



The Virtual Body of Christ in a Suffering World

Deanna A. Thompson

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We live in a wired world where 24/7 digital connectivity is increasingly the norm. Christian megachurch communities often embrace this reality wholeheartedly while more traditional churches often seem hesitant and overwhelmed by the need for an interactive website, a Facebook page and a twitter feed. This book accepts digital connectivity as our reality, but presents a vision of how faith communities can utilize technology to better be the body of Christ to those who are hurting while also helping followers of Christ think critically about the limits of our digital attachments.

This book begins with a conversion story of a non-cell phone owning, non-Facebook using religion professor judgmental of the ability of digital tools to enhance relationships. A stage IV cancer diagnosis later, in the midst of being held up by virtual communities of support, a conversion occurs: this religion professor benefits in embodied ways from virtual sources and wants to convert others to the reality that the body of Christ can and does exist virtually and makes embodied difference in the lives of those who are hurting.

The book neither uncritically embraces nor rejects the constant digital connectivity present in our lives. Rather it calls on the church to a) recognize ways in which digital social networks already enact the virtual body of Christ; b) tap into and expand how Christ is being experienced virtually; c) embrace thoughtfully the material effects of our new augmented reality, and c) influence utilization of technology that minimizes distraction and maximizes attentiveness toward God and the world God loves.

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