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Review

Miriam Diez Bosch, Joseph Lluís Micó and Joseph Maria Carbonell (eds.)
Catholic Communities Online

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When looking for literature on Catholic engagement in contemporary hybrid media environments, this edited volume by Miriam Diez Bosch, Joseph Lluís Micó and Joseph Maria Carbonell (2015) will serve as a good introduction. The edited collection is based on the inclusion of religious issues in the public debate, which constitutes a fundamental interest among the editors, all members of the Blanquerna Observatory on Communication, Religion, and Culture in Barcelona. The key issue addressed in the book concerns different approaches to the implementation of Catholic communities online. In this way, a fresh face of Roman Catholicism is shown.

The book is separated into a short introduction and eight chapters that discuss the problem both analytically and descriptively. The texts from Italy, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Spain and the USA together reveal the diversity of Catholic media in three areas: growing up on religious media, the impact of journalism on religion, and the presence of 'banal religion,' which according to Hjarvard (2012) confirm the ongoing mediatization of religion. Unfortunately, the lack of a final synthesis of concluding insights leaves the reader unsatisfied. Nonetheless, the principal objective indicated by the authors, to discuss what it means for Catholicism to be online, finds an interesting explanation.

The book begins with a chapter by Paul Soukup, who throws light on shared characteristics of both the Bible and digital culture such as concern for community values,

structural immersion in Ong's 'second orality,' functions of shared memory, and finally the reproduction of biblical content. As he claims, the fact that Bible studies are open to different approaches, for example *Lectio Divina*, leads to the transformation of human communities.

In the second chapter, Michele Sorice analyzes how Italian Catholic associations are engaged in the participatory politics. With regard to a decline of active citizenship in the country, several aspects are shown by Sorice. First of all, the Catholic associations mostly based on a vertical structure are strongly engaged with the civilian agency. They tend to open up dialogues that are oftentimes inefficient. Secondly, when representing the Catholic world experience, non-lay groups rather than ecclesiastical associations are used. In fact, "different speeds" are presented (Sorice, 2015: 32), one externally promoting both participation and active citizenship and the other being more static and top-down.

As Leticia Soberón claims in the third chapter, Catholic Church websites fail to focus on dialog, but instead promote non-religious social media networks. Thus, it becomes evident that deliberation is an essential part of facing contemporary religious challenges. She suggests the adoption of the democratic and egalitarian model of collaborative structures related to the collaboration between the Catholic websites instead of the cooperation model managed by a team leader.

The next chapter describes the fundamental terms related to a prayer experience using a religious application called *iBreviary*. In this part of the book, Paolo Padrini affirms the iPhone ecosystem as a space for religious activities. His rather descriptive approach confirms that using Apps in the Catholic context may be salutary in the believer's daily routine. The language of smartphones and tablets creates a space for prayer on the bus or train even if it is not as evident as unrolling the carpet by a faithful Muslim.

An interesting case of young Catholics who use Facebook in Philippines is illustrated by Anthony G. Romano in Chapter Five to present common reasons why youth in such a highly homogeneously religious country are fond of religious posts. It is a well-known fact that the Roman Catholic Church is facing pressure to get in touch with young people via digital media. Romano analyzes the popularity of religious posts as a confirmation of users' faith, and finds them to be catchy and enjoyable in order to renew ties with Facebook users.

An overview of virtual Catholic communities in Latin America is provided by Franklin Cornejo Urbina in the sixth part of the monograph. Here, the author emphasizes that Pope Francis's followers on Twitter are mostly from both Northern and Latin America. Moreover, when describing the characteristics of Latin American Catholic communities, he pinpoints that they consist basically of young people from urban areas.

An absorbing chapter by Marta Kołodziejska analyzes the changing religious landscape in Poland and the role of Catholic forums. She indicates that although religious communication modified by the rules of the internet causes an increase in informal exchanges, it does not mean that the content becomes trivialized. What is more, Kołodziejska proves that Catholic forum users focus their attention on transferring religious knowledge rather than enforcing "a certain worldview of obedience to a particular set of religious rules" (Kołodziejska, 2015).

The last chapter relates to the case of the Jesuits of the Spanish Province who developed an application called *Rezandovoy* – a platform with MP3 audio recordings that contain biblical texts, music, and commentaries. Here, Xabier Riezu shows how most Catholic users

incorporate this prayer tool into their daily religious habits. This example shows that the religious platform stays far away from being just a repository of religious content. It can be calibrated to adapt to the digital world.

To sum up, the book *Catholic Communities Online* shows a diverse and exciting landscape of Catholic engagement in digital communication. The following chapters highlight selected regions of the world and their Catholic digital media characteristics, strictly related to the value of community. The empirically-grounded chapters on the Philippines and Poland provide in great detail a fascinating and rare insight into Catholic digital media use. Community practices that are focused on putting much effort into religious self-education promise efficiency benefits to believers who are active online. In addition to their Catholic religious consciousness, the quality of their religiosity may raise.

Nevertheless, the monograph contains certain shortcomings that need to be put on the agenda. Firstly, community practices announced in the titles of the chapters are not always satisfying. For instance, in chapter six, the author promises an insight into the virtual community in Latin America. In fact, however, he presents an overview of Catholic communication in this region only in terms of Pope Francis's teachings. Secondly, it has to be mentioned that Chapter Four turns out to be inconsistent with the other part of the book regarding its style and lack of references. Although this limitation does not destroy the content, it makes reading difficult.

What lesson can be learned from *Catholic Communities Online* after reading this collection? Obviously, that community value is an essential part of the Catholic identity that has been shaping the ongoing process of Church accommodation in the digital environment with positive results visible in Catholic community practices.

References

- Hjarvard S (2012) Three Forms of Mediatized Religion. Changing the Public Face of Religion. In: Hjarvard S and Lövheim M (eds), *Mediatization and Religion Nordic Perspectives*, Göteborg: NORDICOM, pp. 21–44.