explains the teaching of his Communion in greater depth and brings out clearly its distinctive features,"[507] true understanding of other Christians requires a practical relationship in which people from the different Christians traditions *do life together.*

Ecumenism should not be left to few experts in the church. It must be based on the development of true friendships As John Paul II points out, ecumenical dialogue "is

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[505] Aram I Keshishian, the head of the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia, made this remark during the 40th anniversary of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches on November 18, 2005. See *Online Archives of the World Council of Churches*, https://archives.oikoumene.org/en.

[506] Walter Kasper, *A Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism* (Hyde Park, NY: New York City Press, 2007).

[507] *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4.

not simply an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an 'exchange of gifts."[508]

Friendship based on proclamation of the truth of the gospel to one another in love, one

that finds its fullest expression in visible Eucharistic intimacy, is what will lead to the

"spiritual ecumenism" and the "change of heart and holiness of life,"[509] empower

disciples of Christ to live in unity.[510] As Bishop Denis Madden rightly observes,

friendship is the foundation of true dialogue because it involves the virtues of trust,

opening of the mind and heart towards the other, attentive listening, mutual self-

revelation, and self-giving without which true dialogue cannot occur.[511] In his article

Practicing Personal Ecumenism, Father Thomas Ryan comments:

> When we get to know one another on a human level [through Christian
>
> friendship], a trust is born that enables us together to broach the most sensitive
>
> subjects in a spirit of mutual respect. And the better we get to know one another
>
> — no matter how different our backgrounds — the more we recognize similarities
>
> between us. The Christ in me warms to the Christ in the other. Put in another way,
>
> the closer we draw to the center of our faith lives, the closer we draw to each
>
> other.[512]

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[508] *Ut Unum Sint*, 28.

[509] *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 8.

[510] Kasper, *A Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism*, 10.

[511] In a video presentation for the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, Bishop Denis Madden, the then chairman of the USCCB's Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, explores friendship as the foundation for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. See Denis Madden, "Friendship as the Foundation for Ecumenical and interreligious Dialogue" posted on September 25, 2013, http://archstl.org/node/4327621.

[512] Thomas Ryan, "Practicing Personal Ecumenism*," NorthWest Catholic,* no. 4, (2015), http://www.nwcatholic.org/voices/commentary/practicing-personal-ecumenism. Father Thomas Ryan directs the Paulist Fathers Office for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations. He is based in Boston

Many Christian writers also point to the power of friendship in promoting dialogue among Christians. In *Stories from Christian Neighbors: A Heart for Ecumenism,* Vera Duncanson, Brian Johnson and Stefanie Weisgram report an experience of different groups of Christians who sort unity through friendship. They observe that fear subsides as people become friends because in friendship people do not "compromise" their "individual identities", but rather celebrate and appreciate them.[513] Unless Christian ecumenical dialogue transcends intellectual discussions and is lived out in true Christian friendship, the world will continue to be scandalized by the division that plagues Christianity.

It is therefore encouraging to hear leaders of various Christian traditions emphasize ecumenical dialogue not only as theological discussion, but most importantly as a spiritual and practical search for the restoration of Christians as one community of God's friends, and friends of one another. In a recent joint declaration between Pope Francis and His Grace Justin Welby, the leader of the Anglican Church, the two called attention to ecumenism as a search for friendship and declared: "we have been partially healed by fifty years of friendship. We give thanks for the fifty years of the Anglican Center in Rome dedicated to being a place of encounter and friendship."[514] Anyone who is engaged in ecumenical dialogue but does not desire genuine Christian friendship should ponder the question "what Christian witness am I giving here?" as John of Taize reflects:

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[513] Vera, Duncanson, Johnson Brian, & Weisgram Stefanie. *Stories from Christian Neighbors*; *A Heart for Ecumenism* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 10.

[514] Francis and Justin Welby, Common Declaration on October 5, 2016, accessed December 6, 2016, http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2016/10/05/common-declaration-by-pope-francis-and-archbishop-of-canterbury-justin-welby/

Friendship in Christ does not need to wait for full agreement on doctrinal grounds in order to grow. It can even hasten this agreement because if those reflecting together on the faith are already linked by friendship, their discussions will have less the character of a debate, where each feels called to defend the particular viewpoint of their "team" tooth and nail, and be more a common search for that which unites them in depth behind the diversity of accent and approach. Indeed, cannot it be said that every time true doctrinal progress has been made between theologians or church leaders, this has been because the friendships developed among them have made their discussions deeper and more fruitful?

Interreligious Dialogue in Friendship

As in ecumenism, the church's dialogue with other religions must be based on genuine desire for friendship. Interreligious dialogue among Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, practitioners of African Traditional Religion, Buddhists, and other faith traditions of the world cannot be reduced to tolerating the other, being "politically correct" in order to avoid touch areas of differences, or even surface comprises for peaceful co-existence. Interreligious pursued in friendship becomes dialogue based on a firm belief in the other as a gift from God, a companion on the journey towards God.

The church believes and teaches that people of other faith traditions are gifts. The church "rejects nothing that is true and holy in [other] religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which...reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men."[515] However this belief, like all aspects of our faith, is still in need of a deeper understanding and appreciation. As the Congregation

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[515] Vatican Council II, *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

for Doctrine of the Faith observes in *Dominus Iesus*, there is need for the church to deepen its understanding of "the existence of other religious experiences and … their meaning in God's salvific plan… and in what ways the historical figures and positive elements of those religions may fall within the divine plan of salvation."[516] This search is a duty that calls for all hands on deck; it is not a mission for only a few scholars and pastoral agents involved in interreligious dialogue. True knowledge of God's presence in another's life cannot be acquired only through intellectual discussions. It demands experiencing life from another's perspective. Genuine friendship with people of other faith traditions should not only occur at the global, regional, and diocesan levels, but must be a personal lifestyle of each Christian. Interreligious dialogue pursued in friendship becomes a way of entering into people's life in order to know and be known, accompany and be accompanied in our effort to embrace the restoration of God's friendship with humanity as offered through Christ.

Deepening our understanding of "other religious experiences," besides our own, and what they mean in God's plan of salvation, calls for a "gifted-we" relationship and a "heart-based" listening that can occur only in true friendship. When pursued in friendship, interreligious dialogue can become a safe space, a genuine discussion among friends, one that is open to truth, love, and surprises about God's presence in others in a way that leads to a true doxology because "we cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any [person], created ... in the image of God."[517] As Cardinal Sin rightly observes, "for Christian communication [with other religions] to

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[516] Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, accessed August 25, 2015. Vatican.va, 14.

[517] Vatican Council II, *Nostra Aetate*, 5.

be effective, it should have the same qualities as the communication of Christ: love, gracefulness, loyalty to truth. His communication was an expression of unconditional love"[518]

In order to develop such friendships, it is important for all Christians to avoid any language or attitude that presents people of different faith traditions "as rejected or accursed by God;"[519] As we seek to deepen our knowledge of people of other faith traditions through friendship, each Christian needs to ponder the questions: What have I learned from other churches and religions? How have I incorporated that into my life? How has my experience with other churches and religions deepened my understanding of God? "Can you see the world as others see it? In what ways does our Church or community foster and build friendship, both within and outside of our community?"[520]

Interpersonal Communication for Those in Church Leadership

Besides ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, another challenging area of ecclesial communication is the interpersonal communication between those in church leadership (ordained and non-ordained) and those they serve in various church institutions, such as dioceses, parishes, religious houses, catholic schools and hospitals. The "traditional wisdom" is for church leaders, especially the clergy, to avoid friendships with parishioners or the people they serve. There is no doubt that healthy boundaries are necessary for the success of the pastoral ministry, as well as the protection of those who

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[518] Jaime Cardinal Sin in a homily he delivered at the inaugural mass for the General Assembly of International Catholic Association for Radio and Television (*UNDA)* in Manila, on 1 November 1980. See Communication Foundation of Asia. *Homily of Cardinal Sin,* accessed March 2, 2016, http://cfamedia.org/main/?p=2453

[519] Vatican Council II, *Nostra Aetate*, 4.

[520] Denis Madden, *Friendship*.

serve and those who are served. Healthy boundaries are essential for the survival of the entire people of God. Christian friendship, one built of the marks developed in this dissertation and many other theological reflections Christian love as friendship, enhances the creation of such desired healthy boundaries. The problem is, at times, the desire for healthy boundaries turns into dividing walls built on fear and prejudice that makes the development of Christian friendship between those in leadership and those they serve impossible. Such situations unfortunately reduce the relationships between pastoral leaders and the people they serve into "client-caregiver" or "advertiser-customer" relationship. The absence of Christian friendship will lead to church leadership being exercised as "power to control" rather than the "power to serve."

The real challenge of Christian leadership is how to be a teacher and a friend the way Jesus models it. Understanding church leadership as a call to reveal the face of the Church as a sacrament of Christ, the Friend, invites us to re-examine the "traditional wisdom" that pastoral leaders should not be a friend to the people they serve. Contrary to this "traditional wisdom" the success stories of most pastoral leaders show that those whose life they really touch and help transform to become more like Christ, end up becoming their friends. When pastoral leaders begin to "take on the smell of the sheep"[521] and actually walk through the pain and joys of life with the people, they become their friend, teacher, spiritual advisor, and shepherd.[522] In an age when traditional ecclesiastical sanctions are not as effective as they used to be in leading people to

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[521] Pope Frances made this call in his homily during Chrism Mass in St. Peter's Basilica. See Francis. Holy of Chrism Mass at St. Peter's Basilica on March 28, 2013, accessed September 9, 2016, Vatican.va.

[522] Miriam Parent, "Boundaries and Roles in Ministry Counseling." *American Journal of Pastoral Counseling*, 8 no.2 (2005):1- 25.

conversion of mind and heart, in an age when people seem to listen more to friends than preachers, pastoral leadership must embody the grace that wins the human heart for God, namely the friendship love of Christ.

Pastoral leadership requires the ability to "lead in front, "lead for", but also "lead within." There is no doubt that the virtues of Christian friendship, which are needed for all success at all levels of pastoral ministry, are even more needed in pastoral leadership. When lived as Christian friendship, pastoral leadership leads to celebration of co-workers as gifts from God and the creation of an environment in which actions do not spring from a desire for power or fearful obedience, but rather from a wish to participate and do things with the friends of God in a way that is beneficial for all and reveals the glory of God. It is such friendship that allows the pastoral leader to speak the truth in love to others and be open to the truth as it is spoken to pastoral leaders. It is such friendship-love that leads to genuine listening and the empathy that the shepherds are required to have for the sheep. It also leads to the loving obedience and concern that the sheep are to have for the shepherd.

In his book *It's Time to be Bold,* Michael W. Smith, reflects that "being a friend is the most natural way to influence people and it seems to be God's favorite strategy for reaching the world with his love."[523] The truth in this is obvious when one reflects on the words of Jesus: "No longer do I can call you servants; I have called you friends." (John 15). Christian friendship should also be the most favorite strategy for all pastoral leaders who want to model the friendship love of Christ to his people. Christian friendship breaks down the walls that keeps leaders and those they serve as "strangers;" it enhances the

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[523] Michael Smith, *It's Time to be Bold* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing Group, 1987) kindle, chapter 10.

creation of healthy boundaries, and allows leaders and those they serve to live out the friendship of Christ as they become hosts and quests of one another.

Eucharistic Celebration as Communication of Friendship-love

In addition to ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, and interpersonal communication for pastoral leaders, the ecclesiology of friendship has important implications for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist as communication of friendship love. Communication is the "giving of self in love."[524] Ecclesial communication, lived as Christian friendship, finds its fullest expression in friendship as *leitourgia,* the supreme exchange of gifts between Christ and his friends. It is "the most intimate form of communion and communication possible in this life."[525] It is extremely important that the Eucharistic celebration provides opportunity for the People of God to experience this Eucharistic intimacy. This calls for understanding the Eucharist as divine-human communication. The Bishops of Asia during their 12th annual meeting in Bangkok, Thailand, called for a renewed emphasis on the church's tradition that has always understood the Eucharist as divine-human communication. Reflecting on the theme: *Eucharist as Communication*, the bishops noted that:

> Liturgy is a communicative [event] taking place in the very heart of the
> community through a variety of signs, symbols, art and architecture, music, and
> gestural language. The Eucharist is the communication par excellence, with the
> Word of God and Eucharistic sharing as the core communicative elements. This

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[524] Pontifical Council for Social Communication, *Communio et Progressio*, 11

[525] Ibid

flows into a communication with one another in the community as an important

and necessary part of the Eucharistic assembly.[526]

The variety of signs and symbols used in the Eucharistic celebration must be

intentionally communicated in a way that enhances the "sacramental adequacy", which

occurs not only when "liturgical rites [are] enacted according to prescribed form," but

also when they are properly and effectively communicated to the assembly. Promoting

sacramental adequacy calls for a constant reflection on the question: "what will this

symbolic action say to and cause in the existential lives of this community of

participants?"[527] In order to communicate the Eucharist as divine-human friendship,

important steps such as the following must be taken:

Gathering and welcoming each other in friendship. As Thomas Groome rightly

reflects, "the symbolic action of gathering should be sacramentally adequate to enable

people to recognize and experience a sense of themselves as a community and ready them

for active participation."[528] Our hospitality must demonstrate true inclusion and interest

in persons. How the celebrant welcomes the community gathered is very important. It

should communicate to the people that Christ, in their midst, is happy to welcome them

as friends into Eucharistic intimacy. The members of the community must also seek to

know one another. Church communities need to find creative ways of doing this. For

instance, name tags might be an important first step for learning to call people by name

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[526] Federation of Asian Bishops Conference, *Eucharist as Communication*: *Final Statement of 12th Annual Bishops' Meet in Bangkok, Thailand*, accessed May 20, 2016. http://www.asianews.it/news-en/The-%E2%80%9CEucharist-as-Communication%E2%80%9D-is-theme-of-the-next-Bishops%27-Meet-10786.html

[527] Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry, The Way of Shared Praxis* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1991), 340-345.

[528] Ibid, 351.

and showing interest in them; however if members of a parish cannot call people by name after a year or two of worshiping together in a parish, that is a problem. It might communicate lack of interest in people and make them feel unwelcomed. It is impossible for each person in the parish to know everybody's name; however no one should feel lost or anonymous in the church community.

Using the worship space to communicate a sense of community and a deep awareness of the presence of God. The liturgical space should "engage people's emotions and elicit sentiments such as awe, wonder, reverence, celebration"[529] and a sense of joy of being in a sacred place with God and God's friends. The worship space must also provide a sense of continuity of our friendship with the women and men of our faith who have gone before us. Symbols and signs which draw attention to the saints must be encouraged because they could serve as a physical reminder of the friendship we have with the church triumphant that comes to join us in the Eucharistic celebration. Such awareness can point to the ultimate goal of Christian friendship as union with God and all friends of God at the end of time.

Approaching the homily as a conversation among friends. In order to reveal the nature of the Eucharist as a divine-human communication of friendship love, the homily must be done as conversation between God and God's friends facilitated by the homilist. As divine-human communication, the homily must convey the kind of attentive listening that is found among true friends. This calls for the homilist listening to God, to tradition, and to the current community with the heart of a friend. As Pope Francis reflects, "the preacher must know the heart of his community, in order to realize where its desire for

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[529] Ibid.

God is alive and ardent, as well as where that dialogue, once loving, has been thwarted and is now barren."[530] Such knowledge can only be developed through Christian friendship. In that sense, the faithful must also seek to know the heart of their pastors and leaders. The response to the homily should therefore be a loving listening and ongoing discourse among families, small groups, and other network of friends within the Christian community in a way that opens up the community to the transformative power of the Holy Spirit who speaks to them in the homily.

As true act of conversation, the faithful should provide constructive feedback to the homilist, from time to time. Such interaction signals the level of intimacy that exists between church leaders and the communities they serve. As Pope Francis points out, "The homily is the touchstone for judging a pastor's closeness and ability to communicate to his people."[531] As the Holy Father cautions, it is important for all who are involved in the ministry of preaching to remember that:

> Dialogue [a homily that creates Christian friendships] is much more than the communication of a truth. It arises from the enjoyment of speaking and it enriches those who express their love for one another through the medium of words. This is an enrichment which does not consist in objects but in persons who share themselves in dialogue. A preaching which would be purely moralistic or doctrinaire, or one which turns into a lecture on biblical exegesis, detracts from this heart-to-heart communication.

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[530] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 137.

[531] Ibid, 135.

The priest and all the faithful gathered for the celebration being open to the Truth of God as revealed in the Scriptures, Tradition, and other teachings of the church. Friendship with God does not presuppose equality with God. The goal of Christian friendship is to become more like God and help others do same. Our intimacy with God in the Eucharist must always be construed as friendship that requires total surrender to the will of God through loving obedience to God's will. Like the friendship between God and Abraham, Jesus and the disciples, our friendship with God is an initiative of God who first humbled himself to take out humanity in order to restore his friendship with us and help us share in his divinity as we allow him to transform us to become more like God.

In the Eucharistic celebration, we are gathered in the Spirit, to be transformed by Christ, and be sent. A desire to participate in the Eucharist must also include the willingness to surrender to God in order to be transformed. This is what we symbolize in the offertory rite through which we bring different gifts represented in the bread and wine. This offering of gifts is not complete without the offering of our very lives to be transformed so that, like Christ, we become the bread that is broken for the life of the world. Therefore, unless we celebrate the Eucharist with a sincere desire and openness to be transformed in order to become more like Christ, our celebration will not lead to Eucharistic intimacy.

All the faithful who gather for the celebration having access to the presence of Christ as expressed in the different parts of the Eucharistic celebration. In the celebration of the Eucharist, Christ gives himself to his people in various ways, such as in the assembly gathered as the Body of Christ, in the proclamation of the Word, and in his Holy Body and Blood under the appearance of bread and wine. Christian friendship as

Eucharistic intimacy requires that the church helps all present at a Eucharistic celebration to embrace the love of Christ as he comes to us in the various ways during the celebration. It is very sad that in parishes all over the world, many people cannot experience intimacy with Jesus through reception of his Body and Blood. The popular phrase, "Eucharistic famine" or "Eucharistic hunger" is no longer limited to the situation in Africa where many Catholics lack access to the Eucharist, but sadly, a worldwide problem of the church as seen in the recent discussions at the Synod on the family. The church needs to continue the search for solutions to all causes of "Eucharistic famine" all over the world in order to ensure that the people of God experience Christian friendship in its fullness as *leitourgia.* This calls for access to Christ not only in the gathered assembly and the proclamation of, but also in his Real Presence through his Body and Blood.[532]

In the case of those who do not have access to the Real Presence due to struggles with some sinful situation that needs time to resolve, is it possible for the church to deepen our understanding of the Eucharist as *viaticum* to include "spiritual food that sustains the sinner on the journey of conversion"? As I noted in chapter four, under our discussion on the Church that Makes the Eucharist More Accessible to the People of God, is it possible that the grace of the Real Presence might be the very strength that people in such situations might need to walk away from sin and embrace true friendship with Christ and others?

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[532] The church teaches that Real Presence "is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a *substantial* presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present." See *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* 2nd ed (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000): 1374.

Digital Evangelization as Developing Christian Friendship Online

Besides, the implications discussed above, the ecclesiology of friendship also provides a framework that can guide the church to transcend a bullhorn approach to the new media and harness their full potential for the new evangelization. In this age, digital evangelization is not an option, but a divine imperative. As Paul VI prophetically observes, the church "would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means" to announce the Good News of the gospel for the salvation of all. The ecclesiology of friendship provides a theological imagination that might help the church to mitigate the challenges of our digital culture and explore its affordances for the new evangelization.

Some Challenges and Affordances of the Digital Culture

Our digital culture presents some challenges to evangelization that Christian friendship can help overcome. One such challenge is consumerism, the belief that human well-being and joy depend on one's ability to purchase and make use of material goods. In the digital culture, the danger in consumerism finds expression not only in people's attitude towards goods, but also in how they turn to use human beings as "products." Consumerism in the digital culture "involves a mindset that profoundly affects relationships "with others.[533] It leads to a constant desire to "re-brand" oneself through a collection of "trophy friends."[534] Friends may "be replaced or upgraded in order to accessorise one's new image"[535] as a way of "re-branding" oneself. Such consumerism

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[533] Summers, *Friendship*, 34.

[534] Ray Pahl, *On Friendship* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 146.

[535] Summers, *Friendship*, 34.

undermines the gospel values of the dignity of the human person and human relationships because it produces networked individualism which "rather than surrounding the self with a set of close, comprehensive relationships" leads to a "faceless relationally."[536] Other challenges include relativism, subjectivism, pluralism and indifferentism that find expression in suspicion and rejection of hierarchical institutions, metanarratives, and claims of absolute truths. There is also a "remarkable superficiality in the area of moral discernment."[537]Pope Francis provides great overview of some of the challenges that our culture today poses to evangelization:

In many places, the problem is more that of widespread indifference and relativism, linked to disillusionment and the crisis of ideologies which has come about as a reaction to any-thing which might appear totalitarian...In the prevailing culture, priority is given to the outward, the immediate, the visible, the quick, the superficial and the provisional. What is real gives way to appearances...the negative aspects of the media and entertainment industries are threatening traditional values, and in particular the sacredness of marriage and the stability of the family..The individualism of our postmodern and globalized era favors a lifestyle which weakens the development and stability of personal relationships and distorts family bonds.[538]

In the face of these challenges, one can boldly say that if the friendship love of Christ, which draws all men to the Truth and sets all free to love God, self, and others, was ever needed in the word, it is now. Can Christian friendship help redeem our digital

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[536] Zirschky, *Beyond the Screen*, kindle, chapter 7.

[537] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 64

[538] Ibid, 61-67.

culture from consumerism, trophy friendships, individualism, subjectivism, superficiality in moral discernment, etc help us transcend instant gratification, and seek real and authentic intimacy with God and others? I strongly believe that it can. The hunger and the thirst of the world can only be satisfied through friendship lived the way Jesus lived it. This is the challenge and the hope of Christian friendship.

The news is not all bad because despite the above-mentioned challenges, the digital culture also provides some affordances that can be harnessed for the new evangelization. One such affordance is the understanding of the "self" that the digital culture promotes. The digital culture seems to affirm Steve Summers' observation that the postmodern society is moving from a predominant understanding of Rene Descartes' notion of the self as a "thinking being", expressed through his famous philosophy of *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am), and embracing what Charles Taylor's describes as the "self" as the "capacity to take a stand" to "endorse or oppose,"[539] and Calvin Schrag's notion of the "self" as "being-with-others."[540] The digital culture celebrates the notion of the person as a "connected self."[541] In today's connected culture, friendship may be seen, "as the new social glue to paste over networked lives, because it is ideally structured to cope with the stresses and strains, great and small that modern life throws up."[542] When friendship is not pursued as "trophy friendship" the desire to connect with

[539] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*: *The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989,) 27.

[540] Calvin Schrag. *The Self After Postmodernity* (New haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 84.

[541] Summers, *Friendship*, 113.

[542] Mark Vernon, *The Philosophy of Friendship* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2005), 3.

people online could be perceived as a quest for the self in relation to others. This desire to understand the "self" in relation to others provides a great opportunity that the church must seize and in order to help people grow in friendship with God and with one another. It is a great opportunity to help people embrace what Cardinal Turkson calls the philosophy of "I love and so I am."[543]

Another affordance is the participatory culture of the digital age. People desire friendship, participation and sharing. They love to follow and be followed. Today's culture requires "strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices."[544] It is a culture that invites people not only to consume, but also to create and share. It celebrates collaboration. For people in the digital age, "to participate is to act as if your presence matters, as if, when you see something or hear something, your response is part of the event."[545]

This desire to be part of something and realize oneself in a communicative event is an affordance that can enhance the church's evangelization. If the church critically adopts the principles of today's participatory culture and lives as a friend in the digital world, it will help give a "soul" to the new media and help people live the Christian vision. For this to happen, the church's institutional presence online as well as that of individual Christians must transcend a bullhorn approach to social media and model Christian friendship in the way we communicate with people online. We now turn our

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[543] Peter Cardinal Appiah Turkson, *To Live is Christ.* Unpublished Manuscript (Cape Coast: Catholic Mission Press, 2011), 59.

[544] Jenkins, et. al., *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture, xi.*

[545] Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus,* 21.

attention to how the church can express corporate friendship through its institutional presence as well as that of the individual Christian online.

The Church's Corporate Friendship Online

In order for the church to use the new media effectively for the new evangelization, the church must communicate Christian friendship online, not only through sharing information online, but also interacting with people through dialogue. The church's institutional presence online cannot be reduced to posting church documents and announcements. It must be a two-way interaction that shows a deepened understanding of the new media as a gift for a two-fold transformation, the church transforming the world and the church being transformed through its interaction with people online. As Pope Francis reminds us, "the Church does not evangelize unless she constantly lets herself be evangelized."[546]

The digital continent, places more emphasis on communication as relation and not just exchange of information. To be present online is to interact; and to live online is to be in dialogue with others through conversation. On the digital continent any institution or individual who does not engage in a two-way communication is not alive. Church institutions, all over the world, have taken a bold step in embracing the new media as a method for the new evangelization but without transcending a bullhorn approach to the new media, the church's effort will lose the ardor of the Christian message. Christian Friendship might provide a "new expression" that will help reveal the ardor of Christ's love in this new method of evangelization. Transcending a bullhorn approach to digital

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[546] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 174.

evangelization requires both theoretical and practical shifts in the way most church institutions are currently using the new media.

Theoretically, there is need to emphasize communication not only as transmission or "imparting, sending, transmitting, or giving information to others,"[547] but primarily as ritual or relation that involves sharing, participation, association, shared beliefs, and fellowship.[548] Friends do not just share information; they process it together and make meaning together. Even though the cybernetic approach to ecclesial communication, such as Patrick Greenfields' cybernetic analysis of communication within the institutional church[549] has shed important light on how to achieve participatory communication within the church as an organization, transporting this cybernetic or mathematical model into online engagement will not work.

Online interaction differs remarkably from communication within the walls of a church organization. The psychology of the new media involves individuals understanding their online platforms as "sacred and private spaces" over which they exercise control. In the digital world, everyone owns a "land" and individuals determine whom they want to associate with or "be friends" with. Unlike the hierarchical communication structures in the various organizational structures of the church,

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[547] Carey, *Communications as Culture*, 12.

[548] Even though James Carey himself was skeptical about the potential of technology to allow for communication as ritual, given the technological revolution that has taken place and the interactive nature of the new media, I am sure Carey would have commented on the power of the new media to promote communication as ritual if he were writing in our digital age. Despite the limitations in some of the assumptions that underlie Carey's ritual view, such as the notion that reality does not exist independent of what human beings create through communication, Carey's ritual view provides useful insights for understanding communication as primarily concerned with dialogue and relationship building.

[549] See Patrick Granfield, *Ecclesial Cybernetics: A Study of Democracy in the Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1973).

communication in the new media is a kind of a forum and conversation among friends. The new media is a participative communication forum[550] and success in digital evangelization calls for understanding the new media not only as storage and distribution tools, but most importantly as tools for interaction. The new media culture invites people not only to consume, but also to create and share. It celebrates collaboration and relationships. "The virtual world is [not just a place to store and share information, but has become] the arena in which friendship is undergoing its latest incarnation, where real relationships are developed although their medium may be intangible."[551] It is therefore important for the church as an institution to go beyond posting official documents and announcements online and present itself as a friend capable of interaction; one who does not only invite people to consume, but also to create and share.

In practice, the way most church institutions are currently using social media seems to signal a focus on the new media as storage and distribution tools but not a means for interaction. This contradicts the participatory nature of the digital culture in which information is important only to the extent that it initiatives interaction and dialogue and provide opportunity for people to do things together. Unless the church engages people as they struggle to make sense of the gospel in their interactions online, digital evangelization will remain a good talk that leads to no action. Using social media for effective evangelization requires the church to be a friend who walks along the digital

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[550] Frances Plude, "Interactive Communications in the Church", in *The Church and Communication.* Patrick Granfield (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1997), 237.

[551] Summers, *Friendship*, 31.

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trail, a friend who can be both formal and "informal mentor", a friend who speaks the truth in love and is ready to teach and learn from others.

The church has both an opportunity and a challenge to explore how to be a formal presence, an institution with an official teaching from Christ, in an informal and playful atmosphere of social media. It is important for the church to convey to people that their voices and contributions matter because today, people accept "truth" that is not handed over with a top-down approach; but rather "truth" that is presented in a dialogical model where their voices are heard and shaped through conversation. An ecclesiology of friendship might help the church present truths about God, the human person, and society through conversations in which people contribute by expressing their lived experiences of God and what it means to be human without changing the message of the gospel. This calls for an approach to evangelization that makes room for people's life-stories. For the church's institutional presence online to become a living organism and be experienced as a friend with a human face and heart, practical steps such as the following could be taken:

Building a team to be in-charge of intentional digital evangelization. This could be made up of paid positions or trained volunteers who will take turns, perhaps each taking one day in the week, to be the face of the church online. Such teams are needed at all levels of the church's institutional presence online: global, regional, national, diocesan, and parish levels. There is always the need to monitor feedback and respond to people's questions and comments in a way that speaks the truth of the gospel in love, reveals God's mercy and justice, and is inclusive.

Adopting families for daily or weekly interactions. At the parish level, the members of the team in charge for digital evangelization could interact with people in the local church community online. For instance, they might focus on specific families at a time. Imagine if the team selected two families within the church communities to interact with online each day. This could be an intentional way of communicating to each family in the church that the church is walking with them beyond Sunday. Through this team, the church could celebrate life with people online by leaving positive comments for them on birthdays, weddings, anniversaries and other joyful celebrations.

Also, the team could share funny pictures and short videos of people having fun at church events. Not many people will look these up under the photo galleries on our websites. Sharing them via social media with funny comments helps build friendships online. On the other hand, when people are going through sorrow or pain, the team can leave hopeful messages for them online and follow-up with a face-to-face meeting from a member of the parish outreach team. People may not always call our parish offices to share their pain and challenges, but they share those moments on social media. If we listen, we shall hear the pain and reach out. This could also be a way of helping the families in a parish celebrate one another because they are likely to share the church's posts and comment with others in the parish. Furthermore, in order to show people that the church is listening, the team might bring one or two issues from their online interaction to staff meetings to discuss, pray about, and discern a practical pastoral response.

Inviting and accepting invitations to transform online connections into face-to-face friendships. In order to be a friend online, church institutions should not just use the new media to invite people to programs, but as much as possible, must also accept invitations to some programs in other Christian churches and religious denominations online even when it is a general invitation to the public. This could be a strong public witness and a practical gesture that enhances ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. This could be one way of ensuring that online interactions end in concrete in-person friendships. Whenever possible, online friendship should not remain perpetually online. Even though not all online friends can meet in person, some are possible and that should be encouraged. Examples of some success stories in this direction include the formation of the Catholic New Media Conference, CatholiCon, and Interactive Connections. These are three annual conferences that seek to transform online interactions into concrete in-person friendships by creating opportunities for online friends to meet face-to-face to socialize and share faith experiences as friends.[552]

Reflecting on how engagement with others is transforming the institution to become more Christ-like. It is important for church institutions that engage with people online to constantly reflect on the how the institution is being transformed by its encounter with others online. Questions that might guide such reflection include: How are we transforming people with the gospel online. *How do we gain insights into people's stories of transformation through the gospel?* Addressing such questions will help church

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[552] Lisa Hendey, "Cultivating Online Community," in *The Church and New Media, ed.* Vogt Brandon, (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2011), 149-156.

institutions embrace communication as ritual in which the church "activity acts' and is also "acted upon"[553] for mutual transformation of church as society.

While the above steps will help humanize the church's institutional presence online, digital evangelization will be most effective if individual Christians live out the spirituality of Christian-friendship in person-to-person interaction. "In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. *Mt* 28:19)."[554] Therefore the task of giving human face and heart to the church online cannot be left for only the few trained members of the team in charge of digital evangelization. All hands must be on deck because as Pope Francis reflects:

> All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients, The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love.[555]

Each Christian must therefore embody the marks of Christian friendship discussed in chapter three in order to reveal the love of Christ in our interactions with people online and offline. Because we are the church, our individual interaction with others online has

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[553] Ronald Grimes, "Modes of Ritual Sensibility Liturgical Supinity, Liturgical Erectitude: On the Embodiment of Ritual Authority*"* in *Foundations in Ritual Studies, ed.* Paul Bradshaw and John Melloh (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 140.

[554] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 120.

[555] Ibid.

implications for how people view the church and Christ. As Robert White rightly reflects, individual actions of Christians are part of the church's communicative symbol and it is important to reflect on the question: What am I saying about Christ and the church by the way I relate to people online? The following practical steps might help make person-to-person interactions more effective on the digital continent.

Enhancing Person-to-person Digital Evangelization

Always begin by listening. There are practical challenges that we must be aware of as we strive to share the gospel in the digital environment. One of these is the information overload and the speed of online conversations that can lead to superficial conversations and relationships. As Bishop Tighe observes:

> a particular challenge to the possibility of the new media serving as channels for dialogue and growth in understanding between peoples is that the extraordinary range of words and images generated by these media, the speed with which they are produced and the fact that there is a constant stream of news and information means that there is very little room and time for a sustained and considered engagement; and that there is real danger that our cultural discourse becomes superficial.[556]

For our encounter with people to go deeper we must first develop real friendships that convinces them that we truly desire more than a superficial relationship. Developing such friendships calls for truly being present to people until they can trust us with their

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[556] Bishop Tighe made this observation in a speech he gave titled "Talking Sense: Language, Diversity and Dialogue in a Digital Culture" (*desales.edu*). See Tighe, Paul. "Talking Sense: Language, Diversity and Dialogue in a Digital Culture", accessed July 2, 2016, web1.desales.edu/assets/salesian/library/infoethics/Tighe-TalkingSense.pdf

full presence and engage us beyond the surface. Friendships, whether online or face-to-face, will go through initial phases of superficiality and curiosity, before trust begins to build. It is only when friendship is tested and proven overtime that commitment develops and people begin to overcome doubts and walk through their vulnerabilities together into a deep friendship. Being present to others online involves "giving others our attention through listening, concern, comfort, empathy, help, and ultimately love,"[557] until they begin to listen to us. People get convinced that a person desires more than superficial friendship when they can tell that a person truly wants to bear their burdens and share in their joy.

Bringing the gospel to the digital environment through dialogue therefore requires balancing the zeal to give answers with that of asking questions. Many times online, we talk more than we listen. Lack of listening undermines the efforts towards digital evangelization. Many people online do not want just a lecture on what the church teaches; they rather desire somebody who will truly listen and engage them in a friendly conversation on why they find it difficult to live those teachings. Most people want a conversation that provides a listening ear as they explore questions, such as why do I struggle so much? Am I just too bad or sinful? How can I overcome the things that hold me back and make it difficult for me to embrace some aspects of the church's teaching? People desire a friend who will not just talk about doctrines and moral teaching; but one who also walks with them through loving listening, concern, comfort, empathy, and encouragement as they take baby steps to overcome their struggle with church teachings. As Pope Paul VI reflects, through such listening:

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[557] Zirschky, *Beyond the Screen*, kindle, chapter 7.

Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization.

Do not compromise the Truth; share it in love. It is important to remember that the gospel of Christ in most cases is counter culture. In the digital environment the Christians seeks to speak "truth in an environment where skepticism is the norm…and it [invite] people to commitment in a world where novelty reigns."[558] However, the Christian testimony is still powerful, especially when it directs attention to the power of God's love and merciful-justice. Even though skepticism abounds in the digital culture, people are also attracted to personal testimonies of the transformative power of God's love and justice. The "social dimension to digital communications calls for an evangelization first concerned with witnessing, with giving personal testimony to lived faith prior to elucidating thought about it."[559]

With so much confusion about who God is in our today and the rejection of truths about sin, digital evangelization must be done within friendship-love that points to the love of Christ and help others to walk from sin. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks rightly reflects in *The Persistence of Faith*, *"*we have to learn to speak to those we do not hope to convert, but with whom we wish to live."[560] It is when we get to know people and allow

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[558] Bishop Paul Tighe, *Talking Sense, 3.*

[559] Thomas Deiley, "Meeting the Digital Challenge to Evangelization," *Rambling Spirit,* no. 3 (2015): 4-5.

[560] Jonathan Sacks, *The Persistence of Faith: Religion, Morality, and Society in a Secular Age* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson,1991), 64.

them to know us that we can have deep and engaging conversations that allows for the expression of Christian friendship as kerygma, speaking the truth in love. It is only when we develop true friendships that our conversations will give ardor to evangelization in the digital world, where people are longing for and searching in many ways, consciously and unconsciously, for the friendship love of Christ, which alone satisfies the human heart. Even though the truth is not always welcome, when spoken in love and allowed to grow with patience, truth might eventually reaches the human mind and heart. As participants of this study shared with us in chapter three, all friends desire honesty and truth spoken in love. Christian friendship loses its soul if it is not based on the Truth of the gospel.

Be inclusive. Do not delete people because of their shortcomings. Use your presence online to develop Christian friendship with members of your family, your local church community, school community, people you work with, people with different gender and sexual orientations, as well as people from different racial and tribal backgrounds. "We cannot live in the friendship of Jesus if our friendship is limited to people just like us."[561] We are called to spread the friendship love of Jesus by embracing "the forsaken with affection and the despised with respect."[562]

Contrary to Howard Rhiengold's advice that you should "follow people only if paying attention to them increases your knowledge or inspires or amuses you,"[563] I propose and an open embrace, one that reaches out with the love of Christ to all but never

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[561] Zirschky, *Beyond the Screen*,loc 2241.

[562] Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 283.

[563] Howard Rheingold, *Net Smart: How to Thrive Online* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012), 227. I appreciate how Rheingold offers useful strategies for surviving online; however some of his proposals need to be critically adopted with a Christian lens in order for them to be effective for Christian evangelization.

loses sight of the goal of friendship as growing in virtue with others into a deeper relationship with God. Thus, you can be just to yourself and others by always speaking the truth in love, not deleting them. Allow your friendship with others to grow through the phases of friendship as we discussed in chapter three: curiosity, attraction, uncertainty, exploration, mutuality, familiarity, vulnerability, and stability. This takes time, prayer, and patience. Christian friendship is love that walks along even when it is painful to do so. This does not mean allowing people to abuse or bully you online. No! It rather means being able to stand to any bully and condemning it with love. If relationships deteriorate to an abuse or bullying, you might sound warnings and if the person continues, always respond with a positive comment or let them know that you will not respond to their comments until they treat you respectfully.

Being inclusive also means being charitable. One way that we can reveal the universal aspect of Christian love online is to share in people's joys and pains from different parts of the world. Thanks to God, most people in the world can live in the same digital environment. What happens in one part of the world could be shared within a click of a mouse or a touch on a screen. This is a great opportunity for Christians to be in solidarity with people anywhere in the world. We can use the new media to raise money and gather resources to respond to all sorts of humanitarian needs in the world. Christian friendship demands that we should use our presence online to promote justice for all especially for the poor and the oppressed.

Avoid "trophy friendship." Research is not conclusive regarding the number of friends the human person is capable of handling in face-to-face encounters; but some studies suggest that we are biologically to able have "casual" friendship with not more

than 150 people, close friendships with not more than 50, and intimate friendships with a maximum of 15 people.[564] With the developments in communication technology that allows us to reach so many, there is a great opportunity to express the universal aspect of Christian friendship through online friendships. However, this must be an intentional outreach in love that transcends using people as a trophy.

In the context of digital evangelization, it would be sad to refuse a friend request; however, it would also be impossible to develop close friendships with the whole world. The new media provides great opportunity for realizing both the particular and universal aspects of Christian friendship. This must be done creatively and intentionally. For instance, you might develop close relationship with online friends who are also within your immediate geographical location and do things with them both online and in person when ever possible. But you can also intentionally adopt one online friend per week to reach out to especially those who are going through some difficult moments in life. This adoption might involve carrying them in your prayers, sending them private messages to show that you are listening and that you are journeying with them in prayer. At times, it might even call for making some time to call them and engage them in faith-based conversations to shed light on what is going on in their lives.

Treat friends (online and in person) as bearers and receivers of God's grace. Digital evangelization also calls for using online interactions to learn more about other churches and religions. In order to share faith with people who belong to other Christian traditions and religions we need more than eloquence in proclaiming the gospel. We also

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[564] See Robin Dunbar, How *Many Friends Does One Person Need?: Dunbar's Number and Other Evolutionary Quirks* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010).

need an attitude of "learning in the presence of the other"[565] which involves the ability to allow yourself to be taught by others as they share their experience of God with you. This approach to digital evangelization requires a "deep trust in the Holy Spirit who is breathing on each [human person]-not only Christians," As popularly asserted: "God is already there before the missionary arrives." Learning religion in the presence of the other calls for embracing people in friendship in a way that opens you up to the gifts that others bring. It is "only through such respectful and compassionate listening [that] can we enter on the paths of true growth and awaken a yearning for the Christian ideal."[566]

Conclusion

The overarching goal of this dissertation has been to develop an ecclesiology of friendship as a touchstone for theological reflection on ecclesial communication. Specifically, it has sought to contribute to the ongoing discussion on how the church can make use of the new media to proclaim the gospel in our digital culture. Today, Christians are pilgrims searching for God in a technocentric world. Much of what we "know and think about life is conditioned by the media; to a considerable extent, human experience itself is an experience of media."[567] The new media has brought about "fundamental shifts in patterns of communication and human relationships", a reality that poses many challenges to ecclesial communication today. As evident in the publication of many official church documents on social communication and theological works that

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[565] Mary Boys, "Learning in the Presence of the Other", *Religious Education* 103, no. 5 (2008): 502 - 06. I borrow this concept from Mary Boys who re who develops it in ralation to religious education. Also see her work with. Also see Mary Boys and Sara Lee, *Christians and Jews in Dialogue: Learning in the Presence of the Other* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2006).

[566] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 171.

[567] Vatican Council II, *Aetatis Novae*, 2.

precede this study, great strides have been made in the search for ways that the church might respond to the communication challenges of our day.

However, many challenges still confront the church; one of which is the need for touchstones that will guide theological reflection on the new media. This study adds to the conversation by calling attention to a question, which is important in this search, but has not received much attention, namely, *"What type of church is God calling the church to become in our digital culture*?" By addressing this question, the dissertation follows the church's long established tradition of responding to communications challenges in different times in the church's life through exploration of new religious symbols that express the cultural and religious spirit of the time and remains true to the gospel and Christian tradition. Reading the signs of our times through a critical reflection on some of the challenges as well as affordances of the digital age, the dissertation calls on the church to interpret the problem of trivialization and dehumanization of human friendship in our digital culture as God's call on the church to realize its nature as sacrament of Christ, the Friend and guide all human beings to discover their identity as friends of God and one another. It also proposes an understanding of the new media as God's gift for a two-fold transformation of the world and society; and points out the need to transcend a bullhorn approach to the new media in order to harness their full potential for the new evangelization.

To that end, the dissertation also proposes Christian friendship as a religious symbol that resonates with today's digital culture and has the potential to help the church use the new media more effectively. This proposal is not an attempt to lift up Christian friendship as a sole and sufficient image for the communicative practices of the church,

but rather as a theological lens for reimagining the existing models of the church in a way that might help reveal their relationally. The ecclesiology of friendship developed emphasizes seven essential elements: a church that celebrates the other as a gift; a church that listens; a church that is bold to correct in love; a church that is just; a church that is a friend to sinners; a church that makes the Eucharist more accessible to God's people; and a church that does things *with* and "*hangs out*" with people. The study also points to how some ecclesial communicative practices, such as ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, personal communication of those in church leadership, the celebration of the Eucharist, and digital evangelization might be done in friendship. With regards to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, using Christian friendship as a touchstone reveals the need for the church to transcend theological discussions and any approach that sees ecumenism and interreligious dialogue primarily as an exchange of ideas. The study calls for an approach that seeks unity with people of other Christian traditions and religious backgrounds through friendships. All Christians are invited to live ecumenism and interreligious dialogue as friendship in which they see and treat the other as another self, a gift from God, and a bearer and receiver of God's grace. In addition, the study calls for a celebration of the Eucharist in a way that allows the variety of signs and symbols used to be intentionally communicated to realize "sacramental adequacy" and help the faithful experience the liturgy as communication of divine-human friendship.

Looking at digital evangelization with a lens of Christian friendship, the study emphasizes the need for a theoretical shift from a cybernetic approach to digital evangelization and recommends a relational approach to ecclesial communication online, one that sees the new media not only as tools for storage and distribution of information

but most importantly as tools for interaction. The study also offers some practical guidelines for humanizing the church's institutional presence online. These include building a team to be in-charge of intentional digital evangelization, adopting families for daily or weekly interactions, inviting and accepting invitations from other churches and other religions, transforming online interactions into concrete in-person friendships, and reflecting on how engagement with others help transform church as an institution, to become more Christ-like. Finally, the study makes some suggestions to help individual Christians live out the spirituality of friendship as they engage in digital evangelization. These include emphasis on loving listening, sharing the Truth in love, being inclusive and avoiding the temptation to delete people because of their shortcomings or, being charitable, avoiding "trophy friendship," and treating friends as bearers and receivers of God's grace.

In summary, findings from this research contribute to the literature on ecclesiology and communication theology. They shed light on how one might understand the church as a sacrament of Christ, the Friend. It also deepens our understanding of how the model of the church as a friend might help imagine the relationality in the existing models of the church. In addition, this research contributes towards the development of the church's communication theology, by proposing a practical theology of social media as God's gift for a "two-fold" transformation of church and society.

Even though this study makes important contributions, it is not conclusive or exhaustive. It scratches the surface of what the church is and ought to be for our digital culture. This study is meant to be an initial discussion on how we might understand everything the church says and does within the context of the friendship-love of Christ,

that the church is called to make present to the world. Therefore, there are many aspects of ecclesial communication that could not be covered within the scope of this work. There is thus need for ongoing research that will deepen our understanding the church's corporate identity as a friend and how this can be lived out in various contexts of the church's life.

To that end, future studies could focus on many different aspects of ecclesial communicative practices. For instance, a study might explore the challenges as well as affordances of using friendship as a model for evangelization in different specific cultural contexts since Christian friendship, even though has universal qualities, might still find expressions in ways that might be culturally specific. Seminaries, universities, colleges, and other church institutions of learning should encourage ongoing research that will uncover more culturally-specific expressions of friendship-love in order to help Christians live out the spirituality of Christian friendship as an acculturated experience.

In addition, this study has shed some light on how the Eucharist might be celebrated as divine-human communication of friendship-love. Further research might also focus on how the other six sacraments of the church, baptism, confirmation, holy matrimony, penance, anointing of the sick, and holy orders, might be understood and celebrated as divine-human communication of friendship. Also, future research can explore how catechesis and faith formation might be approached within the framework of Christian friendship. Longitudinal studies focusing on specific cultural contexts of friendship interactions among Catholics and other Christian churches as well as other religions might help the church deepen its understanding of how friendship might help realize the goals of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. Morever, future studies can

explore concrete ways that Christians successfully express the particular and universal aspects of Christian friendship online.

In a nutshell, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and ongoing research, I am confident that the church will survive the storms of the digital sea the way it has overcome all communication challenges in the past two thousand years. Engaging today's culture as a sacrament of Christ, the Friend, the church will succeed in guiding human interaction towards authentic encounter according to the mind and heart of Christ. Many are yearning consciously and unconsciously for the restoration of friendship with God. The church has a great challenge but also immense opportunity to scaffold what it means to be a friend in our world today. While the essential nature and the mission of the church will not change, the church has to find new expressions that help communicate its nature and realize its mission in every new age. The digital culture calls for heralding, serving, praying, teaching in a new way, and understanding itself not only as a teacher, but also as a friend. This will allow the church to use social media in a way that makes it possible for the church to 'act' and be "acted upon" by the grace of God present in the people to whom the church is sent. If lived out, the spirituality of Christian friendship will help people experience the church not only as friend who does things *for* people, but also as one who does things *with* people, a church that is always walking with people.

Appendix: Survey on Friendship

Consent Form

The purpose of this research is to find ways of helping individuals and institutions around the world to relate more effectively to people as "Friends" in using online tools, such as websites, blogs, and other types of social media in a way that enhances relationships and help build more peaceful and loving communities around the world. In this survey, you will be asked to share your understanding and experience of friendship in order to help us identify good practices and challenges of friendship in our world today. I am very grateful for your help. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate.

Your participation in this questionnaire is completely voluntary. You may decline to answer any questions or discontinue your participation at any time. You will not be required to include your name on the questionnaire and your responses will be completely anonymous. Only the researcher (Richmond Dzekoe) will have access to your responses. **By simply completing the questionnaire, you demonstrate your consent**. For questions about this research, please contact Richmond Dzekoe (kwesiabeeku@gmail.com). For questions or concerns about the rights of research subjects or the voluntariness of this consent procedure, please contact the Research St. Thomas University Institutional Review Board at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Q1 .What is your age?

- ◯ 18-29
- ◯ 30-39
- ◯ 40-49
- ◯ 50-69
- ◯ 70 and above

Q2. How do you understand friendship? Briefly explain

Q3. How important do you consider friendship in your life?

- ◯ Extremely important
- ◯ Very important
- ◯ Moderately important
- ◯ Slightly important
- ◯ Not at all important

Q4. What do you consider the most important qualities of a friend? Please list 3.

- ☐ 1st

- ☐ 2nd

- ☐ 3rd

Q5. How would you define friendship on social media?

Q6. How many friends do you have on social media, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Wechat, Snapchat etc?

- ◯ 1-99
- ◯ 100-499
- ◯ 500-999
- ◯ 1000 and above

Q7. Roughly, what percentage of your online friends do you know in person?

0-19
20-39
40-59
60-79
80-99
100

Q8. Do you consider face-to-face friendship the same as online friendship?

- ◯ Yes: Because……………………………………..

- ◯ No: Because…………………………………..

Q9. What do you see as some of the challenges of friendship (both face-to-face and online) in our world today? Please list at least 3

Q10. Is there any aspects of face-to-face friendship that is not possible with online friendship?

- ◯ Yes: Give an example

○ No

Q11. Are you friends with any institution, such as a Church, Mosque, Temple, School, Restaurant etc online?

- ○ No
- ○ Yes

Q12. If you answered YES to the previous question, what is your understanding of being a friend of this institution on online?

Q13.Do have any religious affiliation?
- ○ Yes: Please name your affiliation

- ○ No

Q14. If you belong to any religious community, such as a Church, Mosque, Temple etc, do you consider that a "community of friends"

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q15. Some religions, such as Christianity, teach that God's desire is to be our friend (John 15:12-17). Do you see God as your friend?

- ○ Yes: Because
- ○ No: Because

Q16. Do you follow any institution that belongs to your religious affiliation on social media?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q17. If you answered YES to the previous question, Do you consider that institution your friend?
- ○ Yes: Because

- ○ No: Because

Q18. If you do NOT consider your religious institution as a friend, do you wish that this institution would treat you as a friend?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Q19. What do you expect from an institution that invites you to be a friend on social media?

Q20. What do you think is your responsibility towards an institution that you accept as a friend on social media?

Q21. Please suggest at least ONE way that religious institutions can improve their friendship with people in our world today and help the world experience God as a friend.

- ☐ 1

- ☐ 2

- ☐ 3

Q22. What ONE word describes your Best Friend?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR GENEROUS PARTICIPATION.

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