

“This honest book is invaluable for worship planners who desire to develop a common vocabulary allowing them to investigate the perils and possibilities of using media art in the worship of their faith community. Dr. Crowley convinced me to keep reading when she wrote, ‘. . . the use of media [in worship] can be suspect when media draws disproportionate attention to the worshipers, the performers, or the art, rather than to the holy One who is the Creator and to God’s creation-in-need’ and ‘people should be the starting point, not technology.’”

Scott Weidler
Associate Director for Worship & Music
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

“Crowley provides a practical, clearly written resource for worship leaders now studying, or already embracing, the use of electronic and digital multimedia resources in preaching and liturgy. Her book is an affirmation and celebration of new forms of liturgical media art now made possible with inexpensive and widely available new media technology, while offering clear evaluative frameworks to guide worship leaders and teams in their creative and collaborative work.

“After providing a common vocabulary sure to help practitioners understand and talk about the nature of their work clearly, Crowley then moves us into a balanced discussion about the theological and artistic challenges and opportunities in today’s digital communication milieu, looking to the guidance of past and present Catholic and Protestant discussion and practice, as well as current new media theory. This book is a must-read for clergy and laity considering or already developing locally produced liturgical media art.”

Michael Bausch
author of *Silver Screen, Sacred Story*:
Using Multimedia in Worship (The Alban Institute, 2002)
and director of www.worshipmedia.com

“The emergence of new artistic forms in liturgy offers us the opportunity not only to explore new territory but also to test the criteria by which we judge all art forms. The accessibility of this volume promises to stimulate instructive discussions of these criteria in local worshipping communities, as well as to help local artists of all kinds imagine new ways that they can contribute to vital, faithful worship. The best local discussions of this topic should follow Eileen Crowley’s own approach of drawing on liturgical, theological, and technical expertise.”

John D. Witvliet
Calvin Institute of Christian Worship
Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary
Grand Rapids, Michigan

“This little book is a masterful introduction to media in worship, its historical and cultural context, and its possibilities and perils. Drawing on her professional experience as media producer and liturgist, Eileen Crowley lays out four very helpful frameworks for discerning whether, how, and what media to incorporate in worship, and she proposes a community-based model for developing such media. Her primary concern throughout is for the liturgy itself and for the people who celebrate it. No matter where one stands on media in worship—practitioner, opponent, or undecided—Crowley has provided a timely and much needed reflective guide that will surely advance both discussion and liturgical practice. A must-read for thinking about liturgical art in a media culture!”

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Liturgical Art for a Media Culture

Eileen D. Crowley



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Introduction

Media and Worship in Today's Media Cultures

Nearly three decades after the bishops of the Second Vatican Council released their Decree on the Means of Social Communications (*Inter Mirifica*, 1963)—a document that referred to media as “marvellous technical inventions”¹—the Pontifical Council on Social Communication published a pastoral letter about insights since gained. This pastoral letter proclaimed the end of the twentieth century to be the Dawn of a New Era (*Aetatis Novae*, 1992) in the church’s relationship with media arts and technologies, and with those who produce, use, and encounter them:

Today, much that men and women know and think about is conditioned by the media; to a considerable extent, human experience itself is an experience of media. . . . The use of new media gives rise to what some speak of as “new languages” and has given birth to new possibilities for the mission of the Church as well as to new pastoral problems.²

Projected photographs, computer graphics, feature film clips, video stories, animation, and combinations of these are among the “new media” that have entered Christian worship. These media truly do present new opportunities, as well as new “pastoral problems.” During the last three decades, and since the 1990s in particular, churches Protestant and Catholic have taken up the challenge of how to use this “new language” in their praise and thanks, as well as in their confession, supplication, and lamentation.

Media technologies, “both mass and interpersonal, are deeply embedded in our lives,” notes media scholar Michael A. Real. In what he calls this “media culture,” these technologies “interact abundantly with each other.”³ Media culture flourishes in homes, schools, and workplaces, as well as in commercial, institutional, and public spaces. That media technologies have increasingly entered Christian worship spaces, then, is no surprise: Worshipers naturally swim in the media culture ocean that is their everyday habitat.

Historically speaking, the recent incorporation of media can be seen in continuity with the centuries-long pattern of Christians appropriating the aural and visual media of their day for the glory of God and for the spiritual benefit and uplifting of the assembled faithful. To see better the correlation and connections over time, one need only take a slightly different perspective and view worship itself as a complex, multifaceted communal performance. Before any of today’s new media enters a sanctuary or church auditorium, worship is already a multi-sensory, multi-art, multimedia event. Over the centuries worship has involved, to one degree or another, ritual speech, music, visual arts, lighting, dress, movement, gestures, posture, tastes, and fragrances. Adding today’s new media to these old media does not make worship multimedia. Liturgy has always been multimedia.⁴

Typically, the introduction of new media into worship over the last century has been for the sake of better communications, evangelism, or increased congregational participation, not for the creation of liturgical art. Robb Redman points to media’s supporting role in what he calls The Great Worship Awakening of the second half of the twentieth century. He traces the origins of the Great Worship Awakening to major movements in Christian worship: the praise and worship movement begun in the 1950s, the ecumenical liturgical renewal movement with official major worship reforms starting in the 1960s, and the seeker service movement inaugurated in the late 1970s. He suggests the development of the contemporary worship music industry as another major contributor to this Awakening. Since the 1950s, it is important to note, the introduction of these new forms of worship and new kinds of worship music have gone hand-in-hand with the employment of new forms of media technologies and arts as churches have sought ways to revitalize their worship.⁵ Since the 1970s in particular, media technologies and new media have gradually become

an integral, even an expected element of worship in many non-denominational and denominational churches. For a still relatively small but growing number of faith communities in diverse places around the world—Australia, Brazil, Canada, Dominican Republic, England, Germany, Indonesia, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, the United States, and Wales—media in worship has become the norm for Sunday worship. In the United States alone, by one estimate, two thousand churches adopt some form of media each year.⁶

The combination of media technologies and arts incorporated into church services varies from one church space to another and from one worship and ecclesial context to another. Pastors have added new media not only to Sunday worship but also to funerals, weddings, evening prayer, Good Friday liturgies, reconciliation services, youth-oriented worship, and other services. Many worshipers have appreciated these innovations.

Growth-oriented churches, including those referred to as mega-churches, have been leaders in actively promoting the use of a variety of media technologies and arts to convey the Good News to the unchurched. Their media ministers have produced and provided media resources for their own use and for other churches' use, as well. They have written "how-to" books and have offered workshops, conferences, and consultation services to other churches whose leaders have adopted or are considering adopting media as an element in their worship. For those in communities, denominations, and countries where media has not yet entered the worship of local churches, this worship development might seem startling, as if it were something suddenly erupting on the worship landscape. Since the mid-twentieth century, though, multiple factors have contributed to the escalating incorporation of media alongside other communications technologies and arts. During the last decade in particular, decreased costs of media technologies and software and increased accessibility of media production and projection equipment have brought the possibility of media in worship within the reach of even very small churches.

Nonprofit and for-profit groups offering media-for-worship products and services to churches have created a mini-industry. Suppliers, consultants, and products can be easily found through Internet searches, trade and church magazines, and church-related conferences.

Because the focus of church leaders and worship media industry leaders has been primarily on improving communication, what has yet to emerge is an appreciation of new media's potential to give birth to liturgical art. Media technologies, graphics packages, and editing software may be used artfully and artistically in the production of media for worship, but their product is not typically considered art, and their creators do not typically consider themselves artists.

Media in worship does present new opportunities and new problems. As a liturgist and media producer myself, I contend that the creative, imaginative, and skillful use of media technologies and arts has the potential to produce a new form of liturgical art and, with it, a new liturgical ministry. As with all liturgical arts, though, the use of this art ideally involves thoughtful, prayerful discernment that takes into account questions of community, liturgy, aesthetics, and ethics.

While some church leaders have enthusiastically embraced media for their community's worship, other church leaders have rejected outright the use of media technologies (except, typically, audio amplification) and media arts, claiming they are never appropriate for worship. This essay is designed to prompt further reflection for both sides of that spectrum of opinion, and it will also guide the reflection of all those Christians in between who wonder what doing worship in a media culture might mean for their faith communities.

This evolving media ministry is still at a very basic level of development. In ways comparable to folk music introduced in worship in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, media in worship might be said to be at the "three-chord stage" of artistic, liturgical, and technical development. Yet even at this early stage, media technologies and arts are already affecting worship in the United States and elsewhere, and this development deserves pastoral attention and theological reflection.

To assist church leaders and members in assessing the possibilities and problems associated with media in worship, the following chapters will provide a basic introduction to this topic: chapter 1, a vocabulary for constructive church dialogue and discernment; chapter 2, a historical overview of this worship phenomenon; chapter 3, an assessment of perils and positive possibilities; chapter 4, four critical frameworks for communities' discernment of their own media in worship; and chapter 5, a new model for this liturgical ministry: Communal Co-Creation.

Notes

1. *Inter Mirifica*, no. 1, December 4, 1963. Translation of phrase from *Vatican II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, rev. ed. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1996), 539.

2. *Aetatis Novae* (The Dawn of a New Era), no. 2, Pontifical Council on Social Communications, February 22, 1992.

3. Michael A. Real, *Exploring Media Culture: A Guide* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), 6.

4. The term “media” in art history previously had been restricted to the medium used in the creation of a work of art, e.g., paint, stone, glass, metal, sound, bodies. In twentieth-century common usage, “media” has become synonymous with electronically or digitally produced and transmitted mass media, small group media, and interpersonal communications media.

5. Robb Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening: Singing a New Song in the Postmodern Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

6. Mark Manley, “New Tools for Worship Presentations,” *Technologies for Worship Magazine* (May/June 1999): 19.

1 A Working Vocabulary for Church Dialogue and Discernment

It is not uncommon for church discussion about media in worship to degenerate into polemics or into debates based on personal media preferences and tastes. Such conflict is not surprising. Church leaders and members include both media-philes and media-phobes. They see media, in general, from different perspectives. They may have radically differing views and expectations of worship as well. Thus, media in worship can be a volatile subject that ignites passionate debate. Churches need a productive, constructive way to address the issues related to this phenomenon. Ideally, participants in any discussion need to commit themselves to dialogue marked by charity, openness, and genuine listening. If mutually respectful and fruitful reflection is to occur, it is best if participants begin from a common point of departure.

For a start, it is helpful for all those engaged in such conversations to use vocabulary that is mutually understood. True dialogue requires that those attempting to speak and to listen actually have a chance of communicating with each other. To allow all points of view to be adequately and clearly communicated, we need a common working vocabulary related to this phenomenon of media in worship. Careful use of media in worship also requires a vocabulary in which distinctions are carefully made. The following vocabulary can provide such a common ground and starting point for a worshipping community's discussion and informed critical reflection.

Terms associated with worship

Worship includes the full range of individual and communal praise and thanksgiving, confession and supplication, adoration and lamentation. This general term can apply to ritual practices of adherents of many religions.¹ A general term, this word often is used synonymously for “liturgy,” although the latter term can be more narrowly defined.

Liturgy emphasizes the communal aspect of worship, since this word’s origin comes from the Greek *leitourgia*, typically translated as “the work of the people.”² Liturgy often signifies worship that involves a particular order of actions in religious rituals, a particular worship tradition, or a new arrangement of ritual actions developed to fulfill a particular communal need.³ As used in this book, liturgy is further understood to be ritual that assumes the active participation of those present, including active contemplation. It is ritual in which the participants ideally understand themselves as actors and not as audience members. Those who participate in liturgy eventually come to realize, in part because of the modeling behavior of regular congregants, that they are expected to perform ritual actions such as singing, reciting prayers, taking part in confessions and ritual responses, listening attentively, or moving in ritual ways. Liturgy, following this participation model, then, is different from seeker-oriented or any other services that, for evangelism purposes, follow a performance model. In such services, those who attend are treated as welcomed guests. They are invited to watch and to listen to the on-stage action of preachers, musicians, actors, or others who perform, and to experience media produced to help communicate the church’s message; but they usually are not expected to contribute in any other way, including monetarily.

Liturgical art signifies any form of art that is integral and appropriate to the liturgical actions of a community’s liturgy. The context and function of this art differentiates it from other forms of art.⁴ A distinct form of art, liturgical art is wedded to liturgical action and/or a liturgical environment.⁵

Terms associated with art and artists in general

Art is a general term that can encompass the processes and products of a person or group of persons who intentionally and

imaginatively use expressive media of any sort to produce an artifact or an experience for the use, benefit, contemplation, inspiration, or interaction of others. Art is a social practice.⁶ It involves communal standards, expectations, skills, and traditions. Art is not necessarily only what some might see as high art. It includes folk art, tribal art, popular art, graphic art, and even what have been called crafts. It involves human creation of some thing, some performance, or some experience that draws those who encounter it into a dialogue because art requires their active interpretation and participation. Art is designed to communicate and, ideally, to move those who experience it emotionally, spiritually, intellectually, even physically. It operates on multiple levels at the same time.

Artist refers to individuals or to a collaborative group who “perceive, order, clarify, intensify, and interpret a certain aspect of the human condition for themselves” and for others.⁷

Media art refers to artistically created products or experiences that can result from any combination of electric, electronic, or digital technologies. This art can often be found combined with other art forms such as prose or poetry, music or other artistically generated sound, two-dimensional visual art (e.g., painting, photography, computer art), three-dimensional art (e.g., furnishings, sculpture, installation art, or an architectural space), kinetic art (e.g., cinematography or video art), or performance arts (e.g., drama, dance, mime). Media art is a hybrid art.

Terms associated with media in general

Media, in the twenty-first century technological sense, is a commonplace term that refers to hardware and software systems and to the products of those media technologies.⁸

Multimedia is commonly used in a broad sense to refer to multiple forms of arts and communications working together to create an experience. In the narrower technological sense, this term has evolved in meaning, especially since the 1960s when it denoted a large screen or multi-screen, multi-image event. In the 1990s people began to use this term to refer to media products displayed on a single computer monitor.⁹ In this essay the term multimedia refers broadly to the artistic combination of multiple media technologies that creates an over-

all, multisensory experience for a group of people. This term includes, in effect, its older and newer connotations.

Video is another general term people commonly use to speak about media art of any kind, whether produced by professionals or amateurs, that is projected through video technology onto a computer screen, video projection screen, television monitor, wall, fabric, or other surface. Consequently, video means much more than the products of the mass media entertainment industry (e.g., TV programs and movies), although people may use this term in reference to such products.

Terms associated with media used in worship

Media in worship refers to media systems and products used in worship, regardless of how they are employed. Media in worship can comprise any combination of nineteenth- and twentieth-century media forms: photography; cinematography; overhead projectors and transparencies; multimedia presentations with multiple active screens and audio tracks; audio recording and playback technologies including magnetic tape, CD, CD-ROM, DVD; music and computer-related forms of music and other sounds; video technologies, cameras, games, and video art; computer technologies and computer art; integrative digital multimedia technologies and digital art; and interactive performance and installation arts. All of these technologies and art forms can potentially be put to the service of a community's worship.

Media in worship, as addressed in this essay, includes what is created, as well as what is purchased or appropriated for worship. Churches can now license or buy, often through Internet Web sites, worship-related media art and complete media packages that are frequently designed to be customized by the local church. Media available to worship leaders include: Scripture-based, lectionary-based, and theme-based graphics and video; background photographs, animations, and video; feature film and documentary clips; video vignettes; lyrics; Scripture-of-the-day text; and unison and responsive prayers.

Liturgical media art distinguishes media art that is integral to the actions of a community's liturgy, that is, media art *of* the liturgy, as opposed to media simply being used *in* liturgy.

Liturgical media artists are liturgical ministers who, regardless of their skill level or compensation (or lack thereof), create some form of liturgical art or environment that involves the use of media.

Equipped with a common vocabulary, church leaders, church members, liturgists, theologians, and seminarians may have less difficulty understanding each other's view points when discussing media in worship. Discussions would also be aided if participants came to the table with some historical context, a matter the following chapter will address.

Notes

1. "Worship is a universal phenomenon. It consists in a response of veneration in the face of the recognized presence of God . . . (and) may be private or even individualistic." Patrick Bishop, "Worship," in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 1331–32.

2. Catholic theology from the Second Vatican Council holds that "the liturgy, then, is rightly seen as the priestly office of Jesus Christ" and only derivatively the work of the people in so far as the whole public worship "is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and his members." *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), no. 7, in *Vatican II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, 121.

3. "The amount and kind of Christian prayer that has been referred to by the term liturgy has varied over time." Today the term, as understood in Catholicism, for example, refers to the rites contained in officially promulgated ritual books, including the rites for the seven sacraments, the dying, Christian burial, dedication of a church, religious profession, installation of liturgical ministers, morning and evening prayer, and blessings. It is "distinguished from private prayer and from other pious exercises." Lawrence J. Madden, "Liturgy," in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 742–44.

4. Joseph Gelineau created a taxonomy to describe the differences among liturgical, religious, and sacred music. Gelineau's taxonomy for *music*, I suggest, can be applied to distinguish liturgical, religious, and sacred *art*. In doing so, the broadest category of art, *religious art*, would include art that may have a religious theme or "expresses a religious sentiment but is not designated for use in the liturgy." *Sacred art* would be more narrowly defined, since "by its inspiration, purpose, and destination or manner of use [it] has a connection with the faithful." Over time, this art has become accepted as something sa-

cred to believers. Given the liturgical reforms of the 1960s, *liturgical art* would be art *of* the liturgy, rather than art performed or simply located *in* a worship space. Gelineau's taxonomy cited in Edward Foley, "Liturgical Music," *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 855.

5. G. Thomas Ryan, *The Sacristy Manual* (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993), 22.

6. "A practice is a socially embodied way of doing something, such that there are not only correct and incorrect, and effective and ineffective ways of doing it, but better and worse ways. Social practices provide us with ways of achieving excellence which, apart from those practices, simply don't exist." Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Two Ways of Thinking About Art: Part I and II" in *K-12 Education: Culture and Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: The Van Andel Educational Institute, 2000), 47-48.

7. Herbert Zettl, *Sight Sound Motion: Applied Media Aesthetics*, 3rd ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 1999), 4. Artists, George Steiner writes, are interpreters of Real Presence: "All serious art, music and literature is a *critical act*" that embodies "concentrated, selective interactions between the constraints of the observed and the boundless possibilities of the imagined." George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 11.

8. Within the context of worship, this word does not refer to mass media or to the different materials artists might use (e.g., paint, wood, metal) in creating their art.

9. With the introduction of the Kodak Cavalcade™ and Kodak Carousel™ projectors in the 1960s, multimedia as a term referred to an installation of rapidly changing images projected or displayed on an arrangement of multiple slide screens or video monitors, with the projection of related or unrelated images synchronized in some fashion with music, narration, or some other soundtrack. More recently, the term, and that to which it refers, has shrunk in the spatial dimensions implied. This word now is often limited to meaning any kind of audio-visual presentation that is displayed on a computer monitor, such as a video game, website, or instructional program. John K. Larish, "Multimedia," in *Focal Encyclopedia of Photography*, ed. Leslie Stroebel and Richard Zakia, 3rd ed. (Boston, MA: Focal Press, 1993), 497.