The power of charisma is precisely its infectious, non-rational capacity to capture attention and to rivet it to the person who radiates it—whether it is Luke Skywalker or Darth Vader, good or evil; Princess Diana or Princess Leia, real or fictional. Television and film are the visual mass media that make this happen. They do this by enacting the enchantment of an immediate connection.¹

David Morgan

If that reality is so strong, so deep, and so personal, then how real is the one who gives it? It’s a significant question. How real must be the messenger if the message is so real?²

Benny Hinn

In his autobiographical account, He Touched Me (1999), Toufik Benedictus (“Benny”) Hinn nostalgically describes his childhood to the reader. On Saturday mornings, his mother, Clemence, made sandwiches and lemonade for the family to take to Bat Yam, a famous beach just south of Jaffa, Israel, where the children enjoyed the pleasures of the coast: swimming, sunning, and kite-flying. After returning home, in the afternoon, the Hinn’s viewed weekly movies for kids including Laurel and Hardy, Hercules, Tarzan and The Lone Ranger. His dad, Constandi, served as the projectorist. “Glued to the screen,” Hinn reminisces, “I’d watch those movies and dream of leaving Israel and moving to the West. ‘That’s me,’ I would say to myself. ‘There I am right there!’” American cinema first exposed Hinn to the Western world. He learned English by watching films in the language with no subtitles. Based on those visions of sounds and images he absorbed via television, this essay will demonstrate, Hinn also cultivated his identity in relation to them. “When we played cowboys and Indians in the yard,” he remembers, “I always pretended I was an American, and bragged about my knowledge of the United States—even though it was limited to what I had seen on the screen.”³ After Catholic school lessons on the weekdays followed by tutoring sessions, the children “rushed to the television set.” He and his brothers would finish the day out by watching a program before bedtime. Western televised media, as his autobiography attests, shaped the young Hinn and made an impression on his outlook.⁴

Fast forward some two decades, from the late 1950s and early 1960s to the mid-1980s. The little Palestinian boy from Jaffa, religiously Greek Orthodox and Greek-Armenian by heritage—the child who idolized the larger-than-life stars of American television, enacted Gunsmoke episodes with his siblings, and aspired to be an American—has, in a way, achieved his goals. In 1967, after the Six Days’ War, the Hinn family immigrated to Toronto, Ontario, where his father secured a job selling insurance. Hinn gradually involved himself in the local “Jesus Movement,” and began to attend Kathryn Kuhlman meetings. He worked with Kuhlman’s ministry between 1977 and 1981 and also began his own independent preaching ministry around that time. By 1983,

² Benny Hinn, Good Morning Holy Spirit (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 124.
⁴ Hinn, He Touched Me, 18-19, 22.
“Pastor Benny,” as his audiences know him around the world, established the World Outreach Church in Orlando, Florida; by 1992 it reached more than 7,000 members. Hinn also continued to travel widely as an itinerant evangelist and healer, and claims to have preached the largest healing service in world history, in which some 7.4 million people attended. In the 1990s, he achieved celebrity status in the world of Christian religious broadcasting. Hinn became a performer on the silver screen.

After setting Hinn’s ministry in historical context, this essay traces his meteoric rise to charismatic stardom and celebrity status, focusing on the revivalist’s adoption of various technologies and media forms for neo-evangelical purposes. This essay proposes the categories of image and presence to elucidate both the ways technology and media have shaped Hinn as well as, more importantly, the manner in which he implements the instruments into his ministry and outreach endeavors in an effort to assist others in the experience of divine healing or the cultivation of empowering presence. Television, this essay ultimately argues—conceptualized as a fluid, permeable, and connective medium in the minds of its users—serves well as a conduit of charismatic orality and operates as a highly compatible and even complimentary system to that of the “densely populated cosmology” or pentecostal-experiential worldview of Hinn and his followers. The essay concludes by analyzing a number of new Internet-enabled social media forms that allow Hinn to market novel instructional services and prayer rituals via burgeoning technological apparatus, including but not limited to smartphones and tablets. Such devices and media expand the repertoire of the televangelist in the service of the cultivation of presence.

Sensational Forms and a Brief History of Televangelism

The categories of religion and media are complexly interrelated constructs. As media scholar Daniel Stout argues, “the elements of religion (i.e., ritual, deep feeling, belief, and community) are experienced through the media of popular culture.” Before situating Hinn’s experiential uses of popular media in the history of American televangelism, however, a brief account the analytical scope of the essay will aid the reader. Although the arguments posed in the following refer frequently to religious groups and/or subgroups such as “evangelicalism,” “pentecostalism,” or “Protestantism,” the primary interest here is on the ways evangelical entrepreneurs use media forms to construct, facilitate, and embody both performances and discourses as religious. In other words, the intent is not to generalize the following findings as equally characteristic to the above Christian categories, but to focus on particular developments and themes within the umbrella terms.

Further, one might describe the methodological framing of this essay as falling under the rubric of what anthropologist Birgit Meyer describes as sensational forms, that is, “relatively fixed, authorized modes of invoking, and organizing access to the transcendental, thereby creating and sustaining links between religious practitioners in the context of particular religious organizations.” Elaborating

---

5 G. W. Gohr, “Hinn, Benedictus (‘Benny’),” in The International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, ed. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Maas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 713-715.

6 The cosmological system of prosperity preachers, writes historian Kate Bowler, is populated by “unseen forces, spiritual power and supernatural beings, and expressed by ritual objects.” Ritual objects, in the case of Hinn’s ministry, include television sets and Internet-enabled devices. Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 190, 160-161.


on the concept, sensational forms also include: i) social transmission and sharing; ii) practitioners carrying out practices; iii) the formation of religious subjects (or even cultivation, as this essay will refer to the process); iv) the production of certain feelings; and lastly, v) inclusion of the responses of penitents to religious objects and materials (e.g., religious architecture, iconography, or even images). Centrally, to the purposes of this essay, Meyer classifies televangelism’s production of televised emotion and the emotional experience of viewers as a new category of sensational forms in which the technology encourages mass audiences to participate, emotively, in the televised rituals. The following account, then, narrows in on the methods by which religious institutions (and in particular, Benny Hinn Ministries) produce not only “distinct sensory regimes” but cultivate “specific bodily and sensory disciplines” as well as “particular sensibilities.”

Hinn joins the ranks of historic televangelism’s technologically progressive entrepreneurs. Historically, evangelical leaders have recognized the power of technology but have put technology to use in varied ways, leading scholars to document a paradoxical development in the history of American religion. As historian Patrick Allitt notes, although the ideology of some evangelical groups tends to be “nostalgic and traditionalist,” their methods have been “innovative and technologically sophisticated”:

Preachers had been among the first Americans, back in the 1920s, to exploit radio. By 1950 they were also coming to terms with the new medium of television, and by the 1970s they had complemented televangelism with satellite feeds, direct-mail fund-raising, and computers. Evangelists unself-consciously used the best technologies of their day to produce shows with names like Charles Fuller’s Old-Fashioned Revival Hour on radio or Jerry Falwell’s Old-Time Gospel Hour on television.

Itinerant revivalists or evangelists, including Benny Hinn, act as quintessential examples the entrepreneurial use of technology for evangelical purposes, supporting historian Mark Noll’s description of evangelicals as “culturally adaptive biblical experimentalists.”

Evangelicals, and especially pentecostals, have been at the forefront of this technological innovation that potentially solves the itinerant preacher’s dilemma of reaching the masses.

________________________________________

14 Allitt, Religion in America, xii.
16 Scholars have proffered scores of definitions for this ambiguous Protestant movement. This essay follows historian Randall Balmer’s qualification that evangelicalism’s defining characteristics include 1) “the centrality of conversion”; 2) “the quest for an affective piety”; and 3) “a suspicion of wealth, worldliness, and ecclesiastical pretension.” See his “Evangelicalism,” in the Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism (Louisville, KY: Westminster John
Sociologist Razelle Frankl traces the roots of televangelism to the urban revivalists of nineteenth-century America, evangelists including Charles Grandison Finney, Dwight Moody, and Billy Sunday, each of whom employed “novel techniques” to bring the gospel to the cities. George Whitefield, in the eighteenth century, also engaged in creative evangelistic strategies, rocketing himself to celebrity status during his day and constituting a prototype for later revivalists to follow. Itinerant revivalists’ most important legacy, Frankl continues, “was their revivalist ethos, or use of ‘appropriate means’ to stir religious enthusiasm.” Continuing in this innovative tradition of marketing the gospel to mass audiences, Billy Graham, Rex Humbard, Oral Roberts, and Robert Schuller constituted the first generation to employ the medium of television for religious purposes, certainly a paradoxical development considering that early pentecostals’ long lists of taboos included home movie watching and other popular forms of entertainment. Television aided these prominent evangelicals in a project of bringing the movement out of the shadows of the American religious public and into the center. Among the televangelist forefathers, Billy Graham played probably the most important role in shifting from the media of radio to television in the 1950s. According to Frankl, Graham’s technological innovation had positive public results: “With this one step, the religious tradition, which had lost much of its credibility by the 1920s, in the aftermath of the Scopes trial, gained new legitimacy and recognition.” Television—one element within a much larger social, religious, and political transition that included post-war revival(s), Cold War politics, etc.—offered a new and exciting medium and garnered respectability for brave entrepreneurs such as Graham. A few of these evangelists, intent on distancing evangelicalism from Fundamentalist Protestants, experienced public favor not had by evangelicals since the Bryant-Jennings embarrassment. Not unlike his famed revivalist predecessor, Whitefield, Graham preached to the masses; but in terms of audience building, television enabled Graham in novel ways. The itinerant revivalist could now be in more than one place at a time, and not just his voice, carried over radio waves and disseminated via speakers. The preacher’s entire sensuous persona could be projected visually across space and distance in sound and image form.

Other evangelists followed the lead of Billy Graham and Oral Roberts’s successful television ministries including Kenneth Copeland, Billy Joe Daugherty, Kenneth Hagin Jr., Jesse Duplantis, Jerry Savelle, Creflo Dollar, Marilyn Hickey, Kathryn Kuhlman, and Pat Robertson. Most of these preachers identified as pentecostal-charismatic revivalists and historians note that successfully produced programs, such as those by Roberts and Kuhlman, brought “America into the crusade tent through live television.” Hinn himself qualifies as a second

Knox Press, 2002), 204. By (lower-case)
“pentecostalism,” this essay refers to “both Pentecostals [i.e., adherents to classical Pentecostal denominations that trace their origins to the Azusa Street Revivals] and second- and third-wave Charismatics (both Protestant and Catholic) who emphasize the ongoing activity of the Holy Spirit.” See Candy Gunther Brown, Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing, edited by Candy Gunther Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.


Frankl, Televangelism, 4, 23-61.

For more on early pentecostalism and taboos, see Grant Wacker, Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2001), 128.

20 Frankl, Televangelism, 73.
21 Ibid., 74.

Kuhlman, like Graham and others, also engaged in a project of making pentecostalism respectable in a
generation televangelist in that he modeled his ministry largely after the work of Kuhlman, from the Roberts generation of televangelists. Hinn, like many of these preachers, would go on to make healing the centerpiece of his television ministry. Before turning to the roles of image and presence in the production of sensory regimes and healing ministries—component or correlate terms to sensational forms—an overview of Hinn’s technologically-mediated autobiography will set the context.

**Hinn on Television**

After the death of Kuhlman in 1976, Canadian media outlets caught wind of the claims of miracles taking place in Hinn’s “Miracle Rallies” and began to give press time to the young revivalist. In 1977, still in Toronto, Hinn “contracted for a prime-time slot on a major station—Sunday nights at 10:00 P.M. following 60 Minutes. He called the program, *It’s a Miracle*, and the show became Hinn’s first substantial exposure to the globalizing world. This step was his entry into televised stardom, his graduation into an inchoate form of religious celebrity. *It’s a Miracle*, though—while promoting Hinn’s revival services and showing the signs and wonders of fervent pentecostalism to the world—also brought the fledgling ministry into great financial debt. Television, Hinn learned, was a crucial medium through which to spread (the good) news. But the media also came with a cost; it was expensive.

Another strategic move on Hinn’s part helped drive him towards celebrity status. In the mid-1970s, Paul and Jan Crouch, hosts of Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), sent the preacher a “standing invitation” to guest speak on their show, *Praise the Lord*, whenever he was in the vicinity. In 1983, after Hinn established the “Miracle Life Center” in Orlando, Florida, Paul asked him to record and forward tapes of the services so that TBN could produce them on the air for a broader audience. With this TBN partnership, Hinn’s publicity escalated, a product of both televised screen time and word-of-mouth. Television media, while pricey, proved effective. “I meet people almost every week whose lives were touched by those Sunday telecasts,” recalled Hinn. Television was a fluid medium; it spread easily and had the potential to communicate widely. First-hand reports confirmed this for the up and coming preacher. Of course, Hinn had been aware of television’s power since childhood but capitalized on it now in his attempts to spread the gospel. If one has the right connections—and can afford to hire a basic film crew—one can publicize any message to the world.

Shortly later, in 1984, Hinn purchased a 2,300-seat auditorium in Orlando to support his burgeoning congregation. “Since our Sunday morning services were being televised by TBN nationally and via satellite to several foreign countries,” Hinn reported, “there were visitors in practically every service. ’We didn’t just come to Orlando to see Mickey Mouse,’ they would tell us. ‘We watch you every week on TBN.’”

---


26 Hinn, *He Touched Me*, 144.
television and couldn’t wait to get here.” Already, Hinn was gathering an international audience. He stationed in Orlando, but the silver screen became his pulpit and satellite technology his microphone.\textsuperscript{27}

So far this essay has portrayed Hinn’s employment of media in the service of religion as consistently pragmatic. In other words, if winning souls via preaching the gospel is one’s goal, then television delivers an obvious and practical method by which to do so. In such a manner, television offers a brilliant solution to the ambitious itinerant’s dilemma. But Hinn’s use of television stems from more than pragmatics; television is central to his identity and calling. Hinn \textit{theologizes} television; he reiterates the medium as a sensational form, to recall Meyer’s term, in that for him television serves as both a divinely sanctioned method and conductor of divine presence.\textsuperscript{28} In social scientific language, evangelical implementers of such technology valuate or singularize television media; media take on special or unique significance as leaders authorize and endorse its application in both practical and theological senses.\textsuperscript{29} In his early publications, such as \textit{War in the Heavenlies} (1984), Hinn anticipates the use of television:

> Not only do I believe we are going to see millions saved. Listen to this. I believe we are going to see the power of God restored in our churches in such a way that the dead will be raised. Not only will the dead be raised in church, but \textit{the dead will be raised through Christian television}. I believe the dead will be raised as Christian TV comes on the air, and \textit{the power of God is released through television}.\textsuperscript{30}

For Hinn, television takes on specialized theological and experiential significance in his positing of the medium’s function in supernatural terms. Hinn posits in many of his writings and sermons “the spiritual” as the apex level of personhood and ontology.\textsuperscript{31} Television, as he and his viewers envision it, operates as a mediator, transmitter, or conductor of the spiritual.

While preparing for a conference in Singapore, Hinn reported that God spoke to him, saying, “Take the message of My saving and healing power to the world through \textit{daily television} and healing crusades.” The medium of God’s message to Hinn is not stated, but the command is clear. Hinn will begin a daily telecast. In the recounting, the command is also specific: “On the program, pray for the sick, give praise reports, and show My power.” Hinn moved forward in obedience, into, as he puts it, “uncharted waters” and scheduled crusades all over the United States and the world. Realizing the serious financial implications of such an endeavor, Hinn called TBN to ask for a daily slot in the programming. Remarkably, Crouch replied, a program that had been on air for the last several years had surprisingly ended production, leaving a half hour slot open in the daily schedule. On March 5, 1990, Hinn’s \textit{This is Your Day} (first titled \textit{Miracle Invasion}) aired internationally via TBN satellites.\textsuperscript{32} The formal association with TBN was Hinn’s first admittance to the arena of Christian television broadcasting. The contract served as the beginning of his media empire.

Media, for televangelists—at first print, radio, and television, but now the Internet as well (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, email newletters, and websites such as \textit{Bennyhinn.org})—serve as valuable tools through which one might carry out the purposes of God. “Why am I so

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 154.

\textsuperscript{28} To employ Bowler’s language, television became for Hinn a means by which penitents might “tap into that [divine, healing] power.” \textit{Blessed}, 141.


\textsuperscript{31} Bowler, \textit{Blessed}, 148-149.

\textsuperscript{32} Hinn, \textit{He Touched Me}, 158-161 (emphasis added).
committed to reaching the lost through every means possible?” Hinn asks, rhetorically. The answer to Hinn’s question comes in the form of a biblical citation: “Jesus said, ‘This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come’ (Matt. 24:14).” The subtitle of one section in Hinn’s autobiography is also significant: “By All Means.” Television media are a means through which biblical narrative comes alive. Television seeks actively to bring the gospel of the kingdom to all nations, quite literally, via international satellite television broadcasting. Media, according to neo-pentecostal itinerants like Hinn, function as divine tools.33 In Hinn’s language, the observer witnesses a subtle apotheosizing of favored media forms; television becomes a divine means through which God’s saving and healing power might be broadcasted globally. Focusing on the concepts of image and presence, themes common within Hinn’s teachings—and especially the cultivation of the latter in penitents who also happen to be media and technology adepts—elucidate the issues at hand and further demonstrate Hinn’s application of media and technology for the service of evangelicalism. Additionally, the concepts demonstrate the ways that media and technology, as metaphors, shape both Hinn’s own conceptualization of religious experience as well as his ability to explicate experiential teachings to his audiences.

Image, Presence, and Technological Metaphors

One theme central to the idea of religious media and to media in general is the idea of presence. Hinn peppers his writings with allusions to this concept. The term, which in his application refers to the empowering nearness or closeness of the Holy Spirit, has much to do with Hinn’s conceptions of media and its theological uses. Presence is something maintainable for the Christian only by practice, or to adopt a term popular in recent social scientific studies of identity- and self-formation, cultivation of self, identity, and ability. Cultivation, in short, has to do with the developmental process of devotional faculties within a person or the developing of aptitudes or skills, in a religious subject, pertaining to some devotional practice like prayer or communication with the divine. Psychological anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann, for example, demonstrates in her recent study of charismatic evangelicals how through extended and persistent practice novice penitents become spiritual adepts.34 Such evangelical devotional practices, to return to Meyer’s theory of sensational forms, has much to do with the developing of “specific bodily and sensory disciplines” along with “particular sensibilities.”35 For Hinn, who underscores his teachings with quasi-mystical experientialism, presence is a habit, posture, or mode of prolonged divine encounter to be practiced and maintained as a skill or ability.

Ideally, for the Christian, presence ought to be an everyday phenomenon and Hinn’s writings demonstrate the ubiquitous role that media might play in the process. As Hinn attests, “if you are filled with the Spirit and you absorb yourself in His presence, you will seek Jesus and glorify no one but Jesus.”36 Occurring through experiential encounters with the Holy Spirit, presence is ongoing, processual, and has

---

33 Hinn, He Touched Me, 206.
36 Benny Hinn, Good Morning Holy Spirit (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 60.
much to do with the idea of prolonged exposure with the divine.37 “Since my first encounter with the Holy Spirit,” Hinn clarifies, “I have experienced a growing reality of His presence. Every Scripture, every encounter, and every revelation makes my walk in the Spirit more complete.” His “walk in the Spirit” is something perpetual. Through his media empire, Hinn continues to spread his message, central to which is the practicing of the presence of Holy Spirit. Between the beginning of July 1, and mid-November, 2012, for instance, Hinn Tweeted about “presence” some twenty times. The following list of selected Tweets is illustrative of the visibility of presence in Hinn’s online networking arenas:

When Jesus sets you free you are free indeed. The secret to freedom is His Presence. Bondage, sin & sickness can’t exist in His Presence [July 7].

Fear is the first result of self-consciousness & boldness is the first result of God-consciousness. God’s Presence brings His power [August 5].

The presence of God is what brings power [November 4; November 6].

Today, what is your greatest hindrance to spending more time alone in God’s presence? [November 13]

Such accounts demonstrate Hinn’s conviction that presence must be maintained and cultivated through religious experiences. Words and phrases such as power; quickening our spirit; cover; saturate; and absorbed recur in Hinn’s online discourse as well as in print literature, thus correlating presence with powerfully embodied experiences of the divine.

But Hinn’s conceptions of presence, one might point out, tie biographically to (flashing) images, entities that appear quite similar to televised forms of media. Television itself, in Hinn’s conception, constitutes a medium of authentic religious experience. Consider the following accounts in which Hinn describes visions which prophetically confirmed, in his mind, the calling to preach to large masses of peoples:

On Friday morning and all during the day—at school . . . everywhere I went, a picture kept flashing before me. I saw myself preaching. It was unthinkable, but I couldn’t shake the image. I saw crowds of people. And there I was, wearing a suit, my hair all trimmed and neat, preaching up a storm.39

In this instance he describes flashing images, images that reiterate Hinn’s prophetic calling to preach to the entire world but simultaneously recall his own autobiographical description of pastimes as a child, at home in Jaffa, watching television. Another vision also centers on the idea of image or picture:

That semester we were studying the Chinese Revolution. It could have been any revolution because that morning I didn’t hear a word the teacher was saying. What had transpired a few minutes earlier would not leave me. When I closed my eyes—there was Jesus. When I opened them, He was still there. Nothing could erase the picture of the Lord’s face I continued to see that day.40

Hinn’s employing of “flashing picture” metaphors to describe particular visions or experiences is especially interesting given that television historians use the phrase “flashing” or “moving images” in conjunction with the early development of the medium as an entertainment form.41 Similar phrases also find themselves

37 See also Good Morning Holy Spirit, 96.

39 Hinn, Good Morning Holy Spirit, 35-36 (emphasis added). For a similar vision accounting, see He Touched Me, 52, 58.
40 Hinn, He Touched Me, 51-52.
employed in Hinn’s highly experiential accounts of his own biography. One can imagine Hinn as a child, sitting in front of the television, his perceptions shaped by the technologies he was exposed to. When he retrospectively describes his religious experiences, he casts his recollections in discursively similar terms. Film media informed Hinn’s worldview, confirming, to at least a partial degree, claims by scholars of media. Media theorists consistently preach that technologies and/or media have the potential to shape human persons, perhaps even insidiously. Hinn’s example gives credence to such theorization but adds a layer of complexity by viewing the effects of the medium as helpful and to be exploited.

The issue of religious experience, however, begs an aside in terms of Pentecostal epistemological and ontological formation. Historian and ethnographer Candy Gunther Brown argues for the existence of what she describes as “a widely held pentecostal epistemology that assumes a particular hierarchy of the senses—one that privileges hearing above seeing, and in which feeling sensory input rather than seeing is believing.” Hinn reiterates such thinking in his own stories. In one account, he writes that “when I began my fellowship with the Holy Spirit I talked with Him day and night. Not a day passed that I did not say, ‘Holy Spirit. Precious Holy Spirit.’ And we began our time of prayer and communication.” “Oh, the sound of His voice,” he continues. Evangelical Protestants, and especially pentecostals, perceive of divine communication, including basic theological teaching or instruction, in aural dimensions.

Campany, Photography and Cinema (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 8; Janna Jones, Past is a Moving Picture: Preserving the Twentieth Century on Film (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2012). Umberto Eco comically depicts the television as “an enormous, cumbersome box that in the darkness emitted sinister flashes of light and enough sound to disturb the entire neighborhood.” Turning Back the Clock: Hot Wars and Media Populism, trans. Alastair McEwen (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc., 2007), 1-2. Social anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu, while critiquing journalists for their fragmented and disjointed presentation of information to the public, also makes this connection: “This means that journalists—the day laborers of everyday life—can show us the world only as a series of unrelated flash photos.” On Television, 7.

It is no wonder, then, that Hinn’s teaching metaphors—his theological illustrations during sermons—are media and technology oriented. George Lakoff has much to say on the subject of cognitive domain overlap and the normalcy of metaphorical thought and/or language in shaping human understanding and experience. In other words, Hinn’s media and technology laden metaphors substantiate Lakoff’s case about metaphorical language as a human norm. See his “The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor,” in Metaphor and Thought, ed. Andrew Ortony (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 202-251.


another This Is Your Day interview, Hinn and guest Rabbi Lapin discuss the primacy (and even “spiritual” nature) of speaking over written text, the latter of which Lapin dismisses as a denigration of more authentic sound and hearing.\(^46\) For evangelicals, faith comes by hearing. Hearing interprets sound. The fascinating thing about television is that it captures sound (via hearing) but goes a step beyond to preserve and disseminate seeing. As theorist Walter J. Ong describes, television is “electronic vision added to electronic sound.”\(^47\) Not only does television spread the gospel by hearing—the most esteemed evangelical sense—but it does so through an added sensate aptitude: sight (c.f. David Morgan’s concept of charismatic orality, below). Sound and sight signal nearness and presence for Hinn, and television possesses the ability to project those very sensory experiences.\(^48\)

Hinn frequently employs technology metaphors to explain or illustrate his teachings (themselves disseminated by Internet or satellite). In one 2012 teaching series on “walking in the Spirit,” the revivalist uses an iPhone metaphor to describe the ways a person must “recharge” themselves in God’s presence. “You cannot live in the Spirit unless you live in the presence of God, he admonished. “We must come out of the realm of the flesh. It takes two weeks to charge my Spirit-man, like it takes an hour to recharge my iPhone.” Hinn’s ontologically-thick theological exposition of both Old and New Testament passages of the Bible numbered the problems of the “flesh” (for Hinn a problematic site of sinful proclivity) and the need to expand the “spiritual” parts of one’s person. Hinn uses cutting-edge technology examples to make the point.\(^49\) During another sermon, the evangelist claimed that the ritual of extended periods of praise increases or disposes a certain type of “sensitivity” in a person. To use emic language, an augmenting of this sort of spiritual sensitivity means that one may suddenly “pick up on” things in a “spiritually” discerning sense. Interesting, however, are the phrases that Hinn employs; such sensitivity “is like a radar” or a “switch” that “comes on” or is activated, in other words, with praise.\(^50\)

Extended periods of praise and prayer, therefore, demonstrate the evangelical cultivation of skills through dedication, time, and practice. Both Hinn and Hinn’s audiences, further, fuse media and technology tropes in their transmission of theological values through teaching and reception. But what about the media themselves? How might different forms of media serve as disseminators of religious practices, values, rituals, and experiences, and most importantly, as cultivators of divine presence?

**Charismatic Orality, Fluid Media, and the Erasure of Distance**

Pentecostal healing practices often involve proximate intercessory prayer (PIP), a term coined by Brown.\(^51\) Pentecostals praying for healing from various ailments utilize “in-person, direct-contact prayer, frequently involving touch, by one or more persons on behalf of another.”\(^52\) Through PIP, pentecostals act on their belief that “anointing for healing presumably can be communicated through

\[\text{Source:} \text{American Enlightenment (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).}\]


\(^48\) Hinn, *Good Morning Holy Spirit*, 79.


\(^51\) Brown, *Testing Prayer*, 89.

\(^52\) Ibid.
human touch, because physical bodies function as conduits of spiritual power." Television exposes human persons, or audiences, to a range of variable forms (e.g., images, motions, sound, rhetoric) and ideologies (discourse, theology, cosmology, politics, worldview). Media affects the viewing (listening, seeing, and feeling) audience. Brown continues:

Comparing anointing with electricity or radiation therapy, certain pentecostals believe that efficacy correlates with frequency and length of exposure, types—including theological correctness—of prayers, “faith” and anointing levels of those receiving and offering prayer, and even the anointing level of the physical location in which prayers are offered. Some persons, moreover, are considered more anointed than others, or ‘specialists’ in praying for particular conditions. For both television preachers and audiences, then, the medium serves as a conduit of exposure to the themes of experiential theologies and embodied healings. Beyond exposure, however, television is itself an experiential medium.

Light, music, flashing images, sound bytes: these sensuous and evocative elements contain the power to stir in someone a conception of being there, to apply anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s ethnocentric term to the domain of media and experience. Television media, even if only partially, mediate presence for audiences through temporal exposure. Watching Hinn on television—seeing the signs and wonders of the Holy Spirit—increases one’s faith and thus one’s aptitude for healing. Exposure to these televised rituals reinforces and bolsters the viewer’s faith, and thus religious audiences repeatedly watching Hinn’s programs might view themselves as increasing the chances of healing or of having some other form of religious experience.

David Morgan’s concept of charismatic orality also demonstrates how television is useful to evangelical preachers by integrating image and presence. In one of his aptly titled recent works, The Lure of Images, Morgan contextualizes pentecostal-charismatic type practices in terms of mass media, communication, and consumption. “Charismatic orality,” he writes, “is grounded in the body and understands performative action, a movement of the Spirit of God through the body and person of the inspired, anointed preacher.” In charismatic orality, “word and image corroborate one another in order to signal the preeminence of the spoken word.”

53 Ibid.
54 Ibid. (emphasis added).
55 For a clear example of Hinn’s experiential theology, see Good Morning Holy Spirit, 84.

58 Hinn’s book, This Is Your Day for a Miracle (1996), intends to bombard (or expose) the reader with evidence of God’s healing power via a cataloging of images, scenes of healing, and doctor’s reports. This work is another interesting example of the value of image in the symbolic structure of pentecostals. Even two-dimensional, black-and-white photographic still shots can stir in a viewer the knowledge of God’s healing power. Lake Mary, FL: Strang Communications Company. Interestingly, this book represents one in a library of similar works produced by traveling healers to add credibility to the respective ministries’ claims of healing efficacy. Kathryn Kuhlman, after whom Hinn has modeled his ministry, published a similar work titled I Believe in Miracles (1962). Brown, Testing Prayer, 108.
59 Morgan, The Lure of Images, 222.
while hierarchically subsequent to the aural word, actually enhances the prior for a powerful effect.

Because the body is a fundamental medium of charisma, there is no question as to the hold television may have on its viewers. Mass media “are constructed on the analogy of human speech and vision, [and] indeed operate as extensions of them.” The quote listed at the opening of this essay is also telling as television and film enact “the enchantment of immediate connection.” This enchantment is produced through using television to minimize physical distance and to animate the person behind the pulpit by way of luminosity, sound, and image. Morgan describes the methods charismatic television revivalists utilize the medium of television for these purposes:

Although television can operate as a video screen, as a live medium it attracts the viewer’s attention on different terms. The magnetic or charismatic pull of live television is the sheer presence or immediacy of the medium. Televised sermons are one way this happens for religious viewers, who sit before television whose screens convey the glowing image of a talking head, such as a priest or rabbi at a lectern, who gazes into the camera as if it were the steady eye of his or her audience. Viewers listen as if they were seated in a church or synagogue.

Television rivets the attentions of the viewing audiences. Experiencing a revivalist preach live on television is not unlike being there, in the church or stadium or conference center in which the preacher stands in real time. The compelling aural and visual nature of television, then, supports or serves as a platform for charismatic orality.

Morgan also theorizes about television as a magical medium, reflecting on the ways Americans, as he puts it, “have long regarded modern media as magical, infused with spiritual energy or power.” Put simply, “the power of media inspires fear,” and often in the form of critical theories (i.e., Big Brother surveillance, panopticanism, or the fear of physical harm to the body due to addiction to technologies). Cultural uneasiness about television also has to do with what might be described as television’s perceived permeability or fluidity as a medium. “By all means,” writes Hinn, implying that no form of media is to be excluded from the evangelistic armamentarium. For Hinn, television is a fluid medium—a highly experiential one, at that—a medium able to conduct the effectiveness of the Holy Spirit’s healing power; thus Hinn seeks to apply it for spiritual benefit.

What is important, however, is that the worldview behind Hinn’s Holy Spirit-infused programming operates in a metaphysical milieu. Televangelists harness the ability of television to minimize distance alongside the fluid and transferable nature of the Holy Spirit. Hinn repeatedly requests viewers seeking healings to place their hands on the television screens or lift their hands in prayer towards the direction of the television set. Strategies of such sorts, involving perceived spatial transcendence, join

---

60 See Milly Buonanno and Jennifer Radice, *The Age of Television: Experiences and Theories* (The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 44.
61 Ibid., 224-225 (emphasis added).

63 Fascinatingly, Morgan notes that such worries have been culturally reified in recent horror films such as *Poltergeist* (1982), *The Ring* (2002), and *White Noise* (2005), “which portray television or video as a visual portal that opens up to supernatural realms beyond, providing contact with dimensions that threaten moral life.” In these films, the television screen becomes a gateway through which evil enters the world. In *The Ring*, for instance, an evil entity in television-image form penetrates the glass of the fictional characters’ television screens and, now fully-embodied in the real time of these characters, slays her “voyeur-victims.” Horror films reveal a broader cultural uneasiness about the permeability or fluidity of media forms as entities of presence and mediation. Morgan, *The Lure of Images*, 224.
the ranks of a long history of American metaphysical beliefs and practices.⁶⁴

Any suspicion that television, in the minds of some of its users, lacks metaphysical application, in a transferable sense, might be put to rest when one considers the following “praise reports” listed by Hinn. Healing efficacy appears to have the ability to bypass distance and pass through the permeable glass of television screens:

St. Louis, Missouri: “I watch your program every day. I laid my hands on the television screen and I received my healing of a stomach problem.”

Port Arthur, Texas: “I was watching your program and the Lord gave you a word of knowledge that there was a woman named Alice that had been praying to be delivered from gluttony. That woman was me. Praise God I am delivered from food addiction.”

Salt Lake City, Utah: “I was healed of bursitis and arthritis in my home watching your crusade telecast. I can do things now I haven’t been able to do for years. I was using a walker and a wheelchair . . . no more! If it had not been for your TV ministry I don’t know what would have happened to me.”⁶⁵

Metaphysical transference of healing demonstrates to penitents the arresting power of the Holy Spirit in pentecostal cosmology. No media has enough power to constrain the ubiquitousness and fluidity of the Holy Spirit, but some forms, in fact, can serve as efficient compliments. Hinn’s responses to the above reports confirm the argument concerning his theological use of media. “When letters like these began pouring in,” he writes, “I knew God was confirming His mandate. We built a makeshift studio in the overflow room of the Orlando Christian Center (later World Outreach Church) and began to add television stations to our network.”⁶⁶ Hinn’s ministry received these reports in 1990. Eight years later, he had established the World Media Center in Aliso Viejo, California, noting that “from this state-of-the-art studio and production facility we are able to expand our global television outreach.”⁶⁷ During these years Benny Hinn Ministries institutionalized while Hinn himself grew in celebrity status with global charismatic audiences.⁶⁸

Expanding the Empire: the Internet, Social Networks, and ePrayer

The jurisdiction of the superstar preacher’s media empire reaches far beyond satellite television, however, employing a broad means of media types in the purported dissemination of religious goods. Television, in effect, represents only one domain under the televangelist’s purview. Spiritual instruction and the cultivation of presence extend far beyond the realm of satellite television services. An internet radio station plays hymns and streams Hinn’s teachings.⁶⁹ Benny Hinn Ministries offers online, certificate-based courses to train those interested in learning under Hinn’s specialization. Courses include “Operating in the Anointing,” “Deliverance from Demons,” “Intimacy with God,” and “The Hiding God.” Class materials can be accessed online twenty-four hours a day, seven days a

---

⁶⁵ Hinn, He Touched Me, 162-163.
⁶⁶ Ibid., 163.
⁶⁷ Ibid., 162-163, 206.
week, and the cost of admission in seventy-five dollars. This is Your Day, Hinn’s flagship television program, which includes a half hour of international ministry coverage, Bible exposition or teaching, or interviews with medical doctors and evangelical authors, airs currently on six television networks.

Bennyhinn.org streams showings online for those viewers who prefer to watch the episode on their own time. One can also, on the website, sign up to receive the ministry’s e-Newsletter, and can click on links to both Hinn’s Facebook and Twitter social networking pages.

An interesting aspect of Hinn’s Internet presence is the use of websites and popular social networks to create a milieu, mediated by technological apparati, in which the cultivation of presence can occur and religious experiences can take place. One social scientist has recently described the practice of ePrayer by Benny Hinn Ministries. As a para-ministry of Hinn’s organization, “Mighty Warriors Prayer Army” (MWPA) utilizes Internet-enabled devices including personal computers, laptops, cell phones, and tablets to log into the ministry website. Penitents can fill out detailed prayer request forms that are then broadcast, live, onto a prayer list database which committed prayer team members access. The platform, then, has a unifying effect as it draws on the work of volunteer pray-ers and connects them in real time through the technological apparatus. In effect, these digital ritual tools “serve as expanding platforms or systems for prayer” and offer “a hub of online prayer resources” that simultaneously “constitutes a new form of social prayer.” ePrayer, then, functions to foster ritual connectivity while also overriding physical distance. In Meyer’s terms, such tools aid in the production of “distinct sensory regimes” managed by institutions such as Benny Hinn Ministries. Hinn’s sensory regimes span the radio, television, and Internet worlds.

Conclusions

This essay has documented and analyzed one itinerant televangelist’s implementation of popular media and technology forms for evangelistic purposes. The implications of the sensational forms of the televangelist are varied and interconnected; several summary points deserve reiteration. First, Hinn formulates his autobiography in terms of his relationship to American cinema; he self-identifies as being shaped at a deep childhood level by popular American films. His background with cinema leads to a second point in that Hinn’s narrated religious experiences take on profoundly filmic imagery. Consumers of Hinn’s books, sermons, and other teachings can imagine such experiences because the experiences are visual

---

71 Hinn’s frequent interviewing of doctors of medicine and nutrition also underscore what Bowler has described as the “bilingualism,” or the acknowledgement of believers “that two intersecting processes” of the medical and the miraculous are at work in healing practices. Bowler, Blessed, 171-172.
76 Cooper, “ePrayer and Online Prayer Rituals.”
77 One might go as far as to pose a new term for these rituals, building off of Brown’s proximate intercessory prayer term; such online prayer rituals represent not proximate but distant or remote intercessory prayer.
ones; he couches the experiences in media and technology metaphors that resound with audiences. Hinn describes some experiences as *moving images*, as if they had been projected upon a screen. In other instances, the revivalist uses technological devices and apparati (e.g., charging his iPhone) to illustrate theological points. Third, Hinn’s uses of media are not exclusively pragmatic. His appropriation of television and global satellite broadcasting occurs at a theological level. Television is not an empty, neutral, or value-free medium for Hinn. In his retrospective descriptions of his ministry’s implementation of the medium, he seeks to depict it as a divinely sanctioned and prophetically anticipated tool. Television (and digital media) take on theological, teleological value and are thus historicized into a Christian narrative of global evangelization and expansion. Fourth, and perhaps the most central argument of this essay, through the medium of television Hinn seeks both to cultivate presence in viewers and imbue or disseminate it metaphysically through various media forms. Television—as a fluid, permeable, tactile, or even connective medium—compliments a supernaturally-populated Pentecostal cosmology. Some individuals claim healing through the medium, and Hinn himself sees television as an effective conduit of the healing powers of the Holy Spirit. Related is a fifth point; television also serves to portray and disseminate charismatic orality (i.e., a coupling of image, word, and pentecostal oral authority) that emphasizes hearing but contains the added benefit of sight to the repertoire of televised sensory experience. Lastly, Hinn goes beyond television to harness a number of other technologically-progressive services, thus creating a new ritual arena for charismatic evangelicals. The use of tablets, dataphones, laptops, and other Internet-enabled devices allow the practitioner to engage in ePrayer rituals, partake in instruction or teaching, and ultimately practice the cultivation of presence via a variety of media forms. Evangelical technology proponents thus argue that when put to the correct uses, such implementations suggest that diverse media can enhance the evangelical experience of presence and extend and supplement prayer and healing rituals.

Inevitably, much more research is needed. This essay has offered an initial (and primarily descriptive) foray into the methods of one contemporary televangelist. Further study, however, might underscore the issues involved in democratic media and technology forms. As Hinn is a lightning-rod of controversy in both religious and non-religious worlds, future research projects could also examine the ways popular social media technologies might potentially serve to undermine Hinn’s authority, partly legitimated through charismatic orality, as “God’s anointed.” On one particular *This Is Your Day* episode, for instance, Hinn and his interview guest joke about Tweeting as “thumbs gone wild.” Hinn alludes to the fact that he has received some opposition through the Twitter platform. His guest, visibly not happy about this, makes it clear that people ought to be “protecting the man of God from even hearing [or reading Tweets on] these things.” “That’s why, before a service, I won’t even look at a Tweet,” Hinn replies. Media may connect distant pray-ers, and facilitate religious experiences, then, but they may also serve as a

---


80 “Spiritual Warfare, Part 1” and “Spiritual Warfare, Part 2.”
form of public corrosive discourse. Much has been made by both scholars as well as journalists concerning Hinn’s lavish celebrity lifestyle and perceived power and authority as a public, televised revivalist. Further studies might look with more detail into the global economics of television and Internet media put to the services of a successful itinerant revivalist as well as scrutinize rhetorical strategies embedded in Hinn’s discourse which seek both to legitimate his ministry as well as to produce revenue for the ministry. Another area for future inquiry involves Hinn’s audiences. Much more ethnographic research is needed in terms of the viewers of Hinn’s This Is Your Day as well as data on those who utilize his online resources and prayer technologies. How are these individuals incorporating teachings through various media forms? Do online (and ePrayer) technologies shape or simply supplement theology, and if so, in which ways? This essay demonstrates, at least tentatively, the high compatibility of pentecostal-charismatic practices with television and burgeoning social networking technologies, but further studies will do well to plumb the strength of this congruency.

81 Bruce Lincoln, Authority: Construction and Corrosion (University of Chicago Press, 1994).
82 Much has been made about Hinn’s (and other televangelists’) extravagant lifestyles and consumerist practices (see Bowler, Blessed, 5-6); this essay has not intended to enter the discussion. For an ultra-critical denunciation of Hinn’s ministry for both theological and financial reasons, however, see G. Richard Fisher and M. Kurt Goedelman, eds., The Confusing World of Benny Hinn: A Call for Discerning the Ministry & Teaching of the Popular Healing Evangelist (St. Louis: Personal Freedom Outreach, 1997). For the sake of equity, though, it is also worth noting that a 2007 Senate Finance Committee cleared Hinn of charges of any financial fraud or wrongdoing. Bowler, Blessed, 264n7. For Hinn’s own description of his ministry’s monetary accountability and financial practices, see the “Finances” tab the “Frequently Asked Questions” page, accessed September 26, 2014, http://www.bennyhinn.org/frequently-asked-questions/.

Bibliography
———. “Healing Words: Narratives of Spiritual Healing and Kathryn Kuhlman’s Uses of Print Culture, 1947-1976.” In Religion and the Culture of Print in Modern America, edited by Charles L.


———. 1996. This is Your Day for a Miracle. Lake Mary, FL: Strang Communications Company.


*Symposia*

http://www.bennyhinn.org/media/2012-7-3.asx


Stout, Harry S. *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern


