2

Interface Is Reality

Kutter Callaway

My children have never known a world without screens they could touch. They love to swipe through pictures and videos on my cell phone. They navigate the apps on our family's Kindle with far more aplomb than I do. And they frequently hear their father explain that, unlike most of their electronic devices, his laptop does not have a touchscreen. So hands off!

But it wasn't until recently that I recognized the ways in which my daughters' touchscreen understanding of the world significantly departed from my own. My five-year-old and I were sitting on the couch, trying to find a suitable program on Netflix that both she and her sister could watch during their allotted "screen time." As the father, I of course have exclusive rights to the remote control, so I began navigating the various columns and rows of shows provided by the Netflix app just as one might imagine.

In short order, my daughter was able to identify the icon of the show that she wanted to watch. Unfortunately, I had already passed it, so she desperately tried to point me in the right direction. She kept saying "Daddy, go up! No, I said *up*! Up, Daddy, up. Why won't you go *up*!"

Being the eternally patient father that I am, I conveyed my levelheaded take on the situation with a reply that was equal parts calm and rational: "I *am* going up! This is up!"

As is often the case with a five-year-old, we were at an impasse. But it was not until we reached this critical juncture that I finally noticed what she was doing. She was standing in front of the TV screen, using her entire body in an effort to communicate to her (completely dumbfounded) father.

I had originally thought that she was *pointing* up. But what she was actually doing was *swiping* up. And she wanted me to swipe up too.

Take a moment to visualize this. If we want an image or text on a touchscreen to move up, we physically touch the screen and swipe our hand up. It makes perfect sense. In fact, it happens so intuitively we don't even think about it. But if we are using a remote or the arrows on a keyboard to control an on-screen cursor, we actually move these same images up by pressing the "down" button. And vice versa.

When I finally realized the source of our shared frustration, it became obvious that my daughter and I weren't simply miscommunicating. In fact, both of us were being quite clear (not to mention, loud). Instead, it was as if we inhabited entirely different worlds—worlds where "up" and "down" didn't just mean different things, but operated according to completely different logics. To be sure, we were engaged with the exact same digital content, which was instantly available to us via any number of internet-based streaming services. But it was the particular interface with which each of us was most familiar (for her, a touchscreen and, for me, a remote control) that structured our basic awareness of how these digital and physical worlds worked and interacted. Or to put it somewhat differently, for my daughter and me, interface was reality.

In the pages that follow, I explore the theological significance of these interfaces. That is, I consider the ways in which our vision of the world, the human person, and ultimately, God, is shaped by how we touch (or don't touch) our digital environment—how we daily relate to it, encounter it, and otherwise become involved in its numerous goings on. Of course, in a book of essays about the internet, it might seem odd to focus so much attention on that which we physically touch, but in truth, without some kind of interface, the "internet" is purely conceptual—a vast network of ones and zeroes suspended in the digital ether. So to speak of this digital world without making any reference to the various mediums by which we access it would be to reify an abstraction.

In this essay, then, I want to suggest that our concrete, physical encounters with the internet bear theological significance. Indeed, the basic claim I am putting forward is that the interfaces we employ to connect with our digital environments provide us with both a model and a means for being and becoming more fully human. And perhaps even more scandalously (for theologians anyway), I also want to suggest that, if we have any desire for theology to be coherent or intelligible in the age of the internet,

we would do well to draw upon these interfaces as necessary resources for constructive theological reflection.

Needless to say, conceiving of interfaces in this way is difficult enough, but it will be altogether impossible if the theological tradition is unwilling to adopt a fundamentally different model for understanding the human, which is why it is vital for us to interact with and learn from a more diverse set of conversation partners. It is for this very reason that, in what follows, I attend primarily to the insights of the psychological and cognitive sciences (in addition to media studies and theology). In doing so, I hope to offer a more robust accounting of the ways in which digital interfaces not only shape our awareness of the world and connect us to our broader social networks, but also become an integral part of who we are as human beings.

Excarnation and the Problem with Bodies

These claims are hardly uncontroversial. Indeed, space will not allow a comprehensive listing of every theologian who might disagree with the ideas I am putting forward here. However, a common concern shared by those whose views differ from my own has to do with the theological significance of our bodies. For instance, in his *iPod, You Tube, Wii Play*, Brent Laytham rightly suggests that any theological conversation about our digital lives must take seriously the doctrine of the incarnation:

> [T]he Christian doctrine of the *incarnation* means that bodily life is good, something to be embraced and enjoyed. Our hope in Christ is not that we can finally escape the limitations of bodiliness for the freedom of a purely mental or "spiritual" existence. It is rather that we might be freed from death and sin for a resurrected bodily life that enjoys God forever.[1]

Here, Laytham is correct. Bodies matter. And any attempt to reduce, diminish, or escape our bodies is to take a decided step away from the historic Christian understanding of the human person. But from Laytham's perspective, the contemporary cultural imagination, which has become captivated by a vision of "excarnation," stands in stark opposition to an incarnational view.[2] Indeed, for Laytham, the various digital interfaces

1. Laytham, *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play*, 120 [emphasis original].

2. By employing the term "excarnation," Laytham is drawing explicitly on the work of philosopher and social theorist Charles Taylor in *Secular Age*.

that connect us to the World Wide Web (e.g., iPods, YouTube apps, and video game consoles like the Nintendo Wii) necessarily involve "powerful trajectories of excarnation precisely because they locate [our] actions and identities in a virtual—that is, non-bodily—realm."[3] As a consequence, our interactions with the digital world can never be anything other than an attempt to overcome our bodily limitations and perhaps even escape the body altogether.

In contrast to an embodied, incarnate life, says Laytham, our online lives are de facto *dis*-embodied and *ex*-carnate. As such, to affirm them is to advance a theology that is at best sub-Christian and, at worst, heretical.[4] And if this is indeed the case, then the way my young children have come to see and understand the world is not simply different than my own. It's much worse than that. Their "touchscreen-shaped imagination" is in fact mal-adaptive and de-formative because it is a subversion of the Christian understanding of the incarnation. Without even knowing it, they have been co-opted by the forces of excarnation, seduced by flickering pixels into disregarding their bodies.

Oddly enough, even in those cases where new media are creating space for a more fully embodied encounter with the digital world, Laytham still interprets this movement in entirely negative terms. Responding to a piece I wrote in which I identify the interface of the Nintendo Wii as representative of the contemporary cultural impulse toward more somatic, holistic, and affective interactions with the virtual world, Laytham demurs:

> But there's the rub! There's no ball to rub, hold, swing, and hurl with a Wii, only a weightless simulacrum on a high-definition screen. Though a fuller range of motion is involved, the Wii and its imitators continue the trend of excarnation precisely by substituting virtual images for material objects, a virtual environment for real space, and an avatar for me—that is, for my body.[5]

3. Laytham, *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play*, 121.

4. Laytham interacts with a number of the contributors to *Halos and Avatars*, finding the majority of them to be theologically questionable. But he reserves his most critical assessment for Craig Detweiler's conclusion to the volume. Laytham suggests that Detweiler's understanding of Jesus as an avatar is antithetical to the incarnation. Even worse, this move verges on heresy: "Detweiler is an example of what it looks like when the world absorbs the text, a danger that began, ironically, with gnosticism." Laytham, *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play*, 124, n. 30.

5. Laytham, *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play*, 122–23. Here, he is interacting with and quoting from Callaway, "Wii Are In*spirit*ed."

In other words, even when a digital interface like the Wii remote is designed for the express purpose of incorporating the whole of our bodies into its basic operations, the fact that virtual (i.e., digital) representations are also present somehow negates the very embodied agents who make this digital/human interaction possible in the first place. For Laytham, when the virtual world augments physical reality, the human body is simply eliminated from the equation.

Laytham is certainly not alone in raising concerns about how our bodies relate to digital environments.[6] But I mention his work in particular for two primary reasons. The first is to point out the importance of not confusing the *internet* (or any other virtual realm for that matter) with the *interfaces* that serve as our concrete point of contact with the digital world.[7] Whether it's a touchpad on a laptop, a Kinect sensor for Xbox One, a Roku remote, or the touch-screen of an iPad, interfaces are neither "weightless simulacrum" nor "virtual imitations" of material objects. They are themselves material objects, which connect other material objects (i.e., people) to digital environments through a kind of "soft-assembly."[8] What is more, the representations that make up this digital realm are just that—*re*-presentations. That is, they are not substitutes, but are in fact virtual duplications of physical reality. The images displayed on our screens exist *in addition to* the bodies that generate them. Which means that there are *more* bodies in play here—both digital and physical—not less. Indeed, at the level of the interface, it's not that virtual bodies are replacing our physical bodies. Rather, it is here that our bodies are augmented and extended.

This notion of extension leads to the second reason for interacting with Laytham, and it has primarily to do with the question of how broadly we are willing to understand the human person. Where does the body and, by extension, the human begin and end? And how are the (digital) tools that humans use and the (digital) environments they inhabit implicated (if

6. In their helpful book *Networked Theology*, Heidi Campbell and Stephen Garner classify Laytham's line of thinking as "technological pessimism" (as opposed to "technological optimism" or "technological ambiguity"). They include in this category other theologians and media critics such as Jacques Ellul, Sherry Turkle, and even the Pontifical Council for Social Communications.

7. For the sake of clarity, I will be adopting Haugeland's definition of interface: "a point of interactive 'contact' between components such that the relevant interactions are well-defined, reliable and relatively simple." Haugeland, "Mind Embodied," 32.

8. I am borrowing this term from Andy Clark, whose work we will consider more below. See Clark, *Supersizing the Mind*.

at all) in this formulation of personhood? It's important to point out that the different answers Laytham and I might provide in response to these questions aren't necessarily the result of theological or doctrinal differences. After all, we share nearly identical understandings of the incarnation and its significance for Christian life and practice. However, the way we interpret the theological significance of digital life is quite different, and the main reason is because we are operating with divergent pictures of what it means to be a human being. Thus, what Laytham sees as digitally mediated disembodiment, I see as the embedding of our bodies in digital environments. And where Laytham sees excarnation, I see extension.

Extension and Embodiment

To be clear, I do not intend to suggest that life as it is lived online is entirely uncomplicated or makes physical life somehow "better" in an unqualified sense.[9] Technology (digital or otherwise) is no more capable of creating utopia than any other modern endeavor. I am suggesting, however, that our involvement with digital environments is not *inherently* deficient, destructive, or dehumanizing, as Laytham and others seem to suggest. Put more positively, I would go so far as to say that, rather than moving us either out of or even away from our bodies (i.e., "excarnation"), digital interfaces can be highly incarnational insofar as they become incorporated into our bodily schema and serve as extensions of our bodies through their constant negotiation (and renegotiation) of the boundaries between self and world. Or to borrow a turn of phrase from the philosopher and cognitive scientist Andy Clark, rather than lead us away from our bodies, digital interfaces represent the very machinery that constitutes us as "profoundly embodied creatures."[10]

Much of Clark's work is rather technical, so we need not unpack it all here. However, one of his primary contentions is that the reigning models of human cognition too clearly separate our minds from our bodies and the world. Rather than a "brainbound" model, Clark advocates for an "extended" model of cognition—one in which "at least some aspects of human cognition [are] realized by the ongoing work of the body and/or the extraorganismic

9. This, of course, is the claim many Transhumanists make, which is somewhat ironic, given that its utopian vision of humanity's technological future—although explicitly non- or anti-theistic—is structurally identical to dispensationalist theology.

10. Clark, *Supersizing the Mind*, 43.

environment."[11] In other words, humans just are the kind of creatures that make the most of their bodies and their environments in their ongoing interactions with the world. Thus, people constantly (even promiscuously) incorporate and exploit external tools and environmental resources into their intentional, problem-solving regimes—a "profoundly embodied" activity that involves the intimate intermingling of human agents and the various interfaces that serve as their point of contact with the world:

> What makes such interfaces *appropriate* as mechanisms for human enhancement is, it seems, precisely their potential role in creating *whole new agent-world circuits*. But insofar as they succeed at this task, the new agent-tool interface itself fades from view, and the proper picture is one of an extended or enhanced agent confronting the (wider) world.[12]

For Clark then, it is this picture of an "extended" or "enhanced" agent—a "new systemic whole" created by the agent-tool interface—that offers the best model for understanding what it means to be human.[13] And if correct, then Clark's notion of "extension" bears directly upon our theological understanding of what it means to interface not only with physical environments, but digital ones as well. This is especially the case in the midst of a highly technologized culture where digital interfaces are becoming increasingly incorporated into daily life and, as a result, their operations ever more obscured:

> As we move toward an era of wearable computing and ubiquitous information access, the robust, reliable information fields to which our brains delicately adapt their inner cognitive routines will surely become increasingly dense and powerful, perhaps further blurring the boundaries between the cognitive agent and his or her best tools, props and artifacts.[14]

11. Clark, *Supersizing the Mind*, 82.

12. Clark, *Supersizing the Mind*, 31.

13. Clark, *Supersizing the Mind*, 39.

14. Clark, *Supersizing the Mind*, 41. It is important to note that, for Clark, not all interfaces and/or tools are incorporated into one's cognitive system. Some are simply "used" and, as such, should not be considered as an "extension" of the agent. He identifies four criteria for inclusion: (1) the resource must be "reliably available and typically invoked"; (2) any information retrieved must be "more or less automatically endorsed" and not "subject to critical scrutiny"; (3) information should be "easily accessible as and when required"; and (4) it should be "consciously endorsed at some point in the past." As Clark outlines these criteria, he specifically mentions "mobile access to Google" as failing

From this perspective, the operations of the mind bleed into the surrounding world to such a degree that it becomes difficult to distinguish between human agents and their most useful technologies (digital or otherwise). Yet, for all this talk about *cognition* and *the mind*, Clark's central concern is really the mind/body/world relationship.[15] To be sure, his notion of extended cognition begins with the assumption that the mind is essentially a thinking or representing thing, but at its core, Clark's philosophy of mind seeks to capture the fundamental nature of the human person as a whole. That is to say, even though his concept of cognitive extension reconceives of the human being as an agent augmented by nonbiological media (e.g., digital interfaces), personhood for Clark always remains "anchored" in the body.

Bodies Embedded in Emergent Systems

Interestingly enough, Clark's seemingly holistic formulation (i.e., cognition as extended *and* embodied) can still carry with it an implicit dualism—one in which the "mind" is some kind of "inner agency" that resides within but is nevertheless distinct from the body. Given the theological difficulties this kind of anthropological dualism presents (e.g., "excarnation"), Warren Brown and Brad Strawn (the former a neuroscientist and the latter a clinical psychologist and ordained minister) have proposed a model that builds upon Clark's notion of extended cognition, but seeks to address both the implicit dualism of his model and the conceptual simplicity of others. They refer to their view as Complex Emergent Developmental Linguistic Relational Neurophysiologicalism (CEDLRN):

> From this viewpoint, personhood is constituted by emergent properties which are the product of self-organizing processes within the hypercomplex neurophysiological systems of human

to qualify according to conditions 2 and 4. I think his assessment was correct in 2011, but given the rapid rate at which mobile technology and broad-band internet access has proliferated, "mobile access to Google" is now "automatically endorsed" and "consciously endorsed in the past" by almost every person who has a smartphone and/or a social media profile. The sharing of "fake news" through social media is evidence of this kind of "automatic endorsement." That is, it demonstrates "the potential role of nonbiological media as support for an agent's dispositional beliefs." Clark, *Supersizing the Mind*, 79–81.

15. Indeed, the title of an earlier book in which he begins to work out some of these concepts is *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again*.

> beings, and which come about progressively over a long period of developmental, linguistic, and relational history.[16]

Although Brown and Strawn admit that their long list of descriptors is a bit cumbersome (CEDLRN!), there is much about their model that is helpful in describing and characterizing our interactions with the digital world. Three elements are particularly salient for our purposes. First, theirs is an irreducibly *embodied* picture of personhood—one that is not merely physicalist or even biological, but neurophysiological (N). This way of framing things intentionally underscores the sheer complexity (C) of human biology and, thus, avoids an overly simplistic notion of embodiment that often conceals more than it reveals.

Second, to focus attention on the neurophysiological nature of embodiment is to call out the ways in which human nature *emerges* (E) from complex, dynamic, and interactive systems. Like other complex dynamical systems, the human being emerges through a relational (R) process of self-organization. That is, "the elements of the system come to work together in a coherent or coordinated manner to create a larger-scale functional system that can adapt to the demands of the physical, social, or cultural environment in complex and subtle ways."[17] As a result, the system as a whole (especially at higher levels of complexity) can have properties that do not (and cannot) exist within the elements that make up that system.

Third, because this highly complex biological system adapts, interacts, and receives feedback from the environment, human persons are not simply embodied and emergent, but embedded as well.[18] The capacity for language (L) is perhaps the most significant example of how personhood develops (D) over time as we actively encounter, respond to, and attempt to make sense of the world into which we have been thrown. But language is just one of the more prominent examples. As Clark has suggested (and as Brown and Strawn would agree), embodied persons, who are highly complex, emergent systems themselves, are always already embedded in, and thus, intimately intermingled with the larger emergent systems of which they are a part. In other words, rather than a reductive physicalism that equates the core of the human person (or even the mind) with "the brain,"

16. Brown and Strawn, "Self-Organizing Personhood," 3.

17. Brown and Strawn, "Self-Organizing Personhood," 5.

18. I am indebted here not only to Brown and Strawn's CEDLRN model, but also to their earlier work on embodied and embedded models of theological anthropology, specifically Brown and Strawn, *Physical Nature of Christian Life.*

the CEDLRN model implies that peripheral systems (both biological and non-biological) are necessarily implicated in the emergence of human personhood. As a result, this model doesn't collapse all distinctions between the person, the interface, and the world, but it certainly blurs the boundaries in a helpful (albeit ever-more complex) way.

Interfacing With and As the Body of Christ

But what, exactly, does all this mean theologically? If my opening anecdote is to be taken seriously, it seems clear that the ongoing emergence of my daughter's personhood is intimately bound up with the various interfaces she employs to interact with, adapt to, and experience the increasingly digital environment in which she is embedded. It's not simply that she has no access to much of her world in the absence of her Kindle Fire or my iPhone or our family's Netflix app. It's that she cannot help but imagine the world and her life in it through any other means. Both her awareness of reality and her very sense of self—her thoughts, emotions, memories, and experiences—have developed (and continue to develop) in relationship to these non-biological media. And my daughter is not alone. The same could be said of her entire cohort—a generation of digital natives who have never known any other world.

Here, then, we return to our central question: is this phenomenon evidence of excarnation or, rather, extension? In other words, is our interaction with the digital world an escape from our bodies—a modern form of Gnosticism that the Christian community ought to critique and condemn on theological grounds? Or is it an (not uncomplicated) expansion of what it means to be a fully embodied human being living in a digital age?

One of the primary claims I have put forward in this essay is that the way in which we answer these questions has less to do with doctrine and more to do with the models we employ for understanding the human person. In turn, these models direct (and in some cases determine) our theological reflection. For instance, critics like Laytham start with a rather "body-bound" picture of the human person and, thus, a "body-bound" notion of the incarnation. Given the anthropological model he employs, it is perfectly logical that he construes our encounters with the digital world as indicative of a move toward excarnation. Because all digital interfaces exist "outside" the bounds of the body's physical structures, our interactions with them must be understood necessarily as dis-embodied and ex-carnate.

However, if we adopt a different model for understanding the human person—one that accounts for our complex, emergent, developmental, linguistic, relational, neurophysiology—we are able to reconceive of these very same digital interfaces in terms of their theological possibilities rather than their inadequacies. And while this move certainly encourages a more charitable take on digital life, the theological implications of adopting a "body-centric" rather than "body-bound" model are more than merely interpretive. Indeed, to conceive of digital interfaces as extensions of our bodies is to suggest that every point of contact with the digital world has the potential for providing us with both a model and a means for becoming more fully human.

Thus, I'd like to consider three key ways in which an embodied, extended, emergent, embedded model of the human person might allow us to reconceive of digital interfaces as helpful resources for constructive theological reflection.

An Anthropological Model

In their aptly titled *Networked Theology*, Heidi Campbell and Stephen Garner propose the "network" as a guiding metaphor to understand digital culture, primarily because it characterizes the contemporary situation so well: "Indeed, many have argued that we now live in a network society, in which new social, economic, political, and cultural structures are emerging from an increasingly wired and global world."[19] This is neither to celebrate nor to condemn networked society, but simply to describe the facts on the ground. For good or for ill, modern humans are embedded simultaneously in digital and physical environments, which operate according to the logics of highly complex, emergent, dynamical systems.[20] And the point of contact between these emergent systems is of course the interface, which functions as both the site where the physical and digital worlds meet and the medium by which individual persons are extended into their broader social networks.

19. Campbell and Garner, *Networked Theology*, 3.

20. "Through networked community we see that people online live simultaneously in multiple social networks that are emergent" (Campbell and Garner, *Networked Theology*, 77).

What is more, the ongoing interaction that takes place between online and offline systems (i.e., "networks") does not entail a flight from the body, but rather an expansion of bodily, physical life:

> Because the Internet has become increasingly assimilated into daily routines, researchers have recognized that patterns of Internet use often arise out of users' offline patterns of behavior and beliefs. Such findings challenge concerns that online practices might supplant engagement in offline groups or routines. Instead, Internet-based social activities frequently serve as an extension or supplement to offline engagement and in some cases may stimulate rather than reduce social interaction.[21]

If we imagine the human person to be fundamentally body-bound, then there is simply no way to account for this phenomenon in positive terms. However, if being a human means that we are extended bodies who are embedded in a vast network of emergent systems, then we can say with some confidence that digital interfaces are not standing in the way of our humanity, but are in fact helping us be and become more fully human. Digital life is of course far from perfect, but it does provide us with unique possibilities for extending ourselves into broader networks of relationality that are "profoundly embodied" and, thus, quintessentially human. In an important sense, it is through the digital interface that our bodies become incorporated into an expansive network of humanity and, at the same time, that network becomes a part of us.

So rather than simply decry the contemporary impulse to extend our physical lives through digital interfaces, we would do well to consider the ways in which this augmented reality might present us with a more robust picture of the human person. Indeed, it may very well be that we are only ever fully human—ever fully alive—when we are extended in this way, which is why both lay and professional theologians would benefit from reflecting upon what it looks like for humans to flourish in and through these digitally mediated environments, and then to take the next step of actively encouraging that kind of flourishing.

21. Campbell and Garner, *Networked Theology*, 77.

An Ecclesiological Metaphor

Truth be told, the Christian tradition already has a metaphor for extended, embodied life.[22] The "Body of Christ" that Paul describes in 1 Cor 12:12–30 has long served as one of the central images for understanding the structure of the community of faith:

> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. . . . Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. . . . Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Cor 12: 12, 14, 27)

Paul knew nothing of digital interfaces or the internet. Nevertheless, it is not incidental that the primary image he deploys to speak of the Christian community is a body comprised of numerous individual bodies who are extended into a larger, higher level network of bodies. Each member has his or her role to play, but the system as a whole (i.e., "the body of Christ") has properties that do not (and cannot) exist within the elements that make up the system. In other words, Paul's understanding of the church hinges upon a conception of the human person not as body-bound but as extended. Or, to put it in the terms we have been using, the Christian community itself is a complex, emergent, developmental, linguistic, relational, neurophysiological organism. Thus, from a theological perspective, for our bodies *not* to be extended into the hyper-complex organism known as the body of Christ is to live not simply in destructive isolation, but in a sub-human state.

If this is indeed the case, could it be that the various media by which we connect to the digital world are in fact necessary for contemporary Christians to enact Paul's vision of embodiment? Are these interfaces perhaps offering the community of faith a way of being and becoming the body of Christ that was entirely inaccessible before? Again, as Paul knew full well, the church will always be comprised of faulty members, so no form of communal interaction will ever be perfect, just as no method of interfacing with others will ever be flawless. But if we refuse even to consider the possibility that digital interfaces have the capacity to extend our bodies into a larger communal network, we run the risk of overlooking (and disregarding) one

22. Here again, the work of Brown and Strawn has proven instructive for my thought. I am thankful for their ongoing willingness to engage in dialogue around these topics. They specifically explore the notion of the Christian life as an extension into the body of Christ in their forthcoming book *Supersizing the Christian Faith* (IVP Academic).

of the primary avenues by which the people of God might actually become the body of Christ in the midst of our digital age.

A Theological Metaphysic

Finally, I want to conclude on a more speculative note. What follows is highly provisional and is meant to be more suggestive than anything else, but it does reflect a question (or series of questions) that I could not seem to shake as I formulated the central components of this essay. Namely, what if the extended model of the human person and, by extension, the body of Christ is more than a model? What if it's more than a helpful metaphor that Paul used to illustrate some other (i.e., more "real") reality? What if it has some kind of metaphysical purchase?

If so, then it stands to reason that our online interactions, mediated as they are by digital interfaces, are capable of doing far more than connecting us to various social networks, with the church being but one of many others. Indeed, we could go so far as to say that, if the Christian community is not just a generic social body, but is in fact the body of *Christ*, then the means by which we in-corpor-ate our individual bodies into the complex dynamical system known as the "church" is the very same means by which Christ is made manifest in our midst. In other words, the extension of our bodies (through digital and physical means) into the body of Christ creates the necessary conditions for Christ to be present—real, actual, effective—in the first place. "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt 18:20). Thus, whether its members gather online or offline, the church is not merely the *metaphorical* body of Christ. It *is* the body of Christ—extended, embodied, embedded, and emerging in those very spaces where the digital and physical worlds meet.

But if this "presencing" of Christ does indeed take place in and through the extension of our bodies (digitally or otherwise), then the inverse must be true as well. That is, the incarnation itself might best be understood as the extension of divine personhood by means of a complex, emergent biological system otherwise known as Jesus' human body. Jesus "took on flesh" (John 1:14, Heb 2:14) and, in doing so, incorporated material reality into the divine life. Thus, even the hypostatic union develops and emerges through a process of self-organizing personhood, the sum of which cannot be reduced to its constituent parts. Likewise, the resurrected Christ now takes on a human body insofar as the community of faith enacts or realizes

itself as the body of Christ. And in even broader, more cosmic terms, the entire created order might be seen as an extension of this same incarnational impulse—an ongoing, dynamic process of emergence in which God is embodied, embedded, and extended in and through the world.

None of this is meant to suggest that the created order is to be equated with God. But neither is creation wholly separate from God. Rather, the immanent order of creation is an embodiment and extension of the transcendent God. Both God and the world create the conditions for the o/Other to emerge, which is why the apostle Paul can say, "for from him and through him and to him are all things" (Rom 11:36), and that God will one day be "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

From this view, God is neither "inside" nor "outside" the world. Instead, in the words of Mark C. Taylor, the extension of God "names the unnamable 'outside' that is 'inside' every system, structure, and schema as its necessary condition. As such, it is the irreducible trace that marks and remarks the openness and incompletion of seemingly closed systems. . . . [It] is neither transcendent nor immanent but is an immanent transcendence that disrupts and dislocates systems, structures, and schemata that seem to be secure."[23] If this is indeed true, then we might even say that the material world itself is the interface where the divine and the human encounter and disrupt one another through a near-chaotic but infinitely creative process. And just as anyone with a five-year-old already knows, interface is reality.

Bibliography

Brown, Warren S., and Brad D. Strawn. *The Physical Nature of Christian Life: Neuroscience, Psychology, and the Church*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

———. "Self-Organizing Personhood: Complex Emergent Developmental Linguistic Relational Neurophysiologicalism." In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology*, edited by Joshua Ferris and Charles Taliaferro, 91–102. Burlington: Ashgate, 2016.

Callaway, Kutter. "Wii Are In*spirit*ed: The Transformation of Home Video Consoles (and Us)." In *Halos and Avatars: Playing Video Games with God*, edited by Craig Detweiler, 75–90. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010.

Campbell, Heidi A., and Stephen Garner. *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016.

Clark, Andy. *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997.

23. Taylor, *After God*, 127. Even though he is exploring the value of religion in a post-secular world, the concept of God's "immanent transcendence" is not original to Taylor. Indeed, Jürgen Moltmann articulated a strikingly similar concept in *Spirit of Life*.

———. *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Haugeland, J. "Mind Embodied and Embedded." In *Having Thought: Essays in the Metaphysics of Mind*, edited by J. Haugeland, 207–40. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Laytham, D. Brent. *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play: Theological Engagements with Entertainment.* Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992.

Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Taylor, Mark C. *After God*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.