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“The Bible in One Hand, The Smartphone in the Other:
The Great Commission in the Age of Social Media”

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Abstract:

An analysis of the benefits of social media to fulfilling the Great Commission in the 21st Century
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Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, most churches had not explored much less engaged social media as a tool to fulfill the Great Commission as found in Matthew 28. Instead, many ministers and churches viewed social media as an obstacle, or enemy to fulfilling the calling to discipleship of Jesus Christ. The Coronavirus changed everything. Churches were forced to shutter their services, launch online ministries, and re-evaluate their postures toward technology and social media. The following project will affirm the value of social media to fulfilling the Great Commission, utilize the Gospel of Matthew as a strategy for ministry in the age of social media, and suggest guidance for imagining and implementing digital discipleship in 21st Century churches.

***“The Bible in One Hand, the Smartphone in the Other:
The Great Commission in the Age of Social Media***

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The Swiss Theologian, Karl Barth, once said “The Pastor needs the Bible, on the one hand, and the newspaper on the other, in order to faithfully address the world that they serve.”¹ In Barth’s day, the newspaper was the primary means by which people stayed connected to the goings on of the world around them; his contention was that in order for a minister to stay connected to the people and vice versa, the minister must stay connected to the world. The newspaper was the means to accomplish that task in Barth’s day. Although Barth’s analysis of the interplay between minister and media is still germane, my position will be that social media is to the 21st Century what the newspaper was in Barth’s day. The current undertaking will affirm Barth’s plea and address his contention for our own time by arguing that the pastor needs to be similarly connected to social media in the 21st Century, in the way Barth encouraged connection to the newspaper in the 20th Century. The question I will seek to answer is “Why should ministers utilize social media as a tool to fulfill the Great Commission?”

The Great Commission, found in Matthew 28:16-20, has been used by Christians as a call to action since the apostolic age.² In my own tradition, The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) the Great Commission has not only been instrumental in shaping the modifier of our name, but it has been our clarion call to mission. One of the founders of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Alexander Campbell, found it particularly significant that in the book of Acts the noun, disciple, is used to describe Christians twenty-nine times, whereas the noun Christian is used only twice. In the Gospel of Matthew, where the Great Commission is found, the author uses the word *mathētai*, disciple(s), sixty-eight times.³ So, according to scripture, disciple is not only what we call ourselves, making them is what we are called to do to fulfill the

¹ Karl Barth, “Frequently Asked Questions” 6-12-2020 <https://barth.ptsem.edu/frequently-asked-questions/>

² All biblical references will come from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, unless explicitly stated.

³ Richard N. Longenecker, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 4.

missional command of Jesus Christ. We will proceed to answer the driving question of this project, therefore, by framing it against its objective, which is working to fulfill the Great Commission. And we will find that ministry in the age of social media necessitates working with the Bible in one hand and the smartphone in the other to fulfill our commission from Jesus.

“They Worshipped Him, But Some Doubted”

Christian leaders have been facing doubt from the very inception of the church. It should be of great consolation to those struggling with the Great Commission in the 21st Century, that even Jesus himself was not able to convince everyone of his message. Further, if M. Eugene Boring is correct, then the post-Easter church was not only born in the face of doubt, but Matthew anticipated doubt to be an existing element inherent to the church after the Great Commission.⁴ Today, the 21st Century Church is enduring as much doubt as it has faced in centuries. It is no secret that Christianity, especially Christianity in the United States is declining at a rapid pace. According to the most recent Pew Research Center statistics, the average number of adults who identify as Christian in the United States is down 12% in the last decade.⁵ The decline is especially prevalent within U.S. Protestantism with Protestant affiliation accounting for 10% of the 12% decline.⁶ The reality is that Christianity was born under scrutiny; it emerged from the underside of Judaism, which existed on the cultural margins of the Roman Empire, so swimming against the currents of the times is nothing new to disciples. What is of first importance for this exercise is to identify the contextual reality that today’s ministers are commissioned into, to name opportunities for disciple-making within that context, and then point to tools for ministers to use to help them fulfill that mission.

⁴ M. Eugene Boring, *Matthew in The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1995), 502.

⁵ <https://www.pewforum.org/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/>

⁶ Ibid.

The age of social media is coinciding with an era of church decline. Secularization is defined as “the historical process in which religion loses social and cultural significance.”⁷ In layman’s terms this means that religion is becoming an option culturally, rather than a priority. The latest exhaustive data from the Barna Group affirms a dramatic increase in secularization in the U.S. especially among Christians. After conducting almost 100,000 surveys over more than two decades, Barna concluded in their “State of the Church” report that the number of those who call themselves disciples, that is practicing Christians, has been cut in half since the year 2000.⁸ That the results of the “State of the Church” study were made public in March of 2020 is important because the COVID-19 pandemic was just beginning and we now know that the pandemic accelerated this rate of decline that Barna had already observed. According to a follow-up report, which tracked the impact of COVID-19 on church attendance, the Barna Group found that 32% or 1 in 3 Christians stopped attending church during the pandemic.⁹ What all this means is the rate of secularization is increasing as churches are bleeding disciples and closing their doors. However, with change comes great opportunity. After all, Jesus gave the Great Commission to 11 disciples who were already on the fringes of a secularized culture.

I would argue that this era of decline, coinciding with the age of social media, is to our advantage. We may be in Babylon, but at least it is a digital Babylon. As Mark Crosby observes, “We live in an age where communication, especially digital communications, are the dominant influence on both Christians and non-Christians alike.”¹⁰ Disciple-making involves communication. From preaching to teaching to gathering for mission, the gospel has always been

⁷ <http://sociology.emory.edu/home/documents/profiles-documents/lechner-secularization.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.barna.com/research/changing-state-of-the-church/>

⁹ <https://www.barna.com/research/new-sunday-morning-part-2/>

¹⁰ Mark Crosby, *So Everyone Can Hear: Communicating Church in a Digital Culture* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2019), 16.

spread through communication. Biblically it is plain to see that Matthew's Gospel is living proof of the importance of communication in every age. With 75% of all adults and 84% of adults aged 18-29 using social media, we should be ready to call social media the new Roman road.¹¹

The Roman roads in antiquity were the superhighways of their day, just as digital communication is the information superhighway of our day. Even a cursory study of the roads of antiquity will reveal striking similarities with the digital resources of the 21st Century. Richard Talbert identified several characteristics of the roads of the Roman Empire that are particularly useful to this project. Talbert claims that the Romans purposed their roads for: immense global reach, variety of use, openness to all, connectivity, and networking.¹² Ironically, or not, Roman roads served as essential tools for spreading the same gospel message that the Romans had hoped to suppress with the killing of Jesus. Because they were open to all, even those on the underside of culture, and because they enabled networking and global reach, the earliest disciples maximized these superhighways to their advantage in following the Great Commission. In his book, *The Great Digital Commission*, Caleb J. Lines rightly critiques the church for seeing social media as an impediment instead of the "greatest opportunity to fulfill the Great Commission that Christians have ever had available to them."¹³ Although I might walk back Lines' observation slightly, I would conclude that because the coming of secularization coincides with digital connectivity, social media presents an opportunity to spread the gospel not seen since the Great Commission was given by Jesus himself. So even as signs of decline abound, there is reason to have hope, because social media is today's roman road.

¹¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/04/07/social-media-use-in-2021/>

¹² Richard Talbert, *Roads in the Roman World: Strategy for the Way Forward in Roman Roads* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 22-29.

¹³ Caleb J. Lines, *The Great Digital Commission* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2021), 8.

All Authority Has Been Given

Unfortunately, navigating and using social media in the 21st Century to fulfill the Great Commission is fraught with as many dangers as the Roman road was in its day. Not least of these dangers is the threat to Jesus' authority in our contemporary culture. In his book, *Preaching at the Crossroads: How the World-and Our Preaching-is Changing*, David Lose names "three dominant changes that have shaped and continued to influence our culture and world over the last half century: postmodernism, secularism, and pluralism."¹⁴ Since, Lose's book was published in 2013 really on the cusp of social media beginning to become the dominant source of information and influence and because we have already covered the impact of secularism, I am going to utilize two of Lose's "isms" and add one of my own to his list as a way of teasing out the threat to Christian authority in the 21st Century. I will do this so that we might be aware of some of the dangers of navigating today's Roman road, social media. Then, I am going to conclude with a hopeful conviction that will perhaps guide travelers along the new roman road.

The first "ism" that poses a threat to Christian authority is postmodernism. Lose describes postmodernism as reactionary skepticism of all eternal truths.¹⁵ Postmodernism, to put it another way, seeks to move culture beyond modernism, which is the presupposition that there are eternal foundations and principles that one can turn to for determining truth, justice, right, and wrong. In layman's terms this means that the influence of postmodernism has planted seeds of skepticism in the minds of every audience that a Christian may encounter. To this we can add a growing mistrust of all media, to the threat posed by postmodernism, and we have a full-on assault to

¹⁴ David J. Lose, *Preaching at the Crossroads: How the World-and Our Preaching-is Changing* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

authority in our culture. The result is that practically all authority in our 21st Century culture has been deregulated, so the voice of Jesus as an authority is reduced to a voice among other voices. Nevertheless, the shift brought on by postmodernism offers an opportunity to shift one's approach toward navigating the new Roman road, which is a movement away from a traditional understanding of authority toward the authority of authenticity that we will turn to in my concluding remarks on this subject.

The second “ism” that poses a threat to Christian authority is one I call Neohumanism. Neohumanism is shaping and influencing our culture today and though related to the big three “isms” that Lose lists, neohumanism may pose the most pernicious challenge to the church yet. Classic humanism, born of the Renaissance, emphasizes human values, worth, and achievement based on Greek and Latin classics as well as modern scientific advancements.¹⁶ Today's neohumanism, unlike its predecessor, sometimes ignores scientific fact and classical reasoning for the individual's feelings of right/wrong and true/false. An individual's personal freedoms, beliefs, and even opinions can trump previously held authoritative sources. COVID-19 is teaching medical doctors the same frustrating lessons about our culture's relationship to neohumanism that has been taught to ministers for years, which is that we only have the authority that people give us. Social media picked up on the “I”dolatry of the current age and gave every neohumanist a platform that can deafen if not mute all other authorities. It is for this reason that in her book, *The Social Media Gospel*, Meredith Gould cautions Christians to be very strategic, when she says, “Social media is a tool that must be selected and used with purposeful forethought.”¹⁷ Sticking with the Roman road analogy, the first apostles did not just randomly

¹⁶ Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014).

¹⁷ Meredith Gould, *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing the Good News in New Ways* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2015), 40.

pick a road and take off, they planned, they prepared, and they proceeded with caution as they sought to follow the Great Commission.

The final “ism” to navigate as a threat to Christian authority in the age of social media is pluralism. Pluralism is defined as “diversities of thought, cultures, values, religions, etc., in a society.”¹⁸ For our purposes, pluralism claims many extant truths, whereas postmodernism denied the existence of truths. Further, pluralism supposes not only the existence of many truths but that they compete for primacy. Here, we find perhaps the most subtle if not the most challenging of all headwinds facing the authority of Jesus and our commission. In a pluralistic society, not unlike the culture facing those first disciples, Christianity does not enjoy the corner of the spiritual market; rather, in the 21st Century, Christianity is one worldview among many. Today’s minister will recognize pluralism when nationalism, political tribalism, materialism, ethnocentrism, etc. overtake Christian beliefs as the primary means of making sense of the world. David Lose takes pluralism in the 21st Century further by identifying the reality he calls “digital pluralism”. To paraphrase Lose, digital pluralism is access to competing realities, perspectives, convictions, and stories to the point our culture is super-saturated with information.¹⁹ This means as ministers seek to leverage social media as a tool to fulfill the Great Commission, or as I say use the Bible in one hand and the smart phone in the other, they must be aware that the gift of technology brings with it this great challenge.

The challenges of postmodernism, neohumanism, and pluralism to the authority of Jesus and His commission are real. Those we seek to reach, teach, and baptize are going to be more skeptical, more self-centered, and more inundated with information than perhaps ever before.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ David J. Lose, *Preaching at the Crossroads: How the World-and Our Preaching-is Changing* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 87.

Technology is advancing at an ever-quicken pace, whether we choose to embrace it or not. Conservatively, we could surmise that the average person in the United States is subjected to more information in a year than a person in 1st Century Palestine would be subjected to in her/his lifetime. In addition, the digitization of our culture is the biggest informational transformation that Christians have witnessed since Johannes Gutenberg sparked the revolution of printed information in the 15th Century. Considering that experts predict that by 2023 sixty percent of the world's population will be using digital media, and a staggering ninety-two percent in North America using digital media, the smart phone is here to stay.²⁰ For this author, the challenges to Jesus' authority and our shared commission bring with them great opportunity. As Jesus said to the first disciples, "The harvest is plentiful" (Mt. 9:37). The harvest is still plentiful today because of the pressures of postmodernism, neohumanism, and pluralism. If our ministry ends up bearing fruit, it will depend on the degree to which we ministers can embrace digital media in general and social media in particular as a tool to fulfill our commission.

Go Make Disciples of All Nations

The one imperative command in the Great Commission is to go make disciples of all nations. Baptizing and teaching, which we will soon discuss are subordinate clauses that help in the carrying out of the missional imperative. So, we must begin this portion of our discussion by recognizing that the discipling of all nations is an extension of the Matthean mission of discipling the "lost sheep of Israel" in chapter ten. What we will then discover is that the missiology of Matthew, which emphasizes seeking both "lost sheep" and new disciples is the approach needed for fulfilling the Great Commission today. Finally, we will conclude by

²⁰ See Cisco Corporation, *Annual Internet Report (2018-2023)*
<https://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/solutions/collateral/executive-perspectives/annual-internet-report/white-paper-c11-741490.html>

emphasizing that not since the beginning of Christianity has reaching all nations with the gospel been conceivable, until the 21st Century and the advent of social media. Simply put, having the Bible in one hand and the smart phone in the other gives us unprecedented means to fulfill Jesus' call to action in our age.

Scholars of the gospel of Matthew understand that the Great Commission is intimately connected to everything that preceded it in Matthew's writing. As Craig S. Keener points out, Matthew's closing must be read in light of the work that it is intended to climax, because the earliest audiences of Matthew would not have heard snippets, as we do today, but they would have heard the entire Gospel read from a scroll.²¹ This means that the first listeners of the Great Commission would have made connections with other parts of Matthew's gospel that today's hearers might miss. Particularly, most people miss that the Great Commission is an extension of Jesus' commissioning the disciples to the "lost sheep of Israel". (Mt. 10:1-15) Note, that both commissions have the same structure: 1. Gathering of disciples 2. Authority given 3. Imperative command 4. Subordinate directions 5. Assurances promised. That these two commissions are connected is an important point for 21st Century Christians to ponder. First, the connectiveness of the two commissions helps us avoid the trappings of supersessionist theology. Of utmost importance is to understand that the gentile mission was always meant to be complementary to God's mission for Israel, not to replace it. Secondly, that Christians are simultaneously called to seek lost sheep and new disciples is a perfect model for the contemporary church. Lastly, social media provides the tools for ministers to reach both the lost sheep and new disciples.

We have already established that there are many lost sheep in our culture, given the forces of postmodernism, neohumanism, and pluralism. In addition, there are "nations" of people

²¹ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 715-721.

who yearn for the way of life and blessing that Christian discipleship can provide.²² In our post-Christian context, the Great Commission is a calling of Jesus for us to make disciples of both non-Christians and lost Christians alike. Here I agree with Terence L. Donaldson when he says that Christians need to see the calling of Jesus as Matthew saw it, distinct, appealingly counter-cultural, making visible God's reign in the midst of every age.²³ One great gift of the social media age is that the times are particularly ripe for authentic counter-cultural community. If we can provide, promote, and produce such a community, then both the lost sheep and new disciples will be drawn to our ministry and we will be on our way to fulfilling the Great Commission.

Social media provides an even more powerful gift though and that is the ability to literally reach all nations. For the last decade and a half and for the first time in history Christians have access to all the world's people. According to the latest research, around seven-in-ten Americans use social media to connect with each other.²⁴ Some estimates say the same percentage of people will be connected through social media globally by the end of this decade. COVID-19 has only increased these trends. Churches have been forced to increase their social media presence during the pandemic. For instance, in the Kentucky region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) my denomination, less than 5% of all churches were streaming services on social media prior to March 2020.²⁵ To date, 90% of all churches offer online or hybrid-online services in the Kentucky Region.²⁶ That is a reversal of epic proportions brought about by necessity. Simply put, churches utilized the power of social media to stream their

²² In the Greek text the word "nations" is *ethnē*, which means all kinds of people. In Matthew the term "nations" would have meant non-Jews (Gentiles). For our purposes the insider/outsider language of Matthew is useful, because there are all kinds of people outside the Christian faith who yearn for life and blessing.

²³ Terence L. Donaldson, *Making Disciples: Discipleship in Matthew's Narrative Strategy in Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 48.

²⁴ <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/#how-often-americans-use-social-media-sites>

²⁵ Reverend Dr. Donald J. Gillette, *State of the Region of the Christian Church in Kentucky*, Interview, 2021.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

services to members, who were unable to attend services in person due to the pandemic, and in doing so realized the power of social media to extend their reach to the ends of the earth. And though there may be some detractors who say that online church is not the same as gathering in-person, most have found truth in Meredith Gould's claim that "online communities of faith are real to members who have come to rely on them for inspiration and support."²⁷ In my own community, First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Mt. Sterling, Kentucky, we have had members re-connect through our social media ministry who had been absent from our church for years, we have had seekers find us and attend in person as a result of our social media presence, and we have regular attenders of our services online in Mexico, Germany, and Israel. Very truly, social media provides the ability to reach lost sheep, new sheep, and even the ends of the earth.

Remembering that the commission to "Go make disciples of all nations" was an extension of an already active command of Jesus is important. Keeping in perspective that Matthew's commissioning was to both the lost sheep and new disciples provides us with a wider mission field in today's culture. It enables us to provide a counter-cultural community in the midst of the trappings of our contemporary world. And social media provides the power to reach the lost and the looking both near, far, and to every nation in the world.

Baptizing Them

The Greek word, βαπτίζω, *baptizō*, which we render baptize is the first of the subordinate participial clauses of the Great Commission. Baptism is the sacramental rite of initiation into the Christian faith. It means "to immerse, to dip, to bathe, and sometimes to overwhelm—as a flood."²⁸ However, immersion is not only the way one becomes a Christian, but also the way one

²⁷ Meredith Gould, *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing the Good News in New Ways* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2015), 30.

²⁸ Justo L. Gonzalez, *Essential Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 26.

journeys through life as a Christian. Christians are immersed into Christ even as they are immersed in the world. Thus, Jesus says in the missionary discourse, “Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” (Mt.10:39-40) What Jesus meant was that as his disciples are completely buried into the Christian identity, the world will count it as a loss or even death, but they will find life and incomparable gain. In addition, immersion into Christ means disciples literally carry the identity and authority of Christ wherever they go, just as Jesus has represented God in his own ministry.²⁹ It should not go unnoticed to the critical reader that Jesus’ other-worldly identity is revealed upon baptism. (Mt. 3:16-17) This dichotomy of being simultaneously in the world but somehow just beyond it is not only prevalent in Matthew and the synoptic gospels but is also picked up as a theme in the Gospel of John, and in the extreme 2nd Century Gnosticism.

For our purposes, this Matthean dichotomy and language of baptism is not only useful for understanding Christian identity, but it aids us in our investigation of using social media as a resource for disciple-making. With our focus on baptism, I will now make three fundamental claims about baptism in the age of social media: First, baptism is an essential identity ritual for Christians, so the practice must be maintained to fulfill the Great Commission; Second, baptism is an outward sign of an inward grace, so it is possible to baptize remotely in making digital disciples; third, baptism is the entry point of discipleship not the destination, so merely baptizing fulfills only half of the supporting commands of the Great Commission. In my estimation, the degree to which ministers and churches can integrate traditional practices, such as baptism, with

²⁹ M. Eugene Boring, *Matthew in The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1995), 263.

non-traditional methods will determine the success and sustainability of using social media as a tool to fulfill the Great Commission.

The first thing to recognize when ministering in the age of social media is that baptism is essential. Let Christians not forget that when John, who had been practicing baptism as an essential ritual, tried to forgo it, Jesus told him that it was necessary to fulfill all righteousness (Mt. 3:13-15). That term “righteousness” is a favorite term of Matthew and one that means “right conduct, correct observance, and according to God’s will.”³⁰ Paraphrasing Jesus, we should baptize disciples because it is the right thing to do. Yet, it is equally important to recognize that Jesus himself was baptized. In baptism, we find a spiritual dichotomy occurring where Christians are literally immersed in water and simultaneously immersed into Christ. As we have seen becoming a disciple of Jesus is not only what we do as Christians, it is who we are as Christians. That disciples are at the same time in the flesh and yet their fleshly existence is overcome by Christ is an essential mark of baptism. Likewise, Jesus freely participated in this dichotomy. In baptism, the human Jesus took on “Christ”; that is he took on his other-worldly identity and became the paradigmatic human for every disciple to follow. Little wonder Mark begins his gospel with the baptism of Jesus and all others include it in their narratives, because it is literally the birth of the “Christ” and for all subsequent followers, new birth in Christ. Therefore, baptism is an essential practice to continue in the social media age and beyond to the end of the age.

The second claim that needs to be made regarding the ministry of baptism in the age of social media is that it is possible and necessary for digital disciples to be baptized. Let me state plainly that this method of baptism should be used as an augmentation of the traditional ministry

³⁰ Dennis C. Duling, *NRSV Harper Collins Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 1671.

of in-person baptism not a replacement or substitute.³¹ Here, we should say again that the rite is the sacrament, not the method. As Augustine articulated in his refutation of the Donatists, “All men possess baptism who have received it in any place, from any sort of man, just so long as it was consecrated with the words of the Gospel and was received by them without deceit and with some degree of faith.”³² Taken further we can say that however a disciple is baptized, Christ alone presides. Therefore, all that is necessary for proper Christian baptism is water, witnesses, and the word of God. None of these things are limited by making disciples digitally. Baptized Christians are currently joining churches digitally in the age of social media, so there is no reason that, in certain circumstances, new believers cannot be baptized online as well.³³

Having established that baptism is necessary and possible to do using social media as a tool to fulfill the Great Commission, let us conclude this matter by reemphasizing that baptism is the beginning, not the conclusion, of a life of discipleship. Any commitment to reaching the ends of the earth for the gospel through technology should carry with it a complimentary commitment to maintaining and deepening relationships with digital disciples. Christians in every age have used technology to form connections with each other. From the authors of the epistles, who used scribes and couriers to continue contact with distant disciples, to today’s mega churches who utilize multi-site campuses through virtual preaching and programming, technology has always been utilized by Christians. However, making disciples and maintaining them are two different parts of the same whole. As John Wesley once said, as he was helping change the church through

³¹ The analogy most appropriate here is practicing hospital bed baptisms. In my tradition we practice believer’s baptism by immersion as our traditional method of baptizing disciples of Jesus. However, in extreme circumstances and upon the request of a new believer, many Disciples of Christ pastors baptize by sprinkling and pouring in the hospital bed of the sick and dying. This is an example of adapting of practice to fulfill an essential aspect of faith.

³² Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 311.

³³ First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Mt. Sterling, Kentucky has had 18 people claim membership on our Facebook Live stream since March 2020.

the innovation of open-air preaching, “awakening people through field preaching and not connecting them to a discipleship process was ‘begetting children for the slaughter.’”³⁴ The way we avoid sending digital disciples to the slaughter should follow the pattern of Jesus as found in the scriptures: connect (social ministry); call into a common community (virtual church); communicate the faith (teach); and commission them (duplicate digital disciples). Tried-and-true methods of bringing people into a relationship with Jesus and each other still work here. Such as virtual small groups, online bible studies, streaming membership classes, church-wide challenges even remote participation in worship is possible by engaging the new technology of the social media age. According to the latest gleanings from practitioners in the field, “Emerging generations are digital natives and the technosphere is a foreign mission field.”³⁵ Though this statement makes many of us digital immigrants, our calling to the Great Commission is the same, to baptize and make disciples to the end of the age, in every age. We should use everything at our disposal, including technology and social media to fulfill it.

Teaching Them

Teach, διδάσκω, *didaskō*, is the second of the subordinate participial clauses of the Great Commission. Disciple, which can be translated from the Greek as “learner” or “pupil” is directly related to this command to teach. Walter T. Wilson notes, “the teaching of Jesus would have not only fostered group cohesion, but also served as a marker of group identity.”³⁶ This means teaching is not only a command of Jesus to his disciples, but it makes them who they are. As we have learned about baptism, now teaching the obedience and commands of Jesus is an essential

³⁴ John Wesley, *Journal Entry* dated August 25, 1763.

³⁵ Michael Adam Beck and Rosario Picardo, *Fresh Expressions in a Digital Age: How the Church Can Prepare for a Post-Pandemic World* (Nashville: Abington Press E-Book, 2021), 85.

³⁶ Walter T. Wilson, *Healing In the Gospel of Matthew: Reflections On Method and Ministry* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 4.

task of fulfilling the Great Commission. Accordingly, we will now investigate what disciples of Jesus are to teach and conclude with a word about how technology can be used as a tool for Christian teaching in the age of social media.

As we have just learned, teaching is not only a command within the Great Commission but teaching also defines our identities as disciples of Jesus. Now, to follow our commission, we must establish what it is Christians are supposed to teach. Terence L. Donaldson identifies the five great discourses of Matthew (chs. 5:3-7:27; 10:5-42; 13:3-52; 18:1-35; 23:2-25:46) as the most obvious direct teachings of Jesus in the gospel.³⁷ The first of these teachings, “The Sermon on the Mount” (chs. 5:3-7:27) is the best known and most often recited of all Jesus’ lessons. The timeless reach of the Sermon on the Mount cannot be overstated. It was the great John Chrysostom who noted that through his teaching “He (Jesus) is discoursing not with them (the disciples) only, but also, through them, with all the world.”³⁸ This first teaching is what we will call the ethics and righteousness of Jesus. To fulfill the great commission Christians must teach the ethics and righteousness of Jesus to all the world.

The second of the five great discourses Matthew (10:5-42) is what is known as the missionary discourse. Eugene Boring summarizes the missionary discourse best when he says, “Here Matthew reveals what the Christian life essentially is: confession of Jesus, living with a concern for mission in this world, letting go of both material possessions and fear of what others might think about us or do to us, placing loyalty to God revealed in Christ above all other loyalties, and a deep trust in God and God’s future.”³⁹ Like Chrysostom before us, we must see

³⁷ Terence L. Donaldson, *Making Disciples: Discipleship in Matthew’s Narrative Strategy in Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 42.

³⁸ John Chrysostom, in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew Vol. 10*, (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), 91.

³⁹ M. Eugene Boring, *Matthew in The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1995), 263.

this lesson on mission-mindedness as not only a lesson for those original apostles, but we should see all contemporary disciples of Jesus as apostles so that the teaching applies today as well.

The third discourse (Mt. 13:3-52) are lessons hidden in parables. Jesus taught in parables, by his own admission, to separate those who will listen and learn from those who do not listen and/or fail to learn from him (Mt. 13:11). For this reason, Matthew begins his teachings with parables of sowing and the presence of weeds and even explains that the seeds are the word of God (being fulfilled by Jesus) which will face opposition and competition. Disciples of Jesus, therefore, are good soil and wheat (13:37-38) that must exist amid opposition and competition (13:38-39) and endure by clinging to their identities as students of the Master Teacher until the final grades are tallied (13:40). Parables, like difficult math, or any complicated problem will either draw you in, or cause you to walk away. Thus, the parables, among other things would establish followers of Jesus as prized students and reveal their privileged position in the kingdom. Since Matthew makes clear that he wants his readers to become disciples and prized students of Jesus, the parables are Jesus' way of challenging students in every age. These parables are extremely relevant in the social media age. The analogy of spreading seeds is rich for today's Christian that can cast them far and wide with the click of a button. Moreover, becoming countercultural by using the ethics of Jesus on social media, a space full of weeds, is an opportunity for Christians to show off their treasures, pearls, and even cast their nets to contribute to the eschatological catch (13:44-53).

The fourth of the great discourses (Mt.18:1-35) is perhaps the most pivotal; it is Jesus' teaching on community cohesion. The lesson begins with the disciples asking, "who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" This, for Matthew, is not a one-off question, but rather a key for disciples then and now to understanding what Jesus meant by teaching Christian obedience.

The word “kingdom” *basileia*, is purposed by Matthew to expose contrasting allegiances between Jesus’ reign as your king and being subject to the reign of earthly kings. Latin church architects would call churches, basilicas, in other words royal palaces of the true King. As we will see, subjecting oneself to the sovereignty of Jesus diverges sharply with subjection to human authorities. So, entering the kingdom of heaven for Matthew was not so much something that you do as it is something that you choose, which is accepting Jesus’ identity as the only way to identify with the world. Put differently, becoming humble (18:4) resisting temptation (18:6-9) having a missionary-mindset (18:10-14) offering abundant forgiveness (18:15-35) are not just teachings, they are evidences that those who call themselves disciples are participating in his reign. That Jesus encourages forgiveness the same number of times (seventy-seven) as Matthew mentions Jesus’ kingdom is quite telling in this regard. Disciples of Jesus should do these things as often as their king. It is not difficult to see how each of these lessons (humility, resisting temptation, seeking the lost, forgiveness) translates to our use of social media and can be used as to demonstrate that Jesus reigns in our life over and against earthy competitors for authority.

The last of the five great discourses that make up the core of what disciples are to learn and teach is found in Mt. 24-25. These lessons are Matthean expansions of what is known from the gospel of Mark as “the little apocalypse”; this discourse is purposed to prepare disciples to meet a future apocalyptic event with preparedness for temporal destruction, suffering of the faithful, and knowledge of the return of the eschatological Son of Man.⁴⁰ Matthew takes Mark’s gospel as a source, combines it with other source material and brings it to a climax with his own eschatological discourse material. The point of all this, I think, is for Matthew to drive home what disciples can expect to control, what disciples can expect to be out of their control, and

⁴⁰ M. Eugene Boring, *Matthew in The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1995), 441.

what they can expect Jesus to control. To begin with, disciples do not control the timeline (24:36); disciples do not control their own fates and what will happen to them (24:9) and disciples certainly do not control others (24:10-12). However, disciples do control their “endurance” which is the ability to resist temptation in every age; disciples do control their ability to see the changing of the seasons (24:32-35); and disciples do control their ability to stay awake, which is a metaphor for watching with privileged knowledge (24:42-43). Lastly, from the final three apocalyptic parables, disciples of Jesus can expect him to control who enters his kingdom, who is rewarded in his reign, and who will be punished. If COVID-19 has taught us nothing else, it has taught us that we have very little control over our world, other people, and the outcomes before us. Nevertheless, we can avoid temptations, endure during a season of fake and false, and we can turn to what we have learned from Jesus as our guide for endurance and showing others the way.

One of the ways that 21st Century disciples can do things differently is through our use of social media and technology. COVID-19 has shown us the power of using social media and technology as a tool when many Christians were forced to use it. Now, instead of longing to go back to “normal” and the way things were, we should maximize our use of technology as a tool for fulfilling the Great Commission. Social media and technology are not enemies of God. As Karl Barth once said, “God can speak through whatever means God wants to use, even a dead dog.”⁴¹ So then, we should use social media and technology to its greatest potential to the glory of God. One of the best ways to do that is to use technology to teach. We can fulfill the Great Commission in the social media age by teaching others incarnationally, didactically, and triunely.

⁴¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics Volume 1* (New York: T&T Clark Publishers, 2009), 60.

“But Pastor, how can we use a tool (social media) that is so divisive to accomplish Jesus’ mission of unity?”⁴² The question asked by this faithful deacon after a church board meeting in which over thirteen thousand dollars had been apportioned to upgrade our audio visual equipment and improve our social media ministry is one that most of us have wrestled with at one time or another over the past two years. Ed had joined Facebook in April of 2020, one month after our church shuttered in-person services and launched our online ministry. Ed, a retired schoolteacher, who by his own admission was “tech-challenged” had joined Facebook strictly to stay connected with our church and to watch worship on our live stream. However, given that 2020 was a presidential election year and that he explored Facebook on more days than Sunday, Ed quickly learned that social media was like most other things in our broken world, imperfect. As, I looked across my cup of coffee into Ed’s awaiting eyes, I responded to his question with a question of my own, “Is social media itself divisive, or is social media being used by divisive people?” And if the answer to my question to Ed is the later, would it not then also hold true that social media could be used with equal effectiveness to unite people? So, it is not social media that is the problem, it is how we use social media that matters. Here, an incarnational approach to teaching and social media is what I have learned over the past two years and now advocate.

A person or institution’s activity on social media is known as their social media presence. Theologically, the incarnation of the Christ in our world is known as Jesus’ presence. For our purposes at my church, when it comes to utilizing technology to make disciples, we teach an incarnational approach to digital ministry. Thus, to answer Ed’s question, we advocate that Christians should use social media incarnationally to avoid the trappings of division. This approach fleshes itself out in three essential movements: First, there is a missional movement,

⁴² Ed Sewell, *Technology and the Church* (Mount Sterling: First Christian Church, 2021), Interview.

which means the user must recognize, as a Christian, that she is taking the presence of Christ into her virtual world, that her audience is her mission field, and they can only see the presence of Jesus inasmuch as they see Jesus in her. Second, there is an ecclesial movement, which means the church must recognize as a sacred community a call to take the presence of Christ beyond its walls, to the point that the online gathering becomes itself a little church. Or as Thomas Merton put it, “To go beyond ourselves is just to find the inner ground of our being is without frontier.”⁴³ Which means, when we seek to expand the presence of Christ into the new frontier of a technological world, we will find Christ’s presence waiting to greet us. Third, there is a sacramental movement. At our church, we partake of the Lord’s Supper every time we gather. This is a sacrament of Christ, or his fleshly presence, as Luther called it, and is traditionally considered by the church to be a means of grace. Unless we intend to limit God’s grace in Jesus, then sharing sacraments virtually is yet another opportunity to connect others to Christ in a powerful way.

In practice, we utilize a technological tool like social media as a tool to fulfill the Great Commission. Thinking incarnationally, helps our congregation avoid taking the body of Christ into the comment boxes of controversial posts, tweets, and discussions, while at the same time it allows them the freedom to leverage the power of social media to evangelize and unite, instead of to polarize and divide. We have witnessed unity through online ministry, with people of various church backgrounds, political persuasions, and socio-economic positions coming together for worship, outreach projects, and Christian education. For example, when George Floyd was killed in the spring of 2020, our nation, churches, and communities were reeling from the feeling of exasperation. Our church used social media as a tool for lament, as an apparatus to

⁴³ Thomas Merton, *In My Own Words* (Liguori: The Merton Institute for Contemplative Writing, 2007), 96.

mobilize, and the means to spread a message of unity. I not only preached sermons about race after George Floyd's death, but we also used our church social media pages to solicit participants for solidarity marches. Importantly, because our "congregation" is now made up of people of various backgrounds from all over the world, we encouraged them to march where they lived as an act of church solidarity. This example illustrates that our incarnational approach to engaging social media is transcending the divisive potentialities.

A second approach to teaching in the social media age that we implement at my church is that we do it didactically. To most people the phrase didactic teaching may seem redundant, but when you consider that social media, since its inception, has been used primarily for entertainment, that term makes sense. To use social media didactically means that there is intentionality when considering healthy boundaries for our users, ethical standards for our community, and a spiritual emphasis to our online activities. An example of healthy boundaries is that we periodically encourage church-wide fasting of social media (except on Sundays) and screen-time sabbaticals. The goal is to encourage a healthy balance between social media use and social media abuse. Regarding a didactical approach to ethical standards, I preach sermons about digital consequence, we write blogs and newsletter articles about using media morally, and our student ministry emphasizes making good choices while online. Finally, we focus on spirituality in our didactical approach to social media. For example, this year during Lent there are twenty-eight weekdays between Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday. There are also twenty-eight chapters in the Gospel of Matthew. Therefore, we started a church-wide Lenten Gospel Challenge inclusive of our online church community. The way it works is that we use social media to promote the challenge, to provoke people to read (we even post links to our website where one of our pastors reads the chapter of the day) and we will use social media to celebrate on Palm

Sunday as those who complete the challenge will wave palm branches of victory in the sanctuary, while those who have completed the challenge online will wave palm emojis (hands) to celebrate as a church family. Clearly without the benefits of social media our spiritual reach would not be as great as it is today. Nor would our online ministry be as effective without approaching social media ministry didactically.

Stanley J. Grenz once raised this important existential question, “How is it that I am a Christian? And why was I privileged to hear the gospel message and to respond to it, when so many others have not?”⁴⁴ Before reading those words, I had not ever considered hearing the gospel message to be a privilege. But it really is! COVID-19 among other things magnified the disparity that exists in our world in terms of access to new technologies. Given that the thesis of this project is concerned with utilizing technology, Grenz query should give us pause. Simply put, technology and access to it is a privilege. There are many people and churches, who have not been able to embrace technology during the COVID-19 pandemic because they do not possess the technology or live in areas where internet access is limited. Therefore, a final corrective at our church was implemented in our efforts to fulfill the Great Commission in the age of social media, a corrective that I now call ministering triunely.

The Gospel of Matthew is the first book in the New Testament canon to reference a triune formula.⁴⁵ For me and my teaching the trinity provides the perfect corrective to Christian privilege. The Nicene Creed declares Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be *homoousious*, or of equal stuff. In applying this to ministry, I take this to mean that the God who is revealed in three equal persons is made manifest in a community of equality. Therefore, any ministry that utilizes

⁴⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Boardman & Holman, 1994), 450.

⁴⁵ This author will accept Matthew 28:19 as part of the original letter, despite acknowledgement of scholarly debate on the subject. Whether or not a trinitarian formula was part of the baptism rituals for the Matthean community, does not detract from the point I am trying to make in using it.

technology, must do so with equality as its mission. Practically this means three things: the church must seek technological justice; diversity must be a value; and the church must be willing to lose its life to save it (Mt. 16:25). The pandemic forced my church to engage triunely.

Our triune approach to fulfilling the Great Commission began by seeking technological justice. When COVID-19 hit the United States in 2020, our church was ill-prepared; we literally had the Bible in one hand and a smart phone in the other. Yet, we quickly realized that we were more privileged than others. One of the first things we did to help our community catch up was to provide a free internet hotspot on our property, so that those who needed internet access during the pandemic would have it. The next thing we did was to donate used computers, so that they could be refurbished to provide basic internet access to people who did not own computers. Third, we incorporated what I would best describe as radical ecumenism; that is, we suspended most of our ritualistic traditions, pared down our services to make them accessible to people of all walks of life, and intentionally sought out lost sheep who had either drifted away from church before the pandemic, or who had never gone before the pandemic. We made every decision with diversity in mind from music to message. Lastly, we understood that to not just to survive, but thrive, we needed to become something new. The opportunity to reach people who were different than us took courage on the part of the church. Many people who returned to in-person church after the church had been shut down said they did not recognize it. Yet, at the very same time the face of the congregation was changing, both in the church and online. I would be dishonest if I said no one was grieving over the church changing. In fact, they still are grieving. However, we all see new faces both in the church and online, and this makes us realize that we are reaching out with the heart of Christ in a way that we had never been able to do before and we can see life at the end of the tunnel.

With You Always To the End of the Age

My journey with this project began in late November 2019. Little did I know that three months later the congregation that I serve and the world around me would become a working lab for my project. The COVID-19 pandemic ushered in many changes for our world and the people in it because of this historic event. I would argue that churches in the United States are navigating the biggest watershed moment in Christian history since the Puritans set sail for North America and much of that change relates to use of technology, but that is for another paper. For now, it is enough to provide a few observations, if not exhortations, about putting the theories of having the smartphone in one hand and the Bible in the other into practice.

First, preachers, teachers, and those who seek to spread the gospel need to be mindful that social media and technology in the 21st Century has dramatically shortened attention spans. According to Teresa Fry Brown, today's "Sermons need be no longer than a TED talk."⁴⁶ Although the Baby-Boomer generation, who were the first to grow up with television, were accustomed to watching hour-long programs, and Gen Xers and Ys we might label the sit-com generation had thirty minute attention spans, and Millennials shortened it to the TED talk timespan of fifteen to twenty minutes, I would argue that Gen Zers and beyond are yielding the shortest attention spans in history. Today's youth are tomorrow's church goers and these folks are immersed in TikTok culture where a video clip is ten to fifteen seconds long and a one minute long message seems like an eternity. According to one teen in my church, a sermon that lasts over ten minutes is way too long.⁴⁷ Brevity is not only important to this individual teen, but also to my congregation, considering that "more than fifteen minutes" was the most popular

⁴⁶ Teresa Fry Brown, *Future of Preaching* (Atlanta: Candler School of Theology, 2021), Lecture.

⁴⁷ Laney Miles, *Why Church Matters* (Mount Sterling: First Christian Church, 2020), Interview.

answer when they were asked the question, “How long is too long for a sermon.”⁴⁸ The takeaway is that preachers today who apply Dr. Fry Brown’s TED talk approach, need to be ready to adapt sermon length to TikTok Christians, who are being raised in their pews. I have been focusing on sermon length over the past two years and although I am not quite ready to reach TikTok Christians, I am coming much closer to ministering to TED talk Christians.

Secondly, sermon series and four-to-six-week lessons are more popular in 21st Century church culture than lectionary preaching, preacher’s choice preaching, and studying entire books of the Bible. We live in a world where streaming television programming from your smartphone and binging on trending series are the norm for Christians. Even social media has picked up on this trend by allowing users to post “stories” to their feeds and sequence their sharing in a way that it is easier for their followers to follow.⁴⁹ Although lectionaries follow sequence, because the sequence is based on annual cycles and too long for the average parishioner to wrap their head around, if lectionary preachers are not creative with sermon titles and chunking portions of the lectionary into coherent mini-cycles, they will be fighting an uphill battle to reach today’s listener. Consider, in my congregation the most memorable sermons of 2021 came out of two series, a series on the 7 Deadly Sins and a series called *Update Your Faith*; these sermons were more memorable than both the Easter and Christmas Eve sermons.⁵⁰ Data collected from online services support the interviewees feedback. The number of “views” of services were 62% higher during sermon series that were streamed online, than sermons that were lectionary oriented.⁵¹ My

⁴⁸ See appendix for statistics from the referenced electronic poll conducted on my congregation relating to trends among today’s Christians.

⁴⁹ A story is a post or multiple posts on social media that usually are threaded in a way that the viewer can follow a sequence of pictures, text, and other media that points to a collective experience.

⁵⁰ This feedback is based on interviews conducted with eight demographically diverse church members titled, *Why Church Matters*.

⁵¹ First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Mt. Sterling, Kentucky uses the lectionary during the seasons of Lent, Advent, Easter, and Christmas, and uses series and preacher’s choice all other seasons.

observation in the lab that COVID-19 has provided is that streaming series and bingeing increased during the pandemic, which in turn affected viewing patterns and habits of Christians. The result is that ministers must be more intentional about what we call in the secular world, marketing, and what we call in the church, evangelism. To be faithful to the Great Commission ministers cannot ignore the influence that culture has on potential and existing disciples, just as we cannot fail to equip disciples to influence that same culture with their Christian beliefs and actions.

The third exhortation that I would make regarding implementation of the theories of this project is to not cut off one hand despite the other. Preaching with the Bible in one hand and the smart phone in the other is meant to be a supplemental, not substitutional, method. This means that Christians cannot lean so heavily on the smart phone that others fail to see that we follow Jesus Christ. The Bible must always remain firmly in the one hand for several reasons: foremost, any authority that disciples of Jesus possess to teach, preach, evangelize is bound up in the authority of Jesus as revealed in the witness of scripture (Mt. 28:18); additionally, in the post-Christian culture of the 21st Century, biblical illiteracy is on the rise, which means great opportunity for disciples of Jesus to teach stories that have stood the test of time; and finally, fulfilling the Great Commission means distinctive obedience to everything Jesus commanded and the commands of Jesus, for Matthew, are found within the testimony of his gospel. Simply put, Christians cannot follow, much less fulfill, the Great Commission without the Bible in one hand.

Lastly, electronic communion is not a replacement for authentic Christian community. Social media is purposed to foster human connections and networks of users. Social media is social by name for a reason. So too, is Christianity. In fact, as one scholar put it, the Great Commission was a call for the first disciples of Jesus to replicate themselves into a community of

salvation.⁵² Christianity was from its inception, like social medial, community-minded. Moreover, one could make the argument that Jesus' understanding of what he was creating was a family (Mt. 12:46-50). Importantly, online communion is not a replacement for offline connection, but is a supplement to Christian ministry and a faithful tool to follow the Great Commission. As Luke Powery so aptly put it, "At its heart, the Christian ministry is enfleshed, incarnational."⁵³ So, the challenge that comes with having the ability to literally reach all nations in the palm of our hands is creating Christian communities of fellowship where our connections go further than a space we occupy together on the internet. Here, being reminded that Jesus' call to "Go" in the Great Commission still means enfleshed and in-person ministry, as well as virtual online ministry. Ministers of the social media age will need to help others find balance between digital discipleship and in-person ministry.

Allow me to share one more story that will illustrate what this project has been pointing to better than anything else. A colleague of mine is getting ready to help his church celebrate 150 years of ministry. As part of the festivities, they were putting together a digital scrapbook of milestone moments for his church. In doing research through the church archives my friend found out something about his church that he did not know. Apparently in 1906 there was a great church fight and the congregation was at the point of schism. The main point of disagreement for the church was technology. Evidentially in 1906 writing a check for an offering was a controversial issue. My colleague even found a letter from a particularly upset member who made a very compelling case against this new technology saying, "We should not allow others to write an 'I owe you' to God." The moral to this story is today's controversial technology will

⁵² Terence L. Donaldson, *Making Disciples: Discipleship in Matthew's Narrative Strategy in Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 40.

⁵³ Luke A. Powery, *Preaching and Technology in Ways of the Word: Learning to Preach for Your Time and Place* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 215.

become tomorrow's common practice. I am convinced that someone who reads this paper 150 years from now will be amazed that exhorting Christians to embrace social media and technology as a tool to fulfill the Great Commission was even worthy of a doctoral project.

In the final analysis, the smartphone is to today's Christian minister what the newspaper was in Barth's time. Simply put, pastors must work with the Bible in one hand and the smartphone in the other to fulfill the Great Commission in the 21st Century context. By using social media and contemporary technology, pastors can continue the ancient tradition of baptism in new and exciting ways, ministers can teach and apply essential tenants of the faith to digital disciples, and Christians can literally reach the ends of the earth. I began this investigation by seeking to answer the question, "Why should ministers utilize social media as a tool to fulfill the Great Commission?" I am now convinced that it should be more difficult to argue that ministers should not use social media than this present exercise. There is a tale about a flood and a man who was driven to his roof by floodwaters. When his neighbor comes by in a boat to help him, the man refuses to get on board and says, "God will provide." The water gets a little higher and the man is clinging to his chimney, when a helicopter comes by and drops him a rope, imploring the man to climb aboard, but the man refuses saying, "God will provide." Finally, the water overtakes the man, he dies, and he stands before St. Peter complaining, "I thought the Bible taught God will provide!" To the man's complaints, a voice from beyond the pearly gates responds, "I sent you a boat and I sent you a helicopter, what more did you want me to provide?" When churches die because of rising 21st Century flood waters and ministers who refused to embrace change stand before God someday complaining that there was a lack of an opportunity to fulfill the Great Commission during our day, God will likely respond, "I sent you the internet, and I gave you the smartphone, what more of an opportunity did you need? I have argued that

we should use every resource that God has provided to answer the call of the Great Commission, including social media. Moreover, I have implemented my research at my current church, and it is bearing fruit. In the end, history and God will judge whether I am right or wrong on this matter. Nevertheless, I will stand before God knowing that I tried everything at my disposal to follow the Great Commission. I pray that today's Christians will do the same.

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