

MUSIC AND SPIRITUALITY

THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES, EMPIRICAL
METHODS, AND CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

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16. An Abductive Study of Digital Worship through the Lenses of Netnography and Digital Ecclesiology

Tihomir Lazić

The rapid rise of digital technologies has dramatically transformed religious practices and communities, altering how people worship and experience spiritual realities, both individually and together. A notable shift has been the emergence of digital worship, often referred to as 'online' or 'virtual' worship. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly accelerated this transformation, solidifying the creation and dissemination of online worship songs as a new norm in religious circles. These initiatives sought to enrich communal worship experiences, bridging the gap between offline and online realms. In this evolving landscape, virtual worship choirs became increasingly popular, as they allowed musicians and vocalists to collaborate, producing music that nurtured a sense of shared worship despite the challenges of physical distance. The widespread practice of worship on social media, exemplified by platforms like YouTube, has become a rich reservoir of data, with a proliferation of virtual choirs presenting their multi-screen worship renditions.

This trove of abundant and readily accessible data offers an invaluable resource for researchers across diverse fields who are keen to untangle the intricate interplay between music, spirituality, and technology. Such inquiries are underpinned by pressing questions: what is the perceived impact of these online worship songs on people's spiritual

growth and receptiveness to the deeper, unseen layers of our existence? What motivations lie behind individuals' gravitation towards digital worship? How do these virtual religious engagements shape people's daily spiritual interactions with the divine and their community? Can online music facilitate and shape a genuine expression of the church's communal adoration and, if so, to what extent? And, delving into the heart of the matter, can we truly classify digital worship as genuine worship? It is as an ecclesialogist, musician, and worship leader that I venture into the discourse surrounding online music's potential to nurture deep spiritual connections among digital worshippers. Drawing from an interdisciplinary perspective, my study seeks to unveil the profound relational dynamics underpinning the Holy Spirit's community-forming actions in digital spaces, particularly as evident in the responses to the music videos created by virtual worship choirs in times of physical distancing.

I. An Abductive Method

In this study, our methodological approach draws upon the emergent and promising fields of netnography and digital ecclesiology. To glean a deeper insight into the Spirit's role in community formation in the context of digital worship, it is imperative that research strategies adeptly integrate theory and empirical data. Traditional ecclesiological research typically relies on a deductive approach, beginning with theoretical foundations. Conversely, netnographic research, employing ethnographic principles to study digital communities, emphasises an inductive approach, examining empirical data derived from the stories and lived experiences within these online spaces.¹ However, employing an abductive approach presents an opportunity to bridge the gap between theory and lived experiences. Through this abductive lens, characterised by a dialectical method, one can oscillate between theory and data, creating a dialogue that enriches both domains.² This dynamic

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- 1 Daniela Abrants Ferreira and Paula Castro Pires de Souza Chimenti, 'Netnography: Unveiling Human Narratives in a Digital World', *Brazilian Journal of Marketing* 21.4 (2022), 1433–55.
 - 2 Kirstine Helboe Johansen, 'Analytical Strategies', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. by Knut Tveitereid and Pete Ward

process enables us to engage with the complexities of human experience in tandem with theological concepts.

Identifying the three critical domains—within, through, and around us—where the Spirit’s community-generating activity is most evident, lays the groundwork for formulating relevant empirical queries. Leveraging the potency of an abductive approach, the research can yield nuanced understandings of the Spirit’s dynamic community-building movements, as manifested in online worship responses facilitated through digitally-mediated music.³ Within the realm of contemporary ecclesiological studies, the task of integrating an abductive method—merging netnography and digital ecclesiology—into the study of digital worship is still in its nascent stages. This study seeks to address this void, laying foundational groundwork for this innovative methodological approach and setting the stage for a more in-depth future exploration.

The spotlight on a multi-screen virtual choir video, ‘The UK Blessing’, serves not just as a case study but as a tangible testament to the efficacy of our abductive method. This well-known worship video—featuring a collective rendition of the song ‘The Blessing’—garnered substantial attention upon its release on YouTube on 3 May 2020.⁴ Penned by Chris Brown, Cody Carnes, Kari Jobe, and Steven Furtick, the song was originally introduced on Elevation Worship’s YouTube channel in early March 2020, its debut coinciding with the initial surge of the global pandemic.⁵ The 3 May video showcases a conglomerate of over sixty-five churches from the United Kingdom, harmonising to send a message of unity and hope during challenging times. The song draws inspiration from a well-known biblical text, Numbers 6:24–26, and has

(Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022), pp. 396–98.

- 3 The tangible and historical manifestations of the faith community’s participation in God call for interdisciplinary scholarly collaboration. Such collaboration should encompass theology, sociology, ethnography, history, anthropology, demography, cultural studies, and more. The incorporation of pneumatological insights with qualitative methodologies such as netnography, virtual ethnography, and grounded theory is especially promising, with regard to the burgeoning digital arenas where faith communities thrive. The confluence of online and offline ecclesiastical expressions in mediating divine presence constitutes an intriguing frontier ripe for exploration.
- 4 The UK Blessing, ‘The UK Blessing—Churches Sing “The Blessing” over the UK’, online video recording, *YouTube*, 3 May 2020, <https://youtu.be/PUtl3mNj5U>
- 5 Elevation Worship, ‘The Blessing with Kari Jobe & Cody Carnes’, online video recording, *YouTube*, 6 March 2020, <https://youtu.be/Zp6aygmVzM4>

amassed a considerable following, with over 5.3 million views and 6,276 comments on YouTube.⁶ Surprisingly elaborate and extensive comments offer a treasure trove of insights into the spiritual impact and communal aspects of this phenomenon of digital worship. While the extensive engagement with this video illustrates the profound communal and spiritual impact of digital worship, our primary emphasis lies in establishing the abductive method's viability as a ground-breaking and academically rigorous avenue for subsequent research.

II. Digital Worship Through an Ecclesiological Lens

What might be the most fruitful ecclesiological approach for studying community formation in the context of digital worship? I posit that communion ecclesiology, with its focus on relational dynamics, offers the most insightful perspective for understanding the church's communal essence.⁷ Within contemporary ecclesiological discourse, this relational approach has garnered endorsement from many theologians spanning diverse Christian traditions, primarily for its capacity to foster enriched ecumenical, inter-church, and inter-faith dialogues.⁸ Yet, notwithstanding its broad acceptance, only of late has it been acknowledged as a salient methodology for examining the digital

6 For lyrics, see the video's accompanying script: 'The UK Blessing', *YouTube*. Verse: 'The Lord bless you / And keep you / Make His face shine upon you / And be gracious to you / The Lord turn His / Face toward you / And give you peace / As we receive, we agree, amen.' Chorus: 'Amen, amen, amen.' Bridge: 'May His favor be upon you / And a thousand generations / And your family and your children / And their children, and their children. / May His presence go before you / And behind you, and beside you / All around you, and within you / He is with you, He is with you'.

7 Dennis M. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology: Vision and Versions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), p. 12.

8 World Council of Churches, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper 214 (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2013). See also World Council of Churches, 'Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life, and Witness: A Discussion Paper', *Proceedings of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela*, ed. by Thomas Best and Gunther Gassmann (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 1993).

manifestations of faith communities.⁹ This approach, rooted in the conviction that the church, at its core, is a communion of believers united with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, adds breadth and depth to the sociological definitions of the term ‘community’ (communion or *koinonia*).¹⁰ It explores the ways in which the human community reflects and participates in trinitarian communion.¹¹

Two major approaches, *imitatio Trinitatis* and *participatio Trinitatis*, are prominent in clarifying the relationship between the Trinity and the church. The *participatio Trinitatis* approach offers a dynamic and theologically sound vision by emphasising the believer’s participation in the divine life as revealed in history. It focuses on personal interaction, indwelling, and sharing among believers and with God. Rather than speculating about the inner being of the Trinity as a blueprint for human community (as in the case of *imitatio Trinitatis*), *participatio Trinitatis* grounds the church’s being in aspects of divine life accessible through the event of Christ in which believers participate through the Spirit.¹²

Accordingly, I propose that this approach is at its best when it starts with a rich account of the movement of the Spirit among believers and then explores the ways in which the Spirit transforms and gathers believers around Christ, making them an essential part of God’s triune

9 Heidi A. Campbell, *Ecclesiology for a Digital Church: Theological Reflections on a New Normal*, ed. by Heidi A. Campbell and John Dyer (London: SCM Press, 2022), pp. 65–66.

10 Ferreira and Chimenti, ‘Netnography’, 1433–55.

11 Tihomir Lazić, *Towards an Adventist Version of Communio Ecclesiology: Remnant in Koinonia*, ed. by Gerard Mannion and Mark Chapman, *Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 146–53.

12 Within Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant theological circles, the most coherent, creative, and profound theological attempts to define a vision of the church according to the image of a triune God have arguably been made by Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas (Eastern Orthodox tradition), Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), and Miroslav Volf (Protestant/Evangelical and ‘Free Church’ tradition). See John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985); Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1996); and Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998). For a more detailed critical assessment of these dominant approaches, see Tihomir Lazić, ‘*Ecclesia Semper Migranda*: Towards a Vision of a Migrant Church for Migrants’, in *The Church, Migration, and Global (In)Difference*, ed. by Darren J. Dias et al. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 241–61.

life.¹³ To deepen this exploration, we can identify three principal domains where the community-making activity of the Spirit is most vividly and richly experienced: within us, through us, and around us.¹⁴ A recognition of these realms is crucial for articulating a holistic trinitarian perspective of the church as *koinonia*. While leading digital ecclesialogists, such as Heidi A. Campbell, John Dyer, and others, have recently recognised the heuristic potential of the concept of *koinonia* in deepening our comprehension of the evolving landscape of digital faith communities, there remains room to develop this concept further within the realm of digital ecclesiology.¹⁵

The following section will trace the practical effects of the Holy Spirit's constitutive work in fostering spiritual connection (*koinonia*) among participants of digital worship, as reflected in the comments section of the multi-screen music video, 'The UK Blessing'. The case study, as will be demonstrated, underscores the heuristic potential and applicability of a *koinonia*-based digital ecclesiology framework in interpreting the data derived from the netnographic analysis of online worshippers' insights and narratives.

(a) Spirit within Us

The Spirit's movement within believers manifests in three distinct yet intertwined ways: transformation, enlightenment, and connectedness (*koinonia*). The first aspect, transformation, encompasses a comprehensive change in one's character, attitudes, and heart's

13 Gregory J. Liston, *The Anointed Church: Toward a Third Article Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), pp. 12–14; Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1972), pp. 24–25; D. Lyle Dabney, 'Starting with the Spirit: Why the Last Should Now Be First', in *Starting with the Spirit*, ed. by Stephen K. Pickard and Gordon R. Preece (Hindmarsh: Australian Theological Forum, 2001), pp. 3–27. This approach—recently gaining traction among theologians across Christian denominations—presents significant potential for fresh theological discoveries. These include authors writing from the perspective of Roman Catholicism (Yves Congar, Ralph Del Colle, David Coffey), Protestant denominations (Lyle Dabney, Myk Habets, Gary Badcock, Clark Pinnock), and ecumenical traditions (Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Amos Yong, Miroslav Volf, Steven Studebaker). Liston, *The Anointed Church*, p. 14.

14 For a more comprehensive exposition of this tripartite pneumatological framework, see Lazić, *Towards an Adventist Version of Communio Ecclesiology*, pp. 193–201.

15 Campbell, *Ecclesiology for a Digital Church*, pp. 65–66.

dispositions, shaping their overall demeanour. Often referred to as sanctification, this inner metamorphosis culminates in what the apostle Paul describes as ‘the fruit of the Spirit’. Foremost among these fruits is love, which encompasses other facets such as joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.¹⁶ In the Christian view, these attributes characterise the Spirit-filled existence of devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

Continuing to the second facet, enlightenment, it is crucial to recognise the Spirit’s role in making divine knowledge accessible to believers via revelation, inspiration, and illumination.¹⁷ The intertwining journey of knowledge and love is evident: deepening love fosters a more profound understanding of God, and in turn, an enriched comprehension of God amplifies love for Him and compassion for others.¹⁸ The Spirit’s dual roles—sanctification and enlightenment—cast discernible imprints on God’s community, most notably in their interpersonal bonds. Jesus emphasised that selfless, loving connections stand as the most compelling testament to a community’s divine affiliation.¹⁹ For believers, the paramount aim is to embody and express the divine love epitomised by Jesus Christ in all their interactions.²⁰

This leads to the third dimension, connectedness: through the Spirit’s intervention, believers become profoundly attuned to God, strengthening their bonds with Him and with one another. This metamorphic journey moves individuals beyond a self-centric and insulated mode of being, ushering them into a more expansive, other-centric realm. Here, the solitary ‘I’ evolves into a communal ‘We’, without being suppressed or fused in the process. As a result of this relational evolution, believers become profoundly immersed in connections steeped in love, acceptance, forgiveness, commitment, and intimacy, forming the foundation of a thriving communal existence.²¹ And so, by attuning themselves to the Spirit’s inner movement with a posture of openness, their bond with the

16 Gal 5:22–23

17 John 14:26; 1 Cor 2:10–13.

18 2 Peter 1:3–8.

19 ‘By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another’ (John 13:35, English Standard Version).

20 Richard Rice, ‘The Trinitarian Basis of Christian Community’, in *Biblical and Theological Studies on the Trinity*, ed. by Paul Petersen and Rob McIver (Adelaide: Avondale Academic Press, 2014), pp. 101–12.

21 Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology*, p. 13.

divine deepens. This draws them further into a vast web of interwoven relationships that echo God's communal essence, encompassing not only humanity but the entirety of creation.

Through the transformative, enlightening, and connecting work of the Spirit within them, individuals find themselves oriented Godward in a profound manner. This deep transformation—encompassing mind, emotions, and actions—gives rise to the holistic and relational response of creatures to their Creator, a resonance known as worship. Within this act, all these aspects of human nature harmoniously align, responding with all that we are to all that God is. This whole-life response, in essence, captures the very heart of worship.

(b) Spirit through Us

The movement of the Spirit through believers is evident in the manifestation of spiritual gifts, or charisms, distributed by the Spirit for the edification and growth of the community.²² These gifts unify and diversify the ecclesial community, creating a pneuma-dynamic communal life. Guided by the Spirit and sharing their unique gifts through various modes of communal service (ministries), believers shape the flow and rhythm of the community, fostering an organic connection and deep sense of rootedness in the mysterious realm of the body of Christ.²³

The Spirit's movement through believers creates a space where the people of God can harness their talents, gifts, and experiences, progressing towards their full potential. In this setting, collective worship becomes an avenue where each person's unique contributions coalesce to bring glory to God. This highly connected and interdependent mode of relationships allows each individual not only to contribute to the well-being of others but also to experience the fullness of Christ through the gifts exercised by their peers.²⁴ Through the work of the Spirit, the community of believers becomes a welcoming and just community, offering a spiritual home to the uprooted, marginalised, rejected, and hurt. In this Spirit-forged haven, individuals can find their place,

22 1 Cor 12:7.

23 1 Cor 12:27; Volf, *After Our Likeness*, pp. 228–33.

24 Eph 4:11–13; Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), pp. 173–91.

healing, acceptance, and true belonging.²⁵ It is within this transformative community that human beings can truly flourish and experience the fullness of life and joy.²⁶

(c) Spirit around Us

The movement of the Spirit around the believers expands their community's sphere of interest to include all aspects of life and the world. It invites them to become aware of God's work in various domains of life and join forces with him.²⁷ This holistic outlook requires the Christian community to listen to and learn from those outside their religious boundaries, discerning the Spirit's action in the challenges and wisdom found there. Humility and openness are essential for the faith community to be true to its essence.²⁸ The Spirit's work extends beyond the church, drawing believers closer to others and making them sensitive to their needs. By participating in the mission of God, they engage in the movement of restoration of the broken world.²⁹

25 Lazić, 'Ecclesia Semper Migranda', pp. 256–57.

26 1 John 1:1–4

27 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 18.

28 Acts 10:34, 35.

29 Jürgen Moltmann is one of many modern authors who affirm a close connection between the political and economic event of liberation and the experience of the Holy Spirit. See, for instance, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), p. 154; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992). In view of this recent re-discovery of the extra-ecclesial work of the Spirit, it is not accidental that one finds so many different types of liberationist movements and initiatives that insist on opening up the church to the world and engaging actively in its struggle to reach the ideals of justice, mutual solidarity, tolerance, and socio-economic, racial and gender equality. See Michael Welker, *God the Spirit* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), pp. 16–17; Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1991). A Belgian theologian, long resident in Brazil, José Comblin, sees a modern reappearance of the experience of the Spirit manifested in the social realm in the heightened desire to engage in social action, in the experience of freedom, in the growing need to speak out for the poor and marginalised, in the experience of community, and in a new aspiration for life. See José Comblin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), p. xi. Similarly, Moltmann talks about the liberating work of the Spirit in three dimensions, associating them with three classical virtues: (1) liberating faith: freedom as subjectivity; (2) liberating love: freedom as sociality;

In summary, the Spirit not only moves within believers to transform them into Christ's likeness but also flows through them, incorporating them into his spiritual body. Beyond this, the Spirit works around them, drawing them into active participation in Christ's movement in the world and back to the Father.³⁰ In its whole-life response to these three-fold currents of the Spirit, the community of believers is oriented towards its ultimate purpose—Jesus Christ. In Christ, the entire universe and the community of faith are united in the triune life of God. Through this ongoing spirited *koinonia* with Christ and the Father, the community of believers stands as a truthful witness, a foretaste, and a prophetic sign of the coming kingdom of God. As the imperfect church moves forward, it embodies the kingdom of God, offering hope for a better future in anticipation of its ultimate fulfilment.

As it navigates the complexities of the twenty-first century, this dynamic community of believers with God takes on diverse shapes, forms, and contexts. Yet, its dynamic communal essence remains unchanged. When the Spirit-generated *koinonia* takes tangible form, notably through open communal worship in both online and offline spaces, it deeply resonates with the contemporary generation. This manifestation captivates their imagination, serving as a powerful reminder of what it means to be fully and truly human—person-in-relation. Moved by this realisation, they are prompted to respond to the Spirit's community-making movements by becoming:

...a community of justice in a world of economic and ecological injustice; a community of generosity and simplicity (of being able to say 'enough') in a world of consumer satiation; a community of selfless giving in a world of selfishness; a community of truth [=humility and boldness] in a world of relativism; a community of hope in a world of disillusionment; a community of joy and thanksgiving in a world of entitlement; a community that experiences God's supernatural presence in a secular world where all days are the same, and nothing is exceptional or supernatural...³¹

and (3) liberating hope: freedom as future. For more details, see Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, pp. 114–20.

30 John 1:18; Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 256.

31 Daniel Duda, 'Adventist Identity—A Never-Ending Quest', paper presented at TED Bible Conference, Newbold College, Bracknell, 18 June 2019,

III. Digital Worship through a Netnographic Lens

After examining ecclesiological perspectives on the internal dynamics of the Spirit-driven, community-generative movement, especially visible in the act of Christian worship, we now pivot to an empirically grounded inquiry facilitated by netnography. The central question arises: can these profound relational dynamics be discerned within the context of digital worship, specifically as facilitated by the YouTube video ‘The UK Blessing’? I contend that an analysis of over 6,200 comments yields a resounding ‘yes’. While numerous possible angles and inquiries could be pursued to substantiate this case, within the scope of this chapter, I will provide a summary complemented by an impressionistic overview of the predominant themes, trends, and sentiments emerging from the data. I will spotlight select comments that provide a helpful glimpse into the experiences and narratives of the online worshipper community interacting with the choir’s multi-screen video.

(a) Worship as a Godward Response

To begin, an analysis of the comment section’s word frequency and trends uncovers a remarkable spiritual resonance within the community, reflecting a Godward orientation.³² The most recurrent nouns include ‘God’ (1,558 mentions), ‘Lord’ (626), ‘Jesus’ (562), the personal pronoun ‘He’ used to signify the divine (515), ‘Christ’ (274), and ‘Spirit’ (156). These word frequencies signify a deeply ingrained theocentric framework that permeates the community’s experience and commentary on the song. This linguistic prevalence underscores the guiding influence of the Spirit, showing how individuals, even in a digital space, may pivot towards God, embodying the essence of worship as a God-centred response.

The theological perspective of these worshippers becomes more apparent upon closer examination of their comments. While the

https://ted.adventist.org/images/departments/Adventist_Identity_Bible_Conference-Duda.pdf

32 Analysis conducted on comments gathered until 8 September 2023; the video remains active and continues to attract new responses.

audience is wide-ranging, encompassing individuals from various monotheistic religions, a prevailing Christian influence is evident in their remarks. This Christian inclination is underscored by the frequent references to 'Jesus' and 'Christ' within the context of the Old Testament Aaronic blessing, even though these specific terms are not explicitly mentioned in this ancient text. These references strongly imply that viewers predominantly interpret the text through the lens of the New Testament, giving us clues about their likely identity and worldview.

Furthermore, the extensive repertoire of terms, names, adjectives, and phrases used to depict the nature and attributes of the Ultimate Being they hold in reverence reveals a multifaceted theological landscape. Expressions—such as YHWH, Almighty God, God the Father, Son, Spirit, Holy God, God of Israel, the Messiah, Comforter, God of all the nations, Triune God, Healer, Real God, Living God, Most High God, Lord Most High, the Saviour, Lord God Almighty, King Papa, Sovereign God, Our King, Light, Salvation, Compassionate Lord of all—emphasise a multifaceted understanding of God. This portrayal highlights their belief in a transcendent God who governs the ever-changing events of the world while also embodying an immanent presence—a God who is a close companion, co-sufferer, comforter, and intimate friend. This dual perspective of the divine—marked by intimate closeness and compassion, on the one hand, and transcendence and control, on the other—may offer profound comfort, hope, and insight to individuals navigating a world marred by pain, evil, and suffering, especially in the context of a global pandemic. It allows worshippers to find solace in a compassionate God while trusting in a higher, controlling power when facing adversity and uncertainty.

As individuals eloquently express their profound praises, adoration, and a sense of awe, a recurring and poignant theme often arises in the comments: the personal experience of God's tangible presence, with commenters recounting how it has brought them joy, love, fulfilment, transformation, peace, healing, comfort, and hope. However, these expressions are more than just uplifting, taking on additional significance when viewed against the grim backdrop of a global pandemic. Many of these commenters have faced the agonising loss of loved ones. In the face of adversity and personal tragedy, these worshippers seek solace

and inspiration in God, turning to worship and adoration as a holistic response to the divine presence and self-disclosure they encounter in their faith journey.

(b) Worship as a Holistic Response

In the act of communal worship, the comments capture a spectrum of human experiences: from exhilaration to despair, from moments of joy to instances of sorrow. They serve as heartfelt testimonies of God's revelation in the lives of the commenters, depicting His interventions in their personal journeys, especially in these challenging times. The depth of emotion in these reflections is palpable. Moreover, the breadth of supportive, empathetic, and affirming responses they receive from other participants underscores a shared emotional resonance within the community.

Throughout the digital worship platform, the comments weave a vivid narrative that illuminates the transformative interplay between music and individual spirituality. One participant, highlighting their transformative journey, shared, 'Thank you Jesus for healing me, I'm 23 and finally met Christ after years of addiction, anxiety and pain'. This deep emotional connection is further mirrored by another: 'I was so depressed, then when I heard this song, I literally cried and cried. I heard the name of Jesus and it touched me'.

Music, in this setting, appears as a powerful medium, leading individuals to moments of introspection, solace, and fortitude. This sentiment is echoed by a commenter who shared, 'Today I woke up with hope again, and this song is helping me calm my heart'. Similarly, another expressed their personal struggle with profound loneliness, saying, 'I'm an only child to my parents and also very sensitive, the loneliness just eats me up sometimes, and I come here and listen to worship songs and cry my heart out, this gives me comfort on an unimaginable level'.

While the song serves as a catalyst, the underlying transformative experiences seem to suggest a greater spiritual movement at play. An individual confided, 'This song touched my soul in a way I can't explain. I found my way back to God'. Another individual poignantly described a spiritual metamorphosis, saying, 'I felt the darkness depart and light flood in, leading me to fall to the floor under the power of Jesus'. Many

reported experiencing love, peace, joy, and comfort as they listened. For instance, one comment read, 'This song brought tears to my eyes. I felt God's love surrounding me'. One participant noted, 'Listening to songs like this touches my heart... Thank you, Jesus'. This sentiment is further echoed by others, with comments like, 'Love you, Jesus... this song helps me cry my heart out... Thank you for always being there for me' and 'This song moves me to tears and compels me to worship'.

Beyond personal emotional experiences, the song is a beacon of revelation and hope for many. One touching comment read, 'I found out I was pregnant after having a miscarriage... When hearing this song, I felt like it was God telling me and my family everything will be okay and to stay strong!' Such moments coalesce into a collective sense of worship and reverence, embodied in affirmations such as, 'I will praise you, Jesus, I will glorify your name! Jesus is the Lord!'

The song's continued relevance in the lives of the worshippers becomes apparent with remarks like, 'And again, I have come back to listen to this wonderful work and to drink in those beautiful faces and bask in the love that shines through'. The shared longing for divine intervention culminates in heartfelt prayers: 'This song brings me to tears every time I hear it. My prayer is, Lord Jesus, come soon; we truly need you. The earth is in turmoil; we long for your presence and intervention. Oh Lord, come soon! Amen'. These reflections not only capture the spectrum of human experience but also the deep emotional resonance the song evokes, further emphasising the song's role as a touchstone for many in their spiritual journey.

Such comments demonstrate the inward transformation, enlightenment, and connectedness arising from music-enabled worship. As previously discussed, this is emblematic of the Spirit's movement within, a movement that touches the entire breadth of the human experience, spanning cognitive, emotional, physical, and spiritual faculties. These worship reflections convey a profound spiritual experience that, while deeply personal, resonates widely. Moreover, they underscore the potency of music in eliciting an internal response and priming individuals for a deeper spiritual connection, both with the divine and with others.

(c) Worship as a Community-Forging Response

Data analysis reveals that the Godward orientation in digital worship, engaging every facet of human existence—mind, heart, body, and spirit—goes beyond mere individual experiences. This orientation culminates in a pronounced communal bond, engendering a palpable sense of togetherness. Intriguingly, a netnographic examination shows that the term ‘together’ is the second most commonly used word, following ‘God’. Terms like ‘unity’, ‘union’, ‘united’, ‘one’, ‘belonging’, ‘being with’, ‘community’, ‘we’, ‘fellowship’, and ‘togetherness’ trail closely behind. Such linguistic patterns highlight not just a communion with the divine but also a profound bond with fellow worshippers.

The digital worship experience, with its synergetic combination of music and faith, has unarguably emerged as a salient force, for some breaking down denominational, racial, and other barriers and amplifying the sense of unity and shared spiritual journey. A participant passionately captured this sentiment, stating, ‘We are all one in Jesus Christ regardless of colour, religion and race. Just Christ shining within us, radiating our unity and pure joy of serving and sharing him! The devil messed up when he thought closing churches would shut us up! More churches have opened, more people are coming together, and so many more have received Jesus as their Lord and Saviour!’ Another viewer commented: ‘I love this song and the unity between the churches. We may be in different churches, but we are all one family. I feel so encouraged by this song at these difficult times and know I have a big family out there and an amazing God’.

This strong spirit of unity, transcending boundaries, is a recurring theme throughout. ‘So powerful and united. Long may this spirit of unity continue across the churches and the people of the UK’, one viewer noted. This sentiment is echoed by another who jubilantly exclaimed, ‘We loved being a part of this! Thanks to all who worked so hard to pull it together! What a beautiful time to come together as the Church to sing this blessing over our land!’ Building on this theme of collaboration and inclusivity, another shared, ‘Fantastic to see so many churches come together. Uplifting to see so many men, women and young people getting involved’. Amidst these comments, one particularly impassioned viewer revealed, ‘I don’t usually comment on YouTube videos, but I have to on

this one because this is one of the most powerful things I have seen in a long time. The unity and the presence of God displayed here brought me to tears!!!! Wow wow wow!! This is so beautiful, this's what Jesus has been waiting for in the Body of Christ. The time has come for the true worshippers to come together in the Spirit of Unity. It's so Awesome!!!'

The adversity of lockdown only seemed to strengthen the resolve of the community. 'Love this. I can sense the power and love that happens when God's church comes together in unity. If there is anything we have learned from the Covid-19 pandemic, it is that when important things happen, we lose the things that divide and come together in unity'. The strength of this sentiment was mirrored by another: 'Awesome unity in worship. Hallelujah! We may be in lockdown but the body of Christ is waxing stronger from behind closed doors! No denominational or racial barriers whatsoever! The church is marching on!'

Expanding on this feeling of collective strength, one viewer mused, 'Sometimes as the church in the UK we seem so small, yet this has shown just how BIG we are'. Many were moved by the solidarity on display during this challenging time: 'This was absolutely beautiful... uplifting especially now with the chaos and coronavirus...seeing the church come together as one...the body of Christ...God is with us... He is for us...my children...their children...their children to a thousand generations...amen'. 'This almost brought me to tears. It's what heaven will be like!' remarked one individual, while another conveyed the depth of the impact of this shared worship initiative: 'On my knees as I am overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit. Beautiful unity'.

The assortment of comments accentuates a distinctive unity in diversity within the Christian community, showcasing a rich mosaic of beliefs, traditions, and voices. One viewer's statement stands out as especially reflective: 'A simple coming together of different flavours of the Church, singing from the same song sheet, with a heart and mouth of blessing over the nation. This is not just a collective of people singing words to music, it is a communication of God's heart over the nation. This is THE Church'. Such a plethora of comments is a testament to the unifying power of music and faith. Together, they craft a vivid image of unity within the body of Christ, illustrating how shared worship experiences can bridge divides, foster harmony, and create an overwhelming sense of togetherness.

(d) Worship as an Expansive and Transformative Response

Data analysis reveals that worship extends beyond the confines of the event. It is a highly dynamic and expansive response, deepening inwardly in spiritual richness and radiating outwardly into broader life realms. Internally, as worshippers bond, their shared experiences become more profound, enriched, and transformative. This heightened intimacy amplifies the collective allure, reminiscent of the early church, attracting others into their circle of unity.³³ The magnetism of this genuine worshipful response is evident in comments from those outside this religious tradition. An unaffiliated individual, touched by this unity, remarked: 'I'm not even religious, but this song is beautiful because it unites people through the faith of Christ, and even I can appreciate that'.

Externally, authentic worship reverberates beyond the confines of the collective moment, permeating daily lives, guiding interpersonal relationships, and shaping engagements with the broader world. As worshippers are uplifted, they are also compelled to interact with, support, and stand in solidarity with the wider humanity. This dual orientation, both inward for spiritual growth and outward for worldly engagement, positions worship as a resonant and transformative force in all aspects of human existence.

The sheer volume of comments vividly illustrates how the music became a catalyst for individuals to extend love, grace, and support to others using their spiritual gifts. In a sense, worshippers increasingly feel the pull to 'worship beyond worship'. For example, one commenter noted, 'This song has encouraged me to reach out to my neighbours and start a prayer group'. Echoing this sentiment, another stated, 'Feeling blessed to be part of a community that shows love and compassion, even in times of crisis'. There is a clear sentiment in many remarks pointing to a conscious alignment with the global Christian community, coupled with an invigorated drive for service and outreach. A notable comment read, 'This song reminds me that we are all part of a larger family across the world. We need to stand together and serve'.

33 Acts 2:47, 5:42.

To outsiders, the intricate, Spirit-fuelled dynamics at play within the faith community may seem elusive. Yet, the tangible outcomes of such dynamics are unmistakably evident. This is not just a community that proclaims hope; it embodies it. As illustrated by this case study, the community of believers does not merely sing about a blessing; they actively strive to be a blessing in their everyday lives. As indicated in the video description, many of the churches featured in this song have assisted with supplying over 400,000 meals to the most vulnerable and isolated since the onset of the COVID-19 lockdown.³⁴ Their outreach further extends to phone calls for the isolated, pharmacy delivery drops, and serving hot meals to frontline NHS hospital staff. These acts spotlight the profound resonance of spiritual unity—showing that it not only touches hearts through music but also drives real-world compassionate actions.

IV. Digital Ecclesiology Meets Netnography

In this section, we merge insights from digital ecclesiology and netnography, presenting preliminary conclusions regarding the Holy Spirit's role in shaping worship communities in digital spaces, especially as highlighted by the virtual worship choirs in times of physical distancing. Our focus is on the methodological prospects, potentials, and limitations of using these two closely interrelated disciplines. I argue that the marriage of these disciplines, when holistically pursued, could forge an invaluable interdisciplinary perspective, illuminating the intricate nexus of music, technology, and spirituality with clarity and depth. Together, they provide a richer portrayal of this emergent spiritual phenomenon of digital worship, each highlighting unique and critical facets of its manifestation and impact.

Digital ecclesiology, with its theological roots, reveals a deeper spiritual dimension of the observed phenomena. It provides a heuristic framework that serves as a reference point for interpreting the vast spectrum of responses and experiences as indicators of profound spiritual forces at work 'behind the scenes'. These forces are perceived as guiding and directing individuals, as well as the broader

34 The UK Blessing, 'The UK Blessing', <https://youtu.be/PUtl13mNj5U>

creation, towards their Creator—the origin, foundation, and ultimate purpose of their existence. These spiritual movements, often eluding immediate human perception, reveal the Spirit's agency in generating the ever-evolving communion of worshippers. They unveil the life-awakening currents of the Spirit and their pivotal role in eliciting these reactions within the intricate divine-human relational dance. Without overshadowing or infringing upon human agency, the Spirit subtly and gently steers their paths, fostering growth, unity, and holistic flourishing. Through its theologically informed lens, this discipline grapples with the foundational questions of 'why' and 'how' this form of worship comes into existence. By articulating these theological underpinnings and elucidating the divine agency in the orchestration of community, it positions the human participant in relation to this overarching theocentric narrative. This discipline's emphasis is more theoretical, delineating the broader relational structures and the dynamics between divine and human factors foundational to the digital worship experience.

In contrast to this theoretical lens of digital ecclesiology, netnography harnesses an empirically grounded approach, delving deep into the lived experiences of digital worshippers. In undertaking a netnographic investigation, this study employs a dual analytical approach. On a macro-level, it examines prevalent linguistic patterns, trends, and sentiments. Simultaneously, on a micro-level, it scrutinises individual comments. This methodology provides a window into the relational patterns, theological perspectives, convictions, and the myriad of lived experiences that define this digital worship community—experiences that often defy simple categorisation. Here, worshippers are depicted in the thick of life's messiness, replete with its inherent imperfections, struggles, and limitations. This empirical study presents worshippers in their authentic contexts, navigating the complexities of their existence. Rooted in diverse historical, cultural, and religious backgrounds, their narratives vividly express the ebbs and flows characteristic of an evolving relationship with the divine. In this context, the digital worship experience is laid bare: candid, tangible, and profoundly intimate. It captures the raw, tumultuous, and often chaotic nature of human emotions and experiences. This netnographic portrayal uncovers the more dramatic horizon of a digital worship community—one that is historically contingent and imperfect but equally embraced and

animated by the divine, shedding light on the unique complexities and challenges inherent in their spiritual journeys.³⁵

And so, the comments derived from the netnographic study seem to ground and qualify experientially this ecclesiological framework by shedding light on the effects of the Spirit's influence on individual worshippers, sparking their inner transformation, enlightenment, and a sense of connectedness. This spiritual flow, evident in their feedback, accentuates the profound communal bond they experience while being integrated into the body of Christ through the movement of the Spirit within them and through them. Within this communion, worshippers harness their Spirit-bestowed gifts and competencies to enhance collective well-being and growth. Furthermore, mirroring the ecclesiological framework proposed, the netnographic analysis indicates that believers' actions, steeped in love, compassion, and service, transcend mere declarations of faith, seeking tangible betterment in the broader world while aligning and collaborating with the Spirit's restorative endeavours throughout creation. Although the intricate dynamics of the Spirit's movement within, through, and around worshippers might often remain subtly veiled, their tangible effects are discernible in the testimonies and experiences of worshippers. Such manifestation lends concrete support to this spiritual narrative, opening a portal into a more comprehensive, nuanced, and experientially informed theology.

When viewed in tandem, these disciplines converge to form a symbiotic academic partnership. Their combined insights sidestep potential reductionisms, ensuring balanced navigation between dualities such as the divine and human, perfect and flawed, immutable and evolving, and the ideal versus the actual lived reality. The pursuit of this abductive method yields an integrative vision—one where convergences and unique contributions of these two (and potentially more) distinct disciplines harmoniously coalesce, enriching and refining one another. While there may be inherent tensions between the two, they collectively

35 For further insights into the theodramatic horizon's capacity to encapsulate the complex, imperfect, and historically anchored vision of the church, see Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 25–76; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1988). The metaphor of drama is also used in Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology I: The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 75.

paint a holistic picture of digital worship as a spiritual response that, despite its virtual medium, remains profoundly embodied—deeply anchored in the lived realities, imperfections, and transient nature of human experience. This nexus, elucidated by both disciplines, offers an unprecedented window into a faith community’s dynamics, revealing a digital worship space where the divinity gracefully dances with humanity. Such an alliance also allows for a more comprehensive assessment of the nature and the extent of the impact that online music has in fostering authentic spiritual communion among those immersed in digital worship.

V. Moving beyond Binaries in Digital Worship Discourse

The concluding arc of this chapter aims to challenge some of the common misconceptions and false dichotomies that obscure contemporary conversations on the nature, purpose, and legitimacy of digital worship. By elucidating these divisive issues and offering tentative resolutions, we aim to accentuate the value, relevance, and applicability of the critical insights derived from the abductive method of inquiry.

To counteract the binary perspectives prevalent in contemporary discussions—those that artificially set embodied against disembodied, online-only against offline-only, and real against unreal—we draw on insights from our exploration of digital worship, shaped by the synergy of digital ecclesiology and netnography. First, rooted in pneumatologically-informed digital ecclesiology, we acknowledge the Spirit’s omnipresence, transcending time and space. The Spirit engages with us through various mediums, including human-made technology. As imitators of God’s creativity, the tools we devise, such as digital platforms, can also be channels for experiencing the Spirit’s movement. Second, we highlight the holistic engagement of worshippers in the Spirit-fuelled *koinonia*, encompassing their spiritual, psychological, and physical dimensions. A Godward, holistic, community-forging, expansive, and transformative response, worship is not limited to formal gatherings but is integrated into our daily lives and relationships. Such an all-encompassing experience of worship is always, and without

exception, inherently embodied, and through our bodies, the Spirit is manifested.

These insights may prompt us to rethink notions of enfleshment and embodiment in worship. Digital worship spaces can be a legitimate medium for genuine spiritual community, where the Spirit's presence is experienced through collective participation, transcending physical barriers.

(a) Embodied versus Disembodied

To clarify our language and challenge inaccurate distinctions, we should abandon the notion of 'embodied' versus 'disembodied' experiences, which wrongly equates offline with embodiment and online with disembodiment. Psychologist Margaret Mary Wilson has shown that humans are always embodied, regardless of whether they are interacting through screens or in physical spaces.³⁶ Yet, we must recognise the distinctive forms and experiences of embodiment that online and offline interactions offer and acknowledge the specific impact that they have on forming individuals, relationships, and religious communities.³⁷

Different platforms curate distinct experiences in music-facilitated digital worship. For instance, on YouTube, one-way broadcasts elicit a different sense of embodiment and engagement compared to two-way or multi-way technologies, like Zoom, with their interactive features. Similarly, an in-person worship service can provide a distinct experience of embodiment and communality depending on whether it is being live-streamed or not. While unidirectional mediums offer scalability and broad reach, engaging their worshippers via comments and allowing them to watch and sing along worldwide, multi-directional platforms permit real-time communal singing and spontaneous worship, turning isolated spaces into cohesive congregations. However, as Zoom worship sessions during lockdown demonstrated, technical challenges, such as sound lags or interruptions, can detract from the experience, in

36 Margaret Wilson, 'Six Views of Embodied Cognition', *Psychodynamic Bulletin and Review* 9.4, 625–36.

37 The following section is based on the basic definitions in John Dryer, 'Exploring Mediated *Ekklesia*: How We Talk about Church in the Digital Age', in *Ecclesiology for a Digital Church: Theological Reflections on a New Normal*, ed. by Heidi A. Campbell and John Dyer (London: SCM Press, 2022), pp. 5–8.

stark contrast to the polished nature of pre-recorded music videos. Nonetheless, this interactive online worship amplifies a different embodied sense of being together, fostering intimacy, vulnerability, and active participation, often with a smaller and tighter-knit group of worshippers.

Shifting our attention to ‘virtual church’ platforms, these online spaces craft fully immersive worship environments, enabling communities to gather within a virtual domain. Harnessing advanced virtual reality (VR) technologies, such as Second Life, Roblox, and Facebook Metaverse, the experience accentuates our spatial awareness and sensory engagement. Participants are plunged deeply into a complex representation of reality, acknowledging and celebrating our creaturely limitations. Moreover, such immersive platforms offer those with mobility constraints a preview of a promised divine future, envisioning a moment of complete healing and rejuvenation.³⁸

Finally, a hybrid worship model, combining the best of both digital and in-person experiences, holds great promise in bridging the offline and online spaces. By integrating the local and universal expressions of *koinonia*, this approach expands worship horizons. It encompasses a mixture of in-person and technology-mediated expressions of worship, leading to a rich and variegated experience that broadens inclusion and transcends traditional worship boundaries.³⁹

Based on our ecclesiological and netnographic findings, it becomes evident that the matter of embodiment should not be approached with a simplistic either/or binary perspective. Both online and offline spaces offer genuine and embodied experiences of connectedness in worship, albeit in different ways. Each space allows for the expression of certain aspects of human relationality that the other may not. They overlap in some sense but also operate differently, presenting opportunities for innovative and fresh expressions of worshipping *koinonia* in a world where the boundaries between offline and online are increasingly blurred. A deeper exploration and refinement of our techno-theological language and categories will enable us to better understand these

38 Dryer, ‘Exploring Mediated *Ekklesia*’, p. 13.

39 Ibid., pp. 15–16; Heidi A. Campbell, *The Distanced Church: Reflections on Doing Church Online* (Texas: Digital Religion Publishing & OakTrust-TAMU Libraries, 2020).

diverse worship expressions, prompting critical reflection on their essence, purpose, and importance.⁴⁰

(b) Online-Only versus Offline-Only

This introduces the question of where online-only or offline-only approaches to worship fit within the broader scholarly discourse on ecclesial practices. As evident from this study, technology can serve as an effective medium, connecting both universal and local worship expressions. An online-exclusive worship approach may perceive its realm as covering the full breadth of the digital landscape, utilising platforms like Facebook and sophisticated VR technology to connect with adjacent worshippers. Additionally, it might position itself as addressing the requirements of particular demographics unable to convene physically due to security concerns, health issues, or individual inclinations. In this framework, the online worship community stands as an indispensable adjunct to a broader faith community, providing spiritual sustenance, camaraderie, and connectivity, whilst endorsing engagement with local congregation when feasible.⁴¹

When evaluating the diverse online platforms that enable *koinonic* interactions in worship, it is pivotal not to perceive all digital church forms as providing homogenous experiences. Descriptors like broadcast, virtual, interactive, and hybrid aptly convey the essence and the values underpinning these worship mediums. Addressing the evolving needs of contemporary worshippers, who seamlessly navigate both physical and digital realms in their daily lives, necessitates a balanced integration of both approaches. Here, a discerning appraisal of the merits of these diverse digital and physical spaces, the influence of proximity and the nuances of embodiment on our communities, and their contributions to worshippers' collective spiritual voyage is essential.

Undoubtedly, the path forward involves integrating both online and offline worship forms, leveraging the advantages inherent to each to cater

40 Dryer, 'Exploring Mediated *Ekklesia*', pp. 11–16; for the recent definitions of concepts of the 'lived body', 'mediated immediacy', and 'embodied space', see Gesa Lindemann and David Schünemann, 'Presence in Digital Spaces: A Phenomenological Concept of Presence in Mediatized Communication', *Human Studies* 43 (2020), 627–51.

41 Dryer, 'Exploring Mediated *Ekklesia*', pp. 13–16.

to the worshippers' varied preferences and needs. Overemphasising the sufficiency of digital worship might overlook the genuine desire many have for physical gatherings. Conversely, an exclusive focus on in-person meetings could diminish the significance of digital outreach and prevent believers' immersion in the currents of the Spirit in digital spaces.⁴² Recognising this, a holistic 'hybrid' strategy affirms the genuineness of digital interactions and appreciates the unparalleled depth of in-person connections. Such an approach not only expands the reach but also augments the depth of communal worship experiences, ensuring that the church evolves and remains inclusive in our swiftly changing world.

(c) Real versus Unreal

By challenging unhelpful dichotomies, we move away from debates that put the real/embodied against the virtual/disembodied, where the virtual is often perceived as less genuine and authentic. Instead, we affirm that our relationships and worship experiences are always real, albeit formed differently depending on the mode of mediation. It is important to recognise that humans are always embodied, whether they are perusing a book, engaging in a video chat, or sitting in the local church pews. Throughout the course of a day, we might seamlessly shift between online and offline environments, each influencing us differently. This helps us explain 'Zoom fatigue' not as a direct effect of Zoom causing disembodiment but rather as a manifestation of our body's differential response to screen interactions compared to face-to-face encounters.⁴³

Worshippers' engagements, whether online or offline, are characterised by authentic worship responses elicited by the life-quickenening currents of Spirit, unfettered by spatial and temporal constraints. Recognising this, it becomes imperative to consider digital tools as potent mediums. They present fresh avenues for believers to engage in worship response that extends beyond the conventional

42 Bala A. Musa and Boye-Nelson Kiamu, 'Digital Technology and Mediating the *Pneuma* in Church Outreach', in *Ecclesiology for a Digital Church: Theological Reflections on a New Normal*, ed. by Heidi A. Campbell and John Dyer (London: SCM Press, 2022), pp. 117–29.

43 Dryer, 'Exploring Mediated *Ekklesia*', pp. 14–15.

limits of physical locations or timed services. While traditional church gatherings hold value, true worship is not bound to brick and mortar. Whether digital or in-person, no single approach fully embodies the holistic Christian experience. Responding with all that we are to all that God is demands consistent engagements, not just in collective worship, but in nurturing community and manifesting love throughout the world.

Conclusion: A Way Forward

In conclusion, we return to a question that sparked our inquiry: can online music truly foster authentic spiritual communion among those immersed in digital worship, and, if so, to what extent? To this, I would confidently respond, 'YES'. Grounded in our ecclesiological and netnographic investigation, there is a compelling argument to be made that the same Spirit-generated relational dynamics present in offline worship are equally discernible within the emergent online spaces. This not only affirms digital worship as genuinely authentic but also elevates online music as a powerful medium for nurturing and amplifying communal worship in digital areas. To fully grasp the extent of online music's role in fostering spiritual communion, further research is vital. This study indicates a multitude of variables influencing divine-human community formation. While music enhances these variables, the exact mechanics remain intricate. The experience of digital communion varies and is influenced by factors like the technological medium or platform, spiritual currents, and the worshippers' historical, cultural, and socio-theological context. All these elements, among others, shape the depth to which music fosters genuine spiritual engagement.

Building on this understanding, this chapter has demonstrated that the integration of digital ecclesiology and netnography provides a robust methodology for understanding digital worship. By bridging theological perspective with the lived experiences of worshippers, it offers valuable insights into how digital music, as exemplified by the recent virtual choir multi-screen video produced during the global pandemic's onset, continues to revolutionise and enrich spiritual communion. Furthermore, this interdisciplinary abductive approach

showcases that worship in digital realms retains the authenticity, depth, and embodiment inherent in traditional practices. This invites a reconsideration of entrenched dichotomies that have long defined our traditional perceptions of sacred space and community. These binaries must be challenged decisively and thoughtfully. Only then can we reframe effectively the digital worship discourse and imagine fresh possibilities ahead. Here, in the evolving worship landscape, intertwining these disciplines—and potentially others akin to them—paves the way for forward-looking research, ensuring that the study of digital spirituality remains grounded, nuanced, and profoundly relevant.

For the Christian worship community to harness fully the potential of the digital era and to navigate adeptly both offline and online spaces, it must mirror a microorganism—'capable of rapid mutation and adaptation in response to changing environments while still maintaining continuity with its earlier forms'.⁴⁴ By striking a balance between consistency and innovation, this community can undergo a profound transformation, all the while staying true to its relational core. As such, it can further its mission of glorifying God and expanding His kingdom in both offline and online realms by fostering a genuine *koinonia* where individuals can encounter Jesus Christ and be transformed by the Spirit, taking their rightful place in the grand narrative of God's cosmic redemption. The intention of this chapter is to provide a constructive framework, advancing the scholarly discourse and deepening our appreciation for the myriad ways the Spirit is active within, through, and around believers, drawing them into a dynamic communion with God and fellow worshippers. As Christians traverse both offline and online realms, they not only uncover the essence of worship but also embrace what it means to be fully and truly human—persons-in-relation. Enveloped in the love and wisdom of the Father, they are drawn into the body of Christ through the unifying and diversifying actions of the Spirit, becoming active participants in the triune life of God.⁴⁵

44 Alister E. McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), p. 4.

45 For a more comprehensive exploration of this Spirit-guided journey of believers toward deeper communion with God and fellow believers, see Tihomir Lazić, *Towards an Adventist Version of Communion Ecclesiology*, pp. 141–306.

