RELIGION AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

Journal of the
Asian Research Center
for Religion and Social Communication

Vol. 17 No. 1, 2019

RELIGION AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION is published twice a year by the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication, Saint John's University, Bangkok, Thailand

Copyright © 2019 by the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication.

ISSN 1686-9184

Address all communications, manuscripts and journals for exchange to:

Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication
St. John's University
Ladprao, Bangkok 10900
Thailand
Email: arcstjohns.bkk@gmail.com

Reviews can be sent to:

Dr. Franz-Josef Eilers, svd
1916 Oroquieta Street
1003 Santa Cruz, Manila
Philippines

TABLE OF CONTENTS
Vol. 17 No. 1, 2019

ARTICLES

The Effect of Digital Development on Church and Society in Southeast Asia: A Survey
Anthony Le Duc 1

Intercultural Communication in a Digital World
Franz Josef Eilers 31

Religious Communities in the Digital Era: Dynamic of "Believing" and "Belonging"
Gnana Patrick 38

Engaging Pope Francis' *Laudato Si* in the Discourse on Environmental Communication
Jeramie N. Molino 51

South Asian Voice of Changing Hindu Religious Contour and Digital Media
Binod C. Agrawal 72

BOOK NOTES

A Complete Guide to Advertising Media Selection, Planning Research and Buying
Helen Katz 83

The Social Media Journalist Handbook
Yumi Wilson 83

Media and the Global South. Narrative Territorialities, Cross-Cultural Currents
Mehita Iquani and Fernando Resende (eds.) 85

Mediated Intercultural Communication in a Digital Age
Ahmer Atay and Margaret U. D'Silva 86

New Media in Times of Crisis
Keri K. Stephens 87

Announcing for Broadcasting and the Internet.
The Modern Guide to Performing in the Electronic Media
Carl Hausman, Philip Benoit and Fritz Messere (eds.) 89

Soft Skills for the New Journalist.
Cultivating the Inner Resources You Need to Succeed
Colleen Steffen 91

Media Writing. Print, Broadcast and Public Relations.
5th Edition
W. Richard Whitaker, Ronald D. Smith and Janet E. Ramsey 92

The Handbook of Communication and Security
Bryan C. Taylor and Hamilton Bean (eds.) 94

BOOK REVIEW

Ethics and Religion in the Age of Social Media:
Digital Proverbs for Responsible Citizens
Kevin Healy and Robert H. Woods 97

The Effect of Digital Development on Church and Society in Southeast Asia: A Survey

Anthony Le Duc, svd

Introduction: Southeast Asia Digital Landscape

Southeast Asia is a region of tremendous diversity in its religious, social, cultural, economic and political makeup. With a total population of over 657 million,[1] it is the third most populous geographical region in the world, only behind South and East Asia. Technological development in the region is also as varied as all the other dimensions of Southeast Asian life. Despite the fact that urbanization across the region still falls short of the half-way mark by less than a percentage point, Internet penetration has already reached nearly 60 percent[2] with double-digit growth in most segments and most countries of the region.[3] With over half of Southeast Asians being monthly active users, the region presents itself as the third-largest market globally, and the Internet economy is

[1] "Southeast Asian Population," Worldometers, http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/south-eastern-asia-population/ (accessed October 7, 2018).

[2] "Internet Penetration by Region," We Are Social, https://wearesocial-net.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/DIGITAL-IN-2018-003-INTERNET-PENETRATION-MAP-V1.00.png (accessed October 7, 2018).

[3] Atzlan Othman, "Facebook most popular social mediate platform in the Sultanate," Borneo Bulletin. https://borneobulletin.com.bn/facebook-most-popular-social-media-platform-in-the-sultanate/, (May 19, 2018).

Anthony Le Duc, svd, PhD is the deputy director of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication. He is a designated lecturer in moral theology at Saengtham College in Samphran, Thailand.

expected to reach $200 billion by 2025.[4]

Other statistics on Southeast Asian digital state are equally interesting. Southeast Asians top the world in terms of time spent on the Internet per day, overwhelmingly by way of the smartphone. According to GlobalWebIndex, users in Thailand spend more time on the Internet each day than any other country in the world, 9h38min. Philippines, another SEA country is only slightly behind with 9h29m. Indonesia and Malaysia rank 4th and 6th, respectively. Though slightly lower, Singapore and Vietnam, another one of SEA's most populous countries, also make the top 15. As we can see, the majority of the SEA countries are listed in the top 15 list of time spent per day online.[5]

No doubt a significant amount of online time is spent on social media, in which SEA has a 55 percent penetration. Brunei not only leads the region in Internet penetration, but also leads in social media penetration at 81 percent. Meanwhile, more than three quarters of Singaporeans are active monthly social media users. SE Asians use a variety of social media platforms depending on the country. While Facebook still maintains the lead in all 11 countries at the platform level, SE Asians also like to use mobile messengers. LINE is particularly popular in Thailand and Indonesia. Home-grown Zalo is widely used in Vietnam; and Viber was once so popular in the Philippines that Manila's transport authorities used it for their contact hotlines. Although Facebook Messenger has taken the lead in countries such as Vietnam and the Philippines, other platforms with considerable use in the region include BBM (mostly in Indonesia), WhatsApp and WeChat. In Malaysia and Singapore, WhatsApp is still the most popular mobile

[4] John Russell, "Google: Southeast Asia's Internet economy is growing faster than expected," Tech Crunch, https://techcrunch.com/2017/12/12/google-southeast-asias-internet-economy-is-growing-faster-than-expected/ (accessed October 12, 2018).

[5] "Time Spent Per Day on the Internet," We Are Social, https://wearesocial-net.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/DIGITAL-IN-2018-002-TIME-SPENT-ON-THE-INTERNET-V1.00.png (accessed October 7, 2018)

messenger on the market.[6]

Digital development is not even throughout the region. Although Brunei and Singapore enjoy high digital connectivity, less than one-third of the people in the three countries of Myanmar, Laos and Timor-Leste have Internet access. Likewise, only about a quarter of the people in Myanmar and Laos are social media users. The whole story, however, is that digital growth is rapid in all these countries. Laos, for example, saw an impressive 83 percent growth in users from January 2016 to January 2017. When the ban on Facebook was lifted in Myanmar, Internet users flocked to sign up for the platform. By 2016, there were nearly 10 million Facebook users in the country. Today, the number has grown to over 14 million.[7]

The highly complex picture of the digital landscape of Southeast Asia makes the study on the effect of the Internet on life in Southeast Asia not a simple task. Although certain broad strokes can be drawn about the region, closer examination reveals that the impact of Internet development on each country is unique to its particular context. This survey attempts to provide an overall picture of the effect of the Internet on Southeast Asian society with the caveat that observations made cannot be applied to each of the 11 countries in the region wholesale.

Internet's Impact on Christianity in Southeast Asia

The religious landscape in Southeast Asia is a tapestry of rich, diverse and vibrant age-old traditions. The religious makeup of the region reflects the result of centuries of political, economic, social and cultural exchange between the local people and those from East Asia, South Asia as well the West. Hinduism was introduced into Southeast

[6] "Digital in Southeast Asia in 2017," We Are Social, https://wearesocial.com/special-reports/digital-southeast-asia-2017 (accessed October 7, 2018).

[7] "Revealed: Facebook hate speech exploded in Myanmar during Rohinya crisis," The Guardian, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/03/revealed-facebook-hate-speech-exploded-in-myanmar-during-rohingya-crisis (April 3, 2018).

Asia during the first century CE by Indian traders and became the state religion of several ancient Southeast Asian kingdoms, e.g. the Khmer Empire and the Champa Kingdom. Although Hinduism is no longer a widely practiced religion in Southeast Asia (with the exception of the Indonesian island of Bali), its influence upon the spiritual fabric of various populations in the region is readily visible. Hindu gods and religious festivals enjoy great popularity in Thailand where the predominant religion is Theravada Buddhism. The Theravada ambit of Buddhism is most widely practiced in Southeast Asia, specifically the countries of Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. In these countries, Buddhism, which arrived circa 500 CE, takes on local flavors by mixing with local traditions and beliefs such as in spirits and ghosts. Mahayana Buddhism is found predominantly in Vietnam as well as in other countries with sizeable populations of Chinese ethnic groups. Islam began to spread strongly in the 12th century after having initially arrived to the region around the 7th century. Today, it is the majority religion in Brunei (67%), Cocos Islands (80%), Indonesia (87.18%), and Malaysia (60.4%). In fact, Indonesia by country has the highest number of Muslims in the world. Christianity's arrival to Southeast Asia was much later compared to the other world religions, beginning only in the 16th century. With the exception of the Philippines and East Timor, which have 80% and 97% Catholic populations, respectively, Christianity makes up a tiny percentage in the rest of the region. Vietnam has a total Christian (Catholic and Protestant) population making up 8.2%, while Thailand's Christian population is less than 1 percent.[8]

Christianity as a small minority religion has faced tremendous challenges in Southeast Asia historically as well as in the present. Vietnam, for example, faced hundreds of years of persecution and continues to be strictly controlled by the ruling communist regime. Christianity has also faced great challenges in Myanmar where for many decades was ruled by a military government. There are also

[8] "Religious demographics of Southeast Asia," World Atlas, https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-demographics-of-southeast-asian-nations-dependent-territories.html (accessed October 7, 2018).

reports of on-going persecution of Christians in addition to Muslims in this majority Buddhist country.[9] In countries where communication outlets are severely controlled by the state, it is not always easy to produce programs and materials for the purpose of evangelization. The development of technology, especially the Internet has helped a great deal in this respect.

The effort of the Catholic Church to evangelize through modern means of communication in Southeast Asia is seen notably in the creation of Radio Veritas Asia, which produces programming in various Asian languages from its base in the Philippines. By its name, it can be seen that at its inception, the program was a short-wave radio program broadcasted from the Philippines to countries such as Vietnam, Myanmar, and Cambodia where the ability to produce Catholic programming faced great challenges. The Latin word "*Veritas*" means "truth" and represents the aim of the Catholic Church to proclaim the truth of Christ "from the housetops through the airwaves."[10] When RVA was inaugurated in 1970, the recently canonized Pope Paul VI declared that "this great enterprise and such an important work should echo the teachings of Christ and lift hearts to God's truth and love."[11] In 1981, Pope John Paul II characterized RVA as the "voice of Asian Christianity."[12] Indeed, the presence of radio broadcasts such as that of RVA was of tremendous benefit to countries facing severe persecutions. In 1990, Vietnamese bishops who went to Vatican to attend the Synod of Bishops testified that there were people in isolated villages in Vietnam's forests who knew about the Gospel without ever having met a priest.

[9] Stoyan Zaimov, "Secret genocide of Christians reported in Myanmar: thousands killed, pregnant women raped," Christian Post Reporter, https://www.christianpost.com/news/secret-genocide-of-christians-reported-in-myanmar-thousands-killed-pregnant-women-raped-224688/ (June 6, 2018).

[10] "History," Radio Veritas Asia, http://www.rveritas-asia.org/index.php/about-us/history (accessed October 7, 2018).

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

These people were known as "radio Christians."[13]

Despite the clarity of mission and vision, RVA cannot realize its aims in this digital age if it continues to hold on to old models of operation, both in content and method of transmission. The people in charge of the Vietnamese language programming for RVA recognized the need for change. In 2015, RVA Vietnamese began broadcasting its programs via the Internet 24/7 with a mix of news, Church teachings, biblical meditations, Mass, and sacred music. The streaming analytics indicate that in July 2015, the total number of listeners was 61,323. However, by January 2016, the number of listeners increased nearly five and a half times to 331,623. While most of the listeners lived in Vietnam, Internet technology made it possible for Vietnamese listeners from all over the world to access the program.[14]

Presently, despite the fact that the Catholic Church in Vietnam is unable to produce any television or radio programs that could be broadcasted to the public from within the country, the Internet is full of locally produced materials in various formats to serve the purpose of spiritual support and evangelization. Beside official diocesan websites and social media outlets that include news about the local and universal Church, video clips and live streaming of important celebrations, there are also those belonging to various religious congregations as well as Catholic movements. The Facebook group "Tin Mừng Cho Người Nghèo" (Good News for the Poor) has 281,000 followers. Thái Hà Parish Facebook Group (Truyền Thông Thái Hà – Thái Hà Social Communication) has over 120,000 followers. It is notable that these sites not only include purely religious content but also content that addresses social and political matters as they pertain to religion and justice and peace. In Vietnam, before local websites became widespread, one that

[13] Alessandro De Carolis, "Radio evangelization and the new media," http://www.paoline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/2012RADIO-ING.pdf (accessed October 15, 2018).

[14] Ta Anh Vu, "Challenges of the Digital World for the Church in Vietnam," *Religion and Social Communication* 13, no.2 (2015):188.

was created overseas, VietCatholic, had already been a popular resource for Vietnamese Catholic content for those living inside and outside of Vietnam. However, VietCatholic was often blocked in the country and access to the page required ways to bypass the firewall.

Thailand: The restrictions on the Catholic Church seen in Vietnam is not present in Thailand, which is a predominantly Buddhist country. The Thai Catholic Church, however is a minute percentage of the total population, making up only 0.5 percent. The Thai context, however, presents a different set of challenges. Although the Church can produce television and radio programs for broadcast on any of the commercial outlets available, producing programs, especially for television requires a big budget. Presently, only 3 weekly programs are aired, and some at rather unfavorable hours. Undoubtedly, these programs that take much effort to produce would find viewership not only at the time of their broadcast but also after they have been uploaded online. Like the television programs, Thai Catholic publications such as Udomsarn periodicals can also be found online in addition to the hardcopy.

For the Thai Church, due to the limitations in terms of reach of traditional Catholic communication resources, the Internet has been of tremendous value. Watcharee Kitsawat, who works at Thai Catholic Social Media, says the Internet is the "key" to receiving and sending information in all the various forms in an expedient manner to all people no matter their social or economic status. Kitsawat compares the speediness and the timeliness of the Internet to the work of the Holy Spirit whose presence can be made anywhere instantly.[15] Like Vietnam and elsewhere, Thailand also has its share of websites and social media outlets created by various Dioceses, religious congregations, and organizations etc. However, one of the most active Catholic Facebook groups is Khristang Thay Yok Mueu Khun! (Thai Catholics Raise Your Hands!), which has nearly 30,000 followers as of September 2018.

[15] Personal interview via LINE application, 18 August 2018.

Although this may not sound like a very large number, it represents approximately 10 percent of the total Thai Catholic population. Many priests, religious and seminarians subscribe to this group along with lay people. As a public group, it is a combination of sharing news, photos, discussions etc. in a relatively non-restrictive manner. By following this group, one is almost certain to get quite a bit of information about what is going on in the local Church as well as some matters taking place abroad. New pages are also being created; however, membership often overlaps.

Family Relationships

There have been numerous studies about the effect of the Internet and social media on family relationships around the world (Hans 2004; Mesch 2006, Alolyan 2015; Abuiyada et al. 2016; Moawad et al. 2016; Sultana 2017; Valencia-Arias et al. 2017; Misaghi et al. 2018). Some of the issues raised in these studies such as its negative impact on relationships also apply to Southeast Asians. However, in this survey, I would like to highlight some matters that are particular to the Southeast Asian context.

In 2011, Microsoft conducted a poll on "families and technology" in Asian countries, including the Southeast Asian countries of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.[16] This poll, which surveyed more than 3,000 people, attempted to find out how Asian families incorporated technology into their day-to-day cyber-relationships. According to MSN, the results of the poll showed that technology had become essential to the Asian family life, and that Asian families were enjoying communicating using technology. According to MSN, "Asian families are big believers that technology helps them to communicate better and it is obvious from the rate of adoption, that

[16] "Microsoft study shows that Asian families are heavily into gadgets," Media Buzz, https://www.mediabuzz.com.sg/archive/2011/november/1420-microsoft-study-shows-that-asian-families-are-heavily-into-gadgets (November 2011).

everyone from young kids to grandparents is finding technology easier to use." Among respondents, 86 percent judged technology to have a positive impact on their family relationships, and 16 percent said that the impact was "very positive."

It is no coincidence that Internet technology has been viewed in overwhelmingly positive light by Southeast Asians. The people of this region have very tight knit family traditions. However, due to economic hardships, many are forced to migrate away from their home in order to make a living. Both internal and international migration are ubiquitous for Southeast Asia. In 2015, a survey conducted by the Philippine statistics Authority revealed that nearly 2.5 million Filipinos were working overseas.[17] In 2017 alone, 134,751 Vietnamese left their country as legal export workers.[18] The number who migrated to other countries to work illegally or under the pretense of tourism or studying abroad would add significantly to this total. Thailand is the receiving country of over 3 million workers from Myanmar—both documented and undocumented.[19] Compared with international migration, internal migration is much more numerous. In many Southeast Asian countries, there are various cultural and religious festivals where one could witness the exodus of people from the city to their homes in the countryside. For Vietnamese, this exodus takes place most dramatically during the Lunar New Year festival. For the Buddhist countries of Thailand, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia, the greatest exodus occurs during the Buddhist New Year Festival, known in Thailand as Songkran.

[17] "How connectivity is changing the dynamics of the Filipino family," CNBC, https://www.cnbc.com/advertorial/2016/10/24/how-connectivity-is-changing-the-dynamics-of-the-filipino-family.html (October 24, 2016).

[18] "Xuất khẩu lao động đạt số lượng kỷ lục trong năm 2017" (Record number of export worker in 2017), Thời Báo Tài Chính Việt Nam, http://thoibaotaichinhvietnam.vn/pages/xa-hoi/2018-01-16/xuat-khau-lao-dong-dat-so-luong-ky-luc-trong-nam-2017-52751.aspx (January 16, 2018).

[19] Zarni Phyo, "Myanmar migrants in Thailand," Myanmar Times, https://www.mmtimes.com/in-pictures/19843-myanmar-migrants-in-thailand.html (October 6, 2018).

In many Southeast Asian villages, other than during these particular festivals where families reunite, it is often quiet. The inhabitants of the villages are mostly the elderly, younger students and children. Young people of college age move to the city to study. Those who do not study move away from the village in order to find work. Young couples who have children often leave them in the care of grandparents or older relatives, not seeing them for months or years at a time. Vietnamese who work illegally in Korea report not having been home for up to 10 years. Because they have made the huge and dangerous investment to make a living in the country, they try to stay for as long as they can in order to save up enough before going back to Vietnam.

In an era where economic migration has become a staple of the Southeast Asian family life, and long periods of separation is a reality for vast majority of Southeast Asian families, Internet technology has become and effective and inexpensive way for families to stay connected. The phenomenon of "transnational mothering" has become commonplace among Filipino women who work overseas (Parrenas 2005; Reyes 2007; Francisco 2011; Madianou and Miller 2011; Fresnoza-Flot 2018). Many work in Singapore, Hong Kong or Korea as domestic helpers, taking care of other people's households. At the same time, they also have their own family and children back in the Philippines that they must look after from afar. Thus, "transnational mothers" are migrant workers who attempt to perform their mothering tasks while working in other countries.[20] For these transnational mothers, the model of "intensive mothering" that includes nurturing, protecting, caring, and socializing cannot be carried out directly or with the same level but are partially handed over to other family members. The advancement of technology, however, has greatly assisted transnational mothers to undertake their roles rather than relying exclusively on relatives.

[20] Arul Chib, Shelly Malik, Rajiv George Aricat, and Siti Zubeidah Kadir, "Migrant Mothering and Mobile Phones: Negotiations of Transnational Identity," *Mobile Media & Communication* 2, no. 1 (2014): 74.

The technological gadget that transnational mothers rely most heavily on is the mobile phone with Internet connection. In my research, I interviewed over a dozen Vietnamese migrant workers in Thailand who have children ages from 3-10 in Vietnam. Almost all of them left their children in the care of grandparents. All report that they call their children every day, even multiple times a day using Facebook Messenger or some other app that enables them to both see and hear each other. The mothers also report talking to the grandparents in order to follow up on their children. The smart phone has become an indispensable gadget for these mothers who can only see their children once or twice a year. Not only is the technology able to allow them to be connected with their children in a more efficient way, it is also inexpensive. Before the availability of these Internet applications, Vietnamese migrant workers wanting to contact their family had to buy phone cards in which the rate per minute was as high as 7 baht (.20 USD).[21]

Despite the tremendous opportunity that the Internet has given to transnational parents to connect with each other, limitations are inevitable. The great geographical distance between members could be reduced through voice and video streaming; however, in times of crisis or serious conflict taking place, not everything could be resolved online.[22] In addition, not everything within the parental responsibility could be easily carried out. Vietnamese migrant workers in Thailand report leaving the task of faith formation for their children almost completely to grandparents. The grandparents take their children to church and teach them how to pray. When I asked whether they say prayers with their children online, most report no. The conversations mostly revolve around every day activities such as school and household chores. Some feel that because the quality of their spiritual life in Thailand is not as high as when they were still in Vietnam,

[21] As high as the rate was using these phone cards, a direct call from Thailand to Vietnam would cost seven times as much.

[22] R. Wilding, "'Virtual' Intimacies? Families Communicating Across Transnational Contexts," *Global Networks* 6, no.2 (2016): 125-142.

that they could not educate their children as well in this respect as the grandparents. Most hope that things would sustain until they are able to save enough in order to return to Vietnam to be full-time mothers to their children.

Youth

The youth make up a large portion of the population in Southeast Asia. According to the World Economic Forum, more than half of ASEAN citizens are under 30 years of age.[23] The region is also the fastest in the world in adding new Internet users on a daily basis. Among the 124,000 new ASEAN Internet users added each day, the vast majority are youth. Although there have been many studies done on the topic of youth and the Internet in other parts of the world (Guan and Subrahmanyam 2009; Livingstone 2011; Dinesh 2015; Hasmujaj et al. 2015; VonHoltz et al. 2018; Ballaratto 2018), there have been few studies about Internet and youth in Southeast Asia. The studies that have been done focus more on developed countries such as Singapore (Mythily 2009; Skoric and Poor 2013; Loh et al. 2016) and Malaysia (Yusop and Sumari 2013; Baskaran et al. 2017; Ghazali et al. 2017). Studies focusing on lower income countries such as Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia are much fewer. In many ways, the concerns about youth and the Internet in Southeast Asia mirror the concerns elsewhere in the world. However, there are points of departure when it comes to Southeast Asian youth as well. Based on examination of youth and the Internet in Southeast Asia, the following observations can be made:

1. **Widespread use of the Internet**. In Southeast Asia, the smart phone rather than TV is the most popular gadget in the house. It is the primary way that the youth receive information because approximately 90 percent of the region's Internet users are smartphone users.[24]

[23] Hor Kimsay, "Youth keying into digital economy," The Phnom Phenh Post, https://www.phnompenhpost.com/business/youth-keying-digital-economy (May 11, 2017).

[24] Rayna Hollander, "Southeast Asia could be a leader in mobile Internet usage next year," Business Insider, https://www.businessinsider.com/southeast-asia-could-be-a-leader-in-mobile-Internet-usage-next-year-2017-12 (December 13, 2017)

Whether on a mobile device or other gadgets, the Internet is increasingly becoming the medium in which Asian youth receive information. APAC Kids Market Insights Report 2016-2017 revealed that 98 percent of Thai youth chose the Internet over television as their source of information. This number is 81 percent for youth in the Philippines, 78 percent for Singaporean youth, 73 percent for Indonesian youth and 70 percent for Malaysian youth.[25] In this respect, even children as young as 6 years old are accessing information through the Internet. Once entering teenage years, only a few percentage of teens rely on other means beside the Internet for information. The dependence on the Internet for information has also affected the consumption habit of the region's youth. Increasingly, youth in Southeast Asia are asking their parents to buy things seen online rather than on television.

The widespread use of the Internet among the youth, however, presents specific challenges to the parents and grandparents in the region. There exists a digital divide between the parents and the children, and this divide is even more apparent when it comes to grandparents. Oftentimes, it is the young people who teach their parents and grandparents how to use the Internet rather than the other way around. When digital literacy among the adults is low, the ability to control how young people use the Internet and to protect them from the various dangers associated with Internet is also greatly compromised.[26] The fact that Southeast Asian youth access the Internet primarily through the smartphone means that they have almost complete freedom to go online in any manner they wish and wherever they want, and access

[25] Stella-maris Ewudolu, "Internet Rules When it Comes to Reaching Asia-Pacific Youth – Infographics," AEC News, https://aecnewstoday.com/2017/Internet-rules-when-it-comes-to-reaching-asia-pacific-youth/#axzz5RK7rmVkQ (April 27, 2017).

[26] "Going online in the Asia Pacific region: challenges for parents," London School of Economics, http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/parenting4digitalfuture/2016/03/16/going-online-in-the-asia-pacific-region-challenges-for-parents/ (accessed October 7, 2018).

whatever they are interested in without much adult supervision. This is true especially among the youth who live with grandparents while their parents are working in other cities or countries.

2. **Optimism**. A recent survey conducted by the World Economic Forum on 64,000 ASEAN citizens showed that there is strong optimism, especially in the youth population that technology development will positively affect income and job prospects. 67 percent of under-35 Southeast Asians believed that technology will help them obtain higher incomes, while 52 percent felt that job availability will also increase with technology. The survey, which was conducted through various online platforms, received responses mainly from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore and the Philippines. The level of optimism, however, varies by country as well as level of education. Compared to 31% of Singaporean youth expressing optimism that technology would increase jobs, 60% of Filipino youth felt that this would be the case. Respondents who held university degree or higher were also less optimistic (47 percent) compared to those who stated that they had no schooling (56 percent).[27]

Despite the attitude of optimism towards technological development, the prospects of increased job opportunities may not be as rosy as what the region's youth believe. The United Nations predict that in the next 15 years, the working age population will increase by 11,000 each day in Southeast Asia.[28] In April 2018, the Asian Development Bank released a report entitled "Asian Development Outlook (ADO 2018: How Technology Affects Jobs."[29] The report states

[27] "Survey: ASEAN Youth Bullish about Impact of Technology on Jobs," World Economic Forum, https://www.weforum.org/press/2018/09/survey-asean-youth-bullish-about-impact-of-technology-on-jobs/ (September 11, 2018)

[28] "Youth optimistic about ASEAN 4.0," The Phnom Phenh Post, https://www.phnompenhpost.com/opinion/youth-optimistic-about-asean-40 (September 12, 2018).

[29] "Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2018: How Technology Affects Jobs," Asian Development Bank, https://www.adb.org/publications/asian-development-outlook-2018-how-technology-affects-jobs (April 2018).

that although technological development indeed fuels productivity, the automation of work will place many jobs at risk. Automation is increasingly being implemented in the apparel and footwear industries as well as in customer support. In developing economies in the region, some studies have asserted that over half of the jobs could be at risk. According to Justin Wood, the head of Asia Pacific and a member of the Executive Committee at the World Economic Forum, "Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies like artificial intelligence, advanced robotics and self-driving vehicles will bring significant disruption to the job market. No one knows yet what impact these technologies will have on jobs and salaries. Globally there is concern that technological change may bring rising inequality and joblessness. But in ASEAN, the sentiment seems to be much more positive."[30]

3. **Addiction**. The World Economic Forum survey also revealed that ASEAN youth spent an average of six hours and four minutes online every day, with 61 percent of the time for leisure, and 39% for work activities. Thai youth topped the list with an average of 7 hours and six minutes a day. The least time, spent by Vietnamese youth amounted to 5 hours and 10 minutes. The fact that young people spend a large part of their waking time online is worrying for health experts. Many in the field of mental health in Thailand expressed concern when in 2018, the government decided to officially recognize eSports, saying that it will lead to increase in addiction to online games. According to Teerarat Pantawee, head of the National Health Assembly's panel on children and media in Thailand, eSports is big business in the country, worth more than 10 billion baht and is growing at an annual rate of 12 percent. Thai children spend up to 35 hours a week online with more than half of that time playing games. It has been said that Thai children ages between 6 and 14 are so Internet tuned-in that it is the primary means of communication with this group.[31] According to Teerarat, official recognition of eSports can cause children to persuade their parents to let

[30] Ibid.

[31] Stella-maris Ewudolu, "Internet Rules When it Comes to Reaching Asia-Pacific Youth – Infographics,"

them spend even more time playing since it is now considered a sport. It is a sport, which if addicted, can lead to major problems physically and mentally.[32]

It is not only health experts in Thailand who are worried about Internet addiction among the youth. Experts in other Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia and Singapore share the same concerns. Studies of Malaysian parents revealed that they were increasingly worried that their children's excessive use of the Internet was interfering with home and school responsibilities. Parents also expressed concern that online time was replacing important social activities.[33] According to child psychologist Norharlina Bahar, the prevalence of problematic Internet users in Malaysia could be as high as 49.2 percent. "Most spend time on online games and social media and there is enough evidence to show links to anxiety, depression, physical health problems, school disconnection, unemployment, decreased job productivity and social isolation." In Thailand, I have met numerous young Vietnamese migrant workers who confessed that the reason they dropped out of school and have to come to Thailand to work illegally is due to over-preoccupation with online games and not enough interest in school. In an exploratory study by Zhang et al (2017), it was found that Internet addiction among Vietnamese youth also brought on physical problems such as sleeping disorders.[34]

4. **Social aberrancy**. Rebellion is part of youth. This is generally accepted in the West. However, in Asian society where there is a relatively high degree of conformity to social norms, the presence of the Internet has exposed youth behavior that go against cultural

[32] "Warning over child addiction to eSports," The Nation, http://www.nationmultimedia.com/detail/national/30354154 (September 11, 2018).

[33] "More Malaysians addicted to Internet," The Straights Times, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/more-malaysians-addicted-to-Internet (October 8, 2016).

[34] Melvyn W.B. Zhang et al., "Internet Addiction and Sleep Quality Among Vietnamese Youths," Asian Journal of Psychiatry 28 (March 2017): 15-20.

standards. On Vietnamese and Thai social media, it is not difficult to find clips of students, especially female junior high and high school students having catfights in which one girl is being physically injured while other students stand around watching and recording the incident. Oftentimes, beside the physical and verbal abuse, the victim is further humiliated by having her clothes ripped off. Although some young girls have their clothes ripped off forcefully, many are going online to voluntarily expose themselves for the sake of getting more "likes" from followers. In Vietnam, a youth trend on social media entitled "Saying is Doing" in which the user declares to take some outrageous action if he/she gets a certain number of likes has led to some serious consequences. In 2016, a 24 year-old Vietnamese man from Ho Chi Minh City went through with a promise to immolate himself and jump off a bridge if he received 40.000 likes.[35] Other users have promised and carried out actions such as posting nude photos of themselves, burning their school, eating their own feces, or even stabbing themselves with a knife.[36]

Other social aberrancies that were once confined to the physical world have also found their way onto cyberspace. Cyberbullying is prevalent in Southeast Asia as in any other region around the world. Cyberbullying can be carried out via messaging and chat apps, emails or on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.[37] In Singapore, a survey of teenagers revealed that 3 out of 4 said that they have been bullied online.[38] Almost all of the victims did not tell their

[35] "Cần giáo dục định hướng cho giới trẻ sử dụng mạng xã hội," Dan Tri, https://dantri.com.vn/dien-dan/can-giao-duc-dinh-huong-cho-gioi-tre-su-dung-mang-xa-hoi-20161109173355713.htm (November 9, 2016).

[36] Ngan Giang, "Giới trẻ câu like bằng trào lưu phản cảm 'Nói là làm'," Zing News, https://news.zing.vn/gioi-tre-cau-like-bang-trao-luu-phan-cam-noi-la-lam-post684312.html (September 24, 2016).

[37] Ruthaychonnee Sittichai and Peter K. Smith, "Bullying and Cyberbullying in Thailand: Coping Strategies and Relation to Age, Gender, Religion and Victim Status," *Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research* 7, no.1 (January 2018): 24.

[38] Derrik A. Paolo, "3 in 4 youngsters say they have been bullied online," Channel News Asia, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/cnainsider/3-in-4-

parents about their experience because they felt that their parents would either not understand or that the matter was too personal to share. The vast majority of those who experienced cyberbullying either personally or done to others did nothing about the matter. The vicious cycle of cyberbullying, however, makes a large number of teens both the victim and perpetrator. The survey revealed that 63 percent fit the profile of victim and bully.[39] Cyberbullying, however, is serious and warrants attention from social experts and lawmakers. In Western countries, this problem is increasingly being addressed with various resources and intervention programs. Sittichai and Smith say that this same level of intervention work aimed at youth, parents and schools has not been seen in Thailand, where cyberbullying has led to serious consequences including suicide.[40]

Social and Political Harmony in the Digital Era

In March 2016, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines released a statement denying any papal endorsement of candidates in national and local elections after a post on social media claiming Pope Francis had "admired" Rodrigo Duterte for his "honesty" went viral. The CBCP called on the public to "cease from maliciously using the Pope for political gains."[41] Nonetheless, using religion for political gains is far from uncommon in Southeast Asia. One of the most notorious cases took place in Indonesia in 2017 with the conviction of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) for blasphemy. Ahok, a Chinese-Indonesian Christian, was running for re-election as governor of Jakarta, Indonesia's capital city. Things were going well for the candidate until he decided to tell a small audience not to be fooled by those who cite the Qur'an that Muslims should not vote for a

teens-singapore-cyberbullying-bullied-online-survey-10001480 (March 1, 2018).

[39] Ibid.

[40] Sittichai and Smith, 29-30.

[41] Aries Joseph Hegina, "CBCP: Pope Francis not endorsing Duterte," http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/776078/cbcp-pope-francis-not-endorsing-duterte (March 24, 2016).

non-Muslim to be their leader. Ahok's opponents seized the opportunity to attack him, uploading various doctored versions of excerpts of his speech onto social media, and called for charges to be brought against him. Several large demonstrations were organized, with the one taking place in December 2016 attended by an estimated 500,000 Muslim protesters, mostly men.[42] From a speech 6,000 seconds long, a mere 13-second clip was uploaded onto Youtube and other social media outlets; and even this out-of-context clip was hardly watched by those who felt that Ahok was guilty of blasphemy. One survey indicated that only 13 percent out of the 45 percent of respondents who thought Ahok was guilty had even seen the excerpt. In the end "mobocracy," as characterized by the Indonesian political magazine *Tempo*, prevailed, and Ahok was charged and convicted of blasphemy in May 2017.

Both of the incidents mentioned above to various extents illustrate the phenomenon of misinformation or fake news that has become a reality in the digital age. Southeast Asia has not been exempted from this phenomenon. According to a report released by Singapore's Nanyang Technological University, fake news spanning a wide spectrum of categories is more conspicuous and impactful because Internet technology with its numerous applications has made it much faster and less inexpensive to produce, circulate and re-circulate content. In addition, when there are no humans at work to propagate content, there are artificial intelligence agents set up to automate the task.[43] Even with sophisticated and systematic fact-checking mechanisms available in advanced countries, fending off fake news is still difficult. The challenge lies in the rapid dissemination of content and with such wide reach that information may have already been accessed by millions of people before it is discovered and verified to be fake news. If controlling fake news is challenging for advanced democratic countries, it proves to be that much more difficult for developing countries in Southeast Asia.

[42] Ross Tapsell, "Post-truth politics in Southeast Asia," Inside Story, http://insidestory.org.au/post-truth-politics-in-southeast-asia/ (February 17, 2017).

[43] Gulizar Haciyakupoglu et al., *Countering Fake News: A Survey of Recent Global Initiatives* (Nanyang Technological University, 2017), 2

In these countries press institutions do not have strong or established mechanisms for fact-checking. In the case of Indonesia, for example, with its tremendous cultural, linguistic and geographical diversity, any effort to fact-check and correct false information proves to be a hugely difficult and costly endeavor.[44] This takes place in a context where Indonesia ranks fourth in the world in terms of number of social media users—behind only China, India and the United States. Three other ASEAN countries—Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand—are listed among the 15 countries with the highest number of social media users.[45] Southeast Asian countries have to contend with not only locally produced fake news, but also with content from overseas which makes it into the country appearing either in English or in a translated version. People may have some ability to fact-check things taking place locally, but news about other countries faraway is often digested wholesale without much consideration to its accuracy. Even stories that have already been fact-checked overseas and proven to be a hoax or a satire continue to have their own life in Asian countries. Fake news stories on social media portraying Muslims to be rampant criminals[46] or prone to terrorism can easily reach Asians, thus promoting and reinforcing the sentiment that Muslims are a violent and hateful people. It is not uncommon to hear Vietnamese people comment openly to one another both online and offline about how terrible Muslims are based on what they read in the news from overseas. It is notable that there are only about 90,000 Muslims, mostly from the Cham ethnic minority, living in Vietnam, making up a mere 0.1 per cent of the total population.[47]

[44] Kathleen Azali, "Fake News and Increased Persecution in Indonesia," *Perspective*, no. 61 (August 7, 2017): 7.

[45] "Number of social network users in selected countries in 2017 and 2022 (in millions)," Statistica, https://www.statista.com/statistics/278341/number-of-social-network-users-in-selected-countries/ (accessed October 7, 2018).

[46] Amy Sherman, "Misleading headline says 412 Michigan Muslims busted," http://www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2017/nov/21/freshmedianewscom/misleading-headline-says-412-michigan-muslims-bust/ (November 21, 2017).

[47] "Regards from Vietnamese Muslims," IHH, https://www.ihh.org.tr/en/news/regards-from-vietnamese-muslims-2262 (April 16, 2014).

Most Vietnamese Muslims reside in rural areas peacefully making their livelihood through farming, fishing and trade. Therefore, negative perceptions about Muslims among the Vietnamese do not come from any direct experience with the Muslims themselves, but partly from depictions about Muslims in Western media. This in turn affects how Vietnamese perceive Muslims that reside in their own country. As an Internet user named Nguyen Viet Ha Hanh commented on an online forum, "To a [sic] average Vietnamese person, Muslims are associated with terrorism." For Vietnamese who live in regions far from the Muslim ethnic minority, they are too small to be of concern to them. Muslims can live as they like "as long as you do not create any threat of instability and do not get in the way of 'our' way of life."[48] Although Vietnamese Muslims live peacefully in the country, the negative perceptions of Muslims and the fear that some might be radicalized would hinder the ability of Muslims to practice and develop their religious tradition in a country where religious freedom is already severely limited, and where Muslims are reported to be lacking physical, material and virtual opportunities to learn and preserve their religion. If content from overseas plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of Muslims in Vietnam, it could be safely assumed to also be the case for other countries in the region such as Laos, Cambodia and Thailand.

Locally produced fake news as well as those coming from overseas are able to affect Southeast Asian society thanks largely to the reality of hyperconnectivity present in the world. In the digital age, the amount of global data produced is mind boggling. In 2016 alone, humanity produced the amount of information equaling all of human history up to the year 2015. For the next decade, it is said that information will double every two years.[49] Just Facebook alone is responsible for 510,000

[48] "What do Vietnamese think about Cham Muslims," Quora, https://www.quora.com/What-do-Vietnamese-think-about-Cham-Muslims (May 2, 2017).

[49] "Data is expected to double every two years for the next decade," Quartz, https://qz.com/472292/data-is-expected-to-double-every-two-years-for-the-next-decade/ (August 5, 2015).

comments, 293,000 statuses, and 136,000 photos per minute.[50] If this exponential rate of increase in knowledge presents a huge challenge for even the most developed countries to control and evaluate information, it is the more difficult for the less developed countries of Asia. The World Economic Forum warns that our hyperconnected world can suffer from "digital wildfires" due to "massive digital misinformation."[51] Just as American radio listeners jammed the police station telephone line in 1938 due to the radio broadcast of H.G. Wells novel *The War of the Worlds*, thinking that earth was being attacked by Martians, episodes of panic could take place in societies where the Internet is a relatively new medium and users are not yet savvy enough to make informed judgments on content. One could say that this had already taken place in the Ahok episode in Indonesia where 500,000 protesters turned out on the street of the nation's capital to protest based on a 13-second clip taken out of context from a 100-minute speech. This digital wildfire was started by Ahok's opponents and fueled by Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. The consequence of this digital fire is that a well-liked governor of Jakarta was convicted of and jailed for blasphemy, ethnic and religious tensions were inflamed, and others also became victims of the "Ahok effect."

Another wildfire that involved digital technology is the case of Ronhinya genocide in Myamar. In this once closed off country, Internet penetration galloped from 1 percent in 2012 to 26 percent in 2017. This explosion of Internet usage took place due to the plethora of cheap mobile phones in the country.[52] As the people increasingly took to cyberspace

[50] "The Top 20 Valuable Facebook Statistics – Updated September 2018," Zephoria, https://zephoria.com/top-15-valuable-facebook-statistics/ (accessed October 7, 2018).

[51] "Digital wildfire in a hyperconnected world," World Economic Forum, http://reports.weforum.org/global-risks-2013/risk-case-1/digital-wildfires-in-a-hyperconnected-world/ (accessed October 7, 2018).

[52] Aim Sinpeng, "Southeast Asian cyberspace: politics, censorhip, polarization," http://www.newmandala.org/southeast-asian-cyberspace-politics-censorship-polarisation/ (November 1, 2017).

to engage in academic, social and political activities, individuals and groups also took advantage of the platform to incite ethnic and religious hatred among the people. After the ultranationalist Buddhist monk Ashin Wirathu was forbidden by Myanmar's government to preach in public in 2016 due to inflammatory speeches that helped fuel violence against the Rohingya Muslim minority, the monk took to Facebook. The narrative that Wirathu publicized on Facebook was of the Rohingyas as violent and aggressive outsiders. He characterized them as troublemakers and compared them to mad dogs. Proudly calling himself a "radical Buddhist," Wirathu declared, "You can be full of kindness and love, but you cannot sleep next to a mad dog."[53] Despite such hateful speech, Facebook was not censoring the monk. Phil Robertson, deputy director of Human Rights Watch in Asia says, "Facebook is quick on taking down swastikas, but they don't get to Wirathu's hate speech where he's saying Muslims are dogs."[54] Wirathu also posted photos and videos of decaying bodies which he said are victims of Ronhingya attacks.[55] UN human rights experts in their investigation of the matter concluded that Facebook played a part in the Ronhingya genocide. The reason the social media platform was charged with this responsibility is because in Myanmar, Facebook is virtually synonymous with the Internet. Smart phones bought at the store usually come with the application already installed. Most of the users are familiar with Facebook but are not able to navigate the wider Internet.[56] As Facebook took steps to address the problem of hate speech in Myanmar by removing posts or restricting the monk's page at various times, Witharu found other ways to get around. He simply created a new account. Even if Facebook were able to restrict hate speech from this one particular monk, there were also

[53] "Ashin Wirathu on comparing Rohingya Muslims to dogs in Myanmar," The Berkley Center, https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/quotes/ashin-wirathu-on-comparing-rohingya-muslims-to-dogs-in-myanmar (accessed October 7, 2018).

[54] Megan Specia and Paul Mozur, "A war of words puts Facebook at the center of Myanmar's Rohingya crisis," The New York Times, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/27/world/asia/myanmar-government-facebook-rohingya.html (October 27, 2017).

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

others. Even posts from official government accounts contained false or misleading information about the Rohingya crisis.

For all the dangers that the Internet presents towards social, religious and political harmony, in Southeast Asia, the technology has also empowered the people in unique ways. It must be acknowledged that the hope and expectation that the Internet would be a public sphere where people can come together on more equal footings in order to organize themselves and make more effective decisions concerning the entire society has not been realized in many respects. The hope that social media and social networking would achieve what the previous Internet applications were not able to do has also not been realized as clearly seen in the situations in Myanmar and Indonesia. However, one can also see that in certain contexts, the Internet has served as an outlet for greater political participation among the people.

In Thailand, studies have indicated that political engagement has traditionally been reserved for those in the upper rungs of the socio-economic ladder. Attitudes among political elites that ignored or belittled the opinions of the average people due to their lower status were also prevalent.[57] Although this general situation is still a reality in Thailand, the introduction and propagation of the Internet to the country has altered the dynamics. The Internet was first introduced into the country in 1987 at Prince of Songkla University and began to be commercialized in 1995. As Internet use became more widespread, one could see that it had a role in promoting civic engagement. Compared to their counterparts, Internet users were more likely to take steps to address issues regarding government officials or policies. A common way that this was done was by contacting the local media through online platforms provided by media organizations. Internet users were also more likely to galvanize themselves in order raise issues or sign petitions. The study by Meesuwan shows that the Internet does have

[57] Sanyarat Meesuwan, "The Effect of Internet Use on Political Participation: Could the Internet Increase Political Participation in Thailand?" *IJAPS*12, no. 2 (2016): 59.

the potential to lessen the divide between the have and the have-nots in terms of civic engagement and political participation. In addition, the communication technology can potentially motivate users to be more politically active.

The availability of the Internet, especially social media in Vietnam has also brought dramatic changes to the political voice of the people in this country. According to Thiem Hai Bui,

> The rise of the Internet has led to social media increasingly playing a significant role in Vietnam's political life. It has been instrumental in giving elite politics in Vietnam and unprecedented level of visibility and exposure to the public. As such, social media has dramatically changed the landscape and scope of the public sphere in Vietnam. It has provided a new and powerful avenue for public opinion in Vietnam, along with a broader range of social activism, including social media and informal groups and individuals acting collectively on an issue-specific basis.[58]

In Vietnam, social media has presented itself as the formidable alternative to the mainstream state-controlled media. Social media is essentially the only effective means that the public can have access to important information free from state restriction and censorship. Despite the government's combination of repressive and responsive measures to control content coming from perceived or real opposition forces, cyber dissent has been on the rise in Vietnam. The platforms employed include blogs, microblogs, social networking sites, chatrooms, emails, mailing lists, instant messaging, and online forums. These vehicles have enabled the general public to voice their opinions, demand democratic rights and freedom of participation. There are

[58] Bui, Thiem Hai, "The Influence of Social Media in Vietnam's Elite Politics," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 35, no. 2 (2016): 90.

an estimated 3 million personal blogs in Vietnam, and Facebook has become the most important and influential outlet of information. The majority of the accredited Vietnamese journalists also own Facebook accounts, and many write news based on what appears on Facebook. State media still controls the print, radio and television platforms. State media also is online; but in cyberspace, state media has to compete for the trust and interest of the audience, and it often finds itself on the losing end. Although the government still holds a monopoly over traditional media and employs it to direct public thought, it is not able to do so to the same level with the presence of social media. To be certain, the Vietnamese government has attempted several times to pass cybersecurity laws. In June 2018, Vietnam's National Assembly passed a cybersecurity bill requiring tech companies such as Google and Facebook to store all data of Vietnamese users within the country.[59] The law which went into effect on January 1, 2019 also stipulates that both foreign and local "owners of websites, portals, and social networks do not provide, post, or transmit any information that is propaganda against the Vietnamese government; instigates violent disturbances, disrupts security, or disturbs public order; contains humiliating or slanderous information; or contains fabricated or untrue information (in specified contexts)."[60] Platforms must comply when they are asked to take down content deemed as violating government policy, and companies must cooperate with Vietnamese authorities to provide information on their users when such users are investigated or deemed to have breached laws on cybersecurity.

The Vietnamese government passed the law despite widespread protest online and even street protests by people who saw this as

[59] Nguyen Dieu Tu Uyen and John Boudreau, "Vietnam parliament passes cyber law denounced in street protests," Bloomberg, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-06-12/vietnam-parliament-passes-cyber-law-denounced-in-street-protests (June 12, 2018).

[60] "Vietnam's controversial new cybersecurity law raises questions," Lexology, https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=d9c3ec0d-500c-4f6c-aed1-dfb0a20e1f62 (August 28, 2018).

unreasonable intrusion into civic freedom and free speech. Tech companies were also vocal in protesting the bill, but to no avail. Undoubtedly armed with this new cybersecurity law, the Vietnamese government is expected to continue to intensify its crackdown on bloggers and Facebook critics with lengthy prison sentences. Companies such as Facebook and Youtube will continue to be asked to remove accounts and videos by the Vietnamese government, an action that has seen compliance from the tech giants. Although the Internet and social media have certainly provided an effective outlet for the public to voice its opinions, one will have to wait to see how the newly adopted law on cybersecurity will affect the strength of this voice.

Recommendations

Based on the study carried out on the Internet, the Church and Society in the Southeast Asian context, the author has the following recommendations:

1. *Explore creative ways to employ the Internet and its many different applications for evangelization.* The Internet is the fastest, cheapest and most effective way for the Church to evangelize in countries where communication channels are highly controlled by the government. In countries like Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Catholic news and information is transmitted almost entirely via the Internet. Therefore, this platform needs to not only be utilized in order to effectively communicate accurate information by and about the Church, but also fight fake news and misinformation about the Church.

2. *Employ the Internet to promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue and collaboration rather than division.* Those who oppose religions as well as religious extremists often use the Internet to create conflict among religions and cultures. Interreligious and intercultural dialogue must be carried out both offline and online in order to ensure interreligious and intercultural harmony and collaboration in Southeast Asia. As an extremely diverse region in terms of social, political, economic,

and religious make-up, this region stands to lose a lot if preventative as well as pro-active measures are not taken by the Church and other religions in order to promote healthy communication and mutual collaboration.

3. *Implement digital education to promote responsible and ethical use of the Internet, counter fake news and misinformation that denigrate the Church, promote interreligious and intercultural conflict.* Catholic educators, catechism program leaders, and other Church organizations need to develop instruction manuals that help teachers and parents to train young people about responsible use of the Internet.

4. *Create Internet literacy programs for parents, grandparents and other adult caregivers.* The digital divide is wide in the Southeast Asian context. Many adults are far behind the young people in terms of knowing about the Internet and its usage. A tremendous number of Southeast Asian youth is being cared for by older people who know very little about the Internet as well as the dangers it brings (cyberbullying, pornography, human trafficking, gambling, etc). Adult caregivers cannot provide healthy and wholesome upbringing for the young if they do not have adequate knowledge about the Internet.

5. *Advocate free and responsible use of the Internet.* Although the Internet presents many risks to social and religious harmony, it is a source of tremendous knowledge that the poor, oppressed and marginalized ought to have access. Church and national government must continually support efforts that promote right to information and religious freedom both online and offline.

Conclusion

This survey of the digital landscape of the Southeast Asia and the effect of digital technology on the Church and society in the region presents conflicting images. At the same time that the Internet has been a source of economic development in the region, there is also fear of job displacement due to automation of work that once relied on manual

labor. While Southeast Asians, especially the youth are very optimistic about the improvements in quality of life that digital technology brings to them, the downside of Internet addiction and other social ills have also been witnessed. At the same time that Internet technology has helped connected individuals, especially in the case of transnational parents, and small Catholic populations, to each other and the wider Church, it has also been a source of interreligious conflict and social division. At the same time that the Internet has enabled greater religious and social voice in countries where freedom of religion and speech are severely oppressed, the Internet has also served as a vehicle for fake news and misinformation that set off digital wildfires and create mistrust and disharmony among religions and peoples.

What is not disputed is that Southeast Asians have embraced Internet technology wholeheartedly despite the dangers that it brings. The Church and social leaders in Southeast Asia need to be very pro-active in order to take hold of the opportunities as well as address the dangers. The fact that Internet penetration in Southeast Asia at present is still significantly lower than in North America and Europe means that timely measures will help prevent negative impact of the technology on the Church and society when it does arrive to the rest of the people in the region. If religious and civil leaders are lackadaisical in their actions, the region will suffer increasing social and political strife, interreligious and interethnic conflict, and breakdown in the moral and religious fabric of society.

Intercultural Communication in a Digital World: Some Considerations

Franz-Josef Eilers, svd

From his experience in "selection and training of Americans to work in foreign countries for both Government and business," Edward T. Hall became aware of the need and importance of non-verbal language and Culture. Together with George L. Trager, he developed his seminal book *The Silent Language* from the experience and conviction that "so little is known about cross-cultural communication" which includes also different forms of "nonverbal language which exist in every country of the world and among the various groups within each country" (Intro 1959 p. 14f.). It is reflected in "our handling of time, our spacial relationships, our attitude toward work, play and learning. In addition to what we say, with our verbal language we are constantly communicating our real feelings in our silent language – the language of behavior…"

In his book Hall developed with Traeger a "theory of culture based on a communication model" (p.18) which became the foundation and origin for the new broad and extensive field of Intercultural Communication.

For Hall, "Culture is not an exotic notion studied by a selected

Franz-Josef Eilers, svd, PhD is the Director of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication. He teaches Pastoral Communication at the . Don Bosco Center of Studies, Philippines.

group of anthropologists in the South Sea. It is a mold in which we all cast, it controls our daily lives in many unsuspected ways … Culture hides much more than it reveals and strangely enough what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants …" (p. 52f.).

Within intercultural communication, Hall studied beside others especially proximity and also time which – he says – has "everything to do with not only how culture develops but also how people of that culture experience the world. He therefore uses and presents in his later "Dance of Life" the "use of time as a means of gaining insight into culture" (p.5).

Here cultures are considered as somehow structural systems within a geographical reality: Cultures are related to certain groups of people and therefore also geographically determined like different countries or even continents like America, Europe or Asia. Thus, cultures do reflect also geographical differences through their way of life with boundaries and limitations. This might be, however, challenged by new technical developments; Francis Cairncross has described already towards the end of the last century with her book *Death of Distance* (1997/1998) "How the Communications Revolution will change our lives" as the book's subtitle says. She shows how developments are not any more determined by time zones, location or by size and connections or by filters for the increased amount of information but also give greater access to markets independent from their location. They will be, she predicts, more person-consumer oriented independent from any local fixation but also less influential on political bodies or systems, as she writes in her introduction (pp. XI-XVI). Already those days Cairncross indicated essential elements of our modern digital communication, which for intercultural communication mean that original geographical and even mental limits are disappearing and substituted through a communication without any geographical (and even mental?) limitations. This was already developed and extended in Church documents in 1990 when Pope John Paul II speaks in a document on Mission (*Redemptoris Missio*) of "new ways of communicating, with

new languages, new techniques and a new psychology," which he describes in the "World Communication Message" of that same year as "part of a still unfolding *culture* whose full implications are as yet imperfectly understood and whose potentialities remain for the moment only partly exploited" (No 4). Later documents (2002) talk about the Internet as a "New Forum" comparing the new development with the old *Forum Romanum*, "where much of the life of the city took place and where the best and the worst of human nature was on display" (cf. Eilers 2014, pp. 440, 518; 470ff.). Cultures, actually throughout his life, were a special concern of this Pope who also created within the Vatican administration a special "Pontifical Council for Culture".

+

Far beyond any Church considerations, such developments are also reflected in the development of Web 1.0, Web 2.0 and the following where the Internet becomes interactive and interrelated, which also affects the field and concerns of intercultural communication, where limits and boundaries between cultures are not completely removed but might be "re-defined". Cultures exist very much on their own also in this new situation; they are not removed but still have their "boundaries" and specifics even beyond new technical communication possibilities. Cultures are still "unique" also in a new environment where we start to distinguish between "traditional" networks of media and a growing network of digital communication, where in a growing way the traditional means seem to play either no or a very limited role. Following these developments one might distinguish between two different "Communication Platforms," the "traditional media" and the "new digital ones." In a growing way people now communicate digitally and not any more in the traditional way which affects not only the communication between people but also whole societies.

In the past, our communication was based and related to the media like Press, Radio/TV and Film which now shifts to digital means related to the Internet in a "Culture of Connectivity" (van Dijk

2013). Here there is a move from "Networked Communication to Platformed Sociality," which reflects new "techno-cultural" as well as "socioeconomic" structures that are interdependent and interoperable (p. 41). Intercultural communication moved in the past between people of different cultures in a geographically and mentally limited way which presently is no longer the case. With the "Death of Distance," there are also no more limits for intercultural communication; anybody from one culture anywhere in the world can now "communicate" with everybody else independent of geographical limitations but also with new ways of digital communication far beyond traditional media in the way of so called "social media" or "connective media" – as van Dijk prefers to call them (p.13). This also affects any intercultural initiative, which probably needs today, however, a greater openness and sensitivity for other cultures independent from traditional boundaries. Cultures are now open worldwide but the consequences of this for individuals and societies are probably not yet sufficiently studied and in the awareness of people.

Actually, Fr. Anh Vu Ta from the "Pastoral Communication" Program of the University of Santo Tomas in Manila, commenting on this paper, reminds us in the present situation that "we have to be aware that Internet, social media, apps actually create *new social networks* in the digital world which are totally different from networks we have been familiar with up to now like family, groups, friends, neighborhood, community, etc. In the virtual world, people learn new values and customs that are different from the ones we have received in the past. No institution – either governmental or religious – can fully control or 'filter out' the information or values shared in these digital networks, and this happens quickly and has broad dimensions and consequences."

+

Louis Luzbetak defines culture as a plan consisting of norms, standard and associated notions and beliefs for coping with the various demands of life shared by a social group, learned by the individual from society organized into a dynamic system of control and thus being a

"socially shared design for living" (cf. Eilers, p. 23). This does, however, change in principle through new ways of communicating and dealing with each other – though there might be shifts in emphasis of certain elements but not in principle. Culture exists and grounds also in digital communication, although the emphasis in dealing with each other as well as the "speed" and "selection" of communication elements might shift according to cultural facts and norms of content which might be adjusted or somehow influenced by the ways and means of communication. However, this does not change the facts and elements of culture for any group of people. Communication remains an essential and basic element of every culture; no culture can exist without a proper communication within but also to the outside!

All this does, however, not mean that there will be also a "Death of Culture" like the "Death of Distance." Culture as a way of living of people and societies will continue, although it might be affected by the way we present ourselves and deal with others according to our cultural ways and norms for living. In this way intercultural communication as "communicating between cultures" will continue, though sometimes with changed priorities and experiences.

Intercultural communication will continue to relate us with each other including changed or different priorities which actually can be observed already in comparing different age groups within and between different parts of the population of cultures and their way of living. This also means that in our digital world, culture and intercultural communication continue to be essential elements even though their way of communicating might also change or be influenced by the "Death of Distance." Nonetheless, this is not only to be seen in the geographical distance but also in a "distance" between minds and even "living" experiences. Thus, specialists on "Media Writing" say that "about 90% of adults get news via mobile or desktop formats either from traditional news outlets or the new, more opinionated. Information services … increasingly, too, more Americans are turning to multiple social media sites for news (Whitacker, p. 135).

+

All this calls also for serious and in depth study of the cultural communicative means and dimensions leading also to a deeper mutual understanding and appreciation of Religion and religious practices as well as life approaches. Religions are in their structures and performances culturally bound. This calls for a deeper understanding of their ways and means in adapting cultures to communicate within themselves and with each other and to also appreciating mutual differences and approaches. Very often religions are, in fact, at the heart of respective cultures as we see in Asia and therefore do need a more serious study and integration also in the perspective of intercultural Communication!

References

Cairncross, Frances. *The Death of Distance: How the Communications Revolution Will Change Our Lives*. London: Harvard Business School Press, 1997/1998.

Eilers, Franz-Josef. *Communicating Between Cultures: An Introduction to Intercultural Communication*. Fourth Edition. Manila: Logos (Divine Word) Publications, 2012.

Eilers, Franz-Josef. *Church and Social Communication: Basic Documents 1936-2914*. Third Edition. Manila: Logos (Divine Word) Publications, 2014.

Van Dijk, Jose. *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Hall, Edward T. *The Silent Language.* Garden City/New York: Anchor Books, 1959.

Hall, Edward T. *The Dance of Life. The Other Dimension of Time.* Garden City/New York: Anchor Books, 1983/1984.

Luzbetak, Louis J. *The Church and Cultures: An Applied Anthropology for the Religious Worker*. Techny: Divine Word Publications, 1963.

Luzbetak, Louis J. *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988.

Whitaker, W. Richard, Ronald D. Smith, Janet E Ramsey. *Media Writing Print, Broadcast and Public Relations.* 5th Edition. New York/London: Routledge, 2019.

.

Religious Communities in the Digital Era: Dynamics of "Believing" and "Belonging"

Gnana Patrick

"Religious community" is a concept that is not clear and simple any more. What is being understood by it is increasingly becoming variegated, unbounded, and ambiguous. Gone are the days when one understood a religious community as a group of people, bonded by a set of beliefs and practices (expressed in cult, creed, and code), with a visible presence in a physical geographical space! The loss of this definiteness has to do with several factors. First, ours is a world of high quantum of migration and, as a consequence, religious communities get radically de-territorialized. Second, people mingle and their identities get mutated across religions, cultures, and regions, and this phenomenon shakes up traditional forms of religious communities. Third, much more than the other two factors, the new media of communication – the digital media, sustained by computer mediated communication, creates virtual spaces which religious communities have come to inhabit today. Virtual habitation has become a new mode of existence of religious communities. How this phenomenon affects the nature of religious communities is the question this paper tries to explore.

Gnana Patrick, PhD is professor and head of the Department of Christian Studies, School of Philosophy and Religious Thought of the University of Madras, Chennai, India.

Being Religious and Being a Community

"Being religious" has for a long time been associated with "bonding" in communities of faith or belief. This has been differentiated from "being spiritual," which would mean "nurturing" the spirit of transcendence with values of healthy and moral living. While being spiritual is open-ended and goes beyond strict communitarian living, "being religious" would imply that a believer gives life in a "religious" way to a set of relationships—between the believer and the perceived divinity (personal or mystery), between different believers in a community, between communities of believers, etc. Being religious is, according to Emile Durkheim, being eminently social, i.e. being in a community. Durkheim understood religion to be a "unified system of beliefs and practices ... which *unite into one single moral community ... all those who adhere to them*."[1] Bringing religion and society/community intimately together, Durkheim went on to claim, in a reductionist manner, that "religion was society worshipping itself." It was but a manner of imagining an indispensable relationship between religion and community in the early sociology of religion.

Sociologists of later times went beyond Durkheim. They began to study how, in the advancing secular modern contexts, religion was functioning as a social phenomenon. They observed an increasing dissociation between religion and community life. As individualism attendant upon modernity increased, ties of communities dissipated, and religious communities were no exception to the impact of modernity. Sociologists of religion began to notice the thinning down of belongingness to religious communities. Grace Davie, a British sociologist of religion, in a much quoted essay, argued that in the context of Britain there was a new trend of "believing without belonging" to any denominational church. Based on an empirical study in selected rural areas of Britain, Davie sought to demonstrate that in the modern condition of life, although individuals continued to believe in God, they

[1] Kenneth Thompson, ed. *Readings from Emile Durkheim* (London: Routledge, 1985), 88.

were reluctant to participate in denominational church activities. Thus there was a trend of "believing without belonging," which weakened the bonding of a religious community in a modernist context.

However, Michael Winter and Christopher Short, through another empirical study in Britain, refuted Davie's argument, by showing that the modern individuals, especially the youth, believed as well as had a sense of belonging to a religious community. They lived with a conviction that they belonged to a denominational church, though their belonging was not so manifest. With their study, they made a further point that both believing and belonging could be found in modern condition of life, albeit with a qualitative difference.

Virtual Religious Communities

In such a modern condition of life, we encounter today an advanced feature of modernity—the technology of digital media. Needless to say, the digital media is premised upon a new mode of communication, the computer mediated communication (CMC), improvising upon the print, but written in electronic texts, intended to create a simulated cyber field, and presented through online platforms. The simulated cyberspace, the virtual space in other words, provides not merely yet another ambience but also the very dynamics for a new sense of a community. It creates a virtual community that works "as if" it is a physical community. It is an alternate model of community that has already taken hold of the behaviour of the netizens of the world.

It has come also to create virtual religious communities all over the globe. Virtual religious communities are of differing types. There are those which are totally virtual wherein the members never meet face-to-face in real physical life, but only in the virtual space as virtual members. However, most of the virtual religious communities are "networked communities," as in the words of Heidi Campbell. These communities present themselves in the virtual spaces, enroll membership online, involve them in religious activities through

online forums, but also have opportunities to make the members meet offline in real-life situations. It would be interesting to explore the characteristic features of these types of virtual religious communities to see whether they are going along with the impulse of modernity in the sense of yielding to the logic of individualism and therefore of more belief and less bonding, or continuing with the traditional features of religious communities by retaining or even accentuating the elements of bonding.

I take two cases for study—two virtual sites which are sponsored by two important types of churches: one, an online church-site hosted by the Syro-Malabar oriental church whose offline base is in Kerala, and the other by an independent Pentecostal church whose offline base is in a village near Pondicherry, South India.

The Syro-Malabar Church (SMC)

http://www.syromalabarchurch.in/ is an active bilingual (English and Malayalam) website that hosts the "online Syro-Malabar Church" as well as the "Syro-Malabar Church online." It is subtitled as "Syro-Malabar Church Internet Mission." The Homepage itself is an interesting field to study, which presents a "virtual" representation of the SMC. It begins with a pull-down menu with eight main headings (Home, SMC Church, SMC Curia, News, Directory, Resources, Liturgy, Interactive, Saints, Retreats / Courses), branching off into a larger number of sites and links. Below the pull-down menu, there are ten headingings (Matrimonial, Download, Live Events, Podcasts, Eparchies, Bishops, Parishes, Priests, Congregations, Migrant Form) which give detailed information about various features of the Church, and take visitors to multiple services provided by the SMC. Starting with a space for news and events, which hosts visuals (videos, photos) of recent events, the page comes down to presenting the latest news (local, archiepiscopal and Vatican). It then goes further down to present the Editor's pick, a selection of news by the Editor, and then goes sideways to presenting a column on "Syro-Malabar Matrimony." It then comes down to a

downloadable "Syro-Malabar Church Anthem" in Malayalam, and goes to the centre of the page to present a pictorial representation of "Syro-Malabar Archiepiscopal Curia," and then comes down to "Migrant News." Next, there are more resources, including a virtual tour of the biblical land, and then to liturgical sites for qurbana, prayer materials, then to a homily section and to a section on the saint St. Alphonsa. The entire page, filled with thick data, presents the virtual representation of the SMC.

What is easily visible in the representation is a positive intent on virtually organising a Syrian Christian community. This virtual intent begins with a genealogy, tracing back to St. Thomas the Apostle, and, after showing a connection to the Pope, comes down to the centre of the SMC curia, which presents the hierarchy in detail in a circular format, and then gives immense information on the dioceses and parishes—national and international. A virtual experience of the SMC begins with listening to the SMC Anthem, which creates certain euphoria of being a Syro-Malabar Christian, and informs about the SMC in terms of history, hierarchy, liturgy, and community. The concern for community enters into providing a substantive "pastoral care" to migrant Syro-Malabarians, including facilitation of Syro-Malabar Christian marriage alliances through the matrimony site.

SYRO-MALABAR MATRIMONY (www.syromalabarmatrimony.org) is a Catholic matrimonial service provided by the Syro-Malabar Church Internet Mission (SMCIM). It is part of the pastoral initiatives taken by the Syro-Malabar Church to reach out to its faithful world-wide with various pastoral and spiritual services using the new medium of internet. The Internet Mission benefits mostly the members of the Syro-Malabar Community, who have moved to other parts of India and the world in search of a living. The matrimonial service directly benefits young men and women who are seeking suitable life-partner from their own faith and community to start a Christian family. Parents, who are eagerly searching for good brides and grooms for their sons and daughters can also make use of this service.…[2]

Yesu Ennesar Church (YEN) (https://www.yesuennesar.org/)

This is a website hosted by an independent Pentecostal Church, whose physical base is in Pondicherry, India. A self-descriptive caption in the website reads: "Church 'Yesu En Nesar' is a large and friendly family where people with various backgrounds, religious experiences, and different characters are united by the love of Christ, shared future, and desire to live a true Christian life." The Homepage of the website has a set of headings (Home, I'm New, About us, Connect, Giving, Blog, Contact) as pull-down menu. This menu takes visitors to further links and resources, which provide a glimpse into the "Online Yesu En Nesar Church," as well as "Yesu En Nesar Church online." The Homepage which is a multi-layered screen, fabricated with an advanced software, begins with a grand caption: "An Inclusive Community for all who Believe in the Love and Spirit of Jesus." It goes on to offer help for prayer, invites the visitor to join in to spread the love of Jesus, presents a Church Forum with an invitation to join, and ends with an e-version of the Bible for free download. The website again describes itself as follows: "Our church is a casual and multi-cultural environment, and we welcome you the way you are blue, jeans or slacks; tattoos or piercing;

[2] http://www.beta.syromalabarmatrimony.org/aboutus

every shape, colour and size," and gives an open-ended understanding of the church in the following words: "Many people understand the church as a building. This is not the biblical understanding of the church. The word 'church' comes from the Greek word 'ekklesia' which is defined as an 'assembly' or 'called-out ones.' The root meaning of the word is not that of building but of people." The website gives links under "Know God," "Meet Jesus," "Read Bible," "Get Baptized," "Start Serving," "Care and Prayer," and gives a link to connect in small groups. Yet another self-description of the Yesu En Nesar goes as follows:

> Yesu En Nesar Church can be categorized as a "Pentecostal" church influenced by Reformation. Its services are attended by people from all denominations who believe that there is only one Living God and one Word of God the Bible. As for the teaching, the church is leaning on the inerrant and absolute authority of the word of God, the Bible, and fully accepts all universally recognized truths and values of the Christian faith. Dogmatically the foundation of our faith is invariably traditional and shared with brothers in traditional denominations. The church does not stress its denominational affiliation and, leaving aside the insignificant differences, puts its emphasis on the shared, precious, and unchangeable foundations which unite all Christians and churches.

The section on membership says:

> Membership means you have come into agreement with the vision, mission and the values of the church and want to see the church grow as we continue to reach people for Christ. The membership at Yesu En Nesar church gives you the opportunity to serve in leadership in a greater way and gives you a vote in major decision we make about the church. Therefore, it is important that the members of the church meet certain minimum requirements, so that together we can best direct the course of the church in line with God's heart and the mission He has give you...

Discussion

These short descriptions of the content of the homepages of the two websites typify the virtual presence of Christianity, from the Indian context. The Syro-Malabar Church is a Catholic oriental church, more tradition-bound, whose provenance is from Kerala, and the Yesu En Nesar Church is a Pentecostal church, hailing from a village in Pondichery, near Tamilnadu. It is interesting to note that both the churches have approached the medium of the Internet congenially, treating the medium to be an effective manner of communicating the Christian faith to its members and to others. Both churches are present in cyberspace as "online church," and "church online," and they provide enormous material about themselves for the public to gaze, and grant several opportunities to practice Christianity along with them. They allow themselves to be visited and commented upon, and render themselves to be interpretatively engaging. Perhaps one of the striking features of virtual Christianity is this hermeneutical openness to the public.

However, there are some important differences between the two churches in their virtual presence. The website on SMC centres round the ecclesial hierarchy, tradition and history of the Church. Intent for "organizing" the church nationally and internationally is clearly visible in the various links of the site. A Syro-Malabarian is made to feel proud of being one and motivated to get networked with the SMC wherever she/he is. Contact details of local organisers are given in detail, migrant Syro-Malabarians are cared for, and marriage alliances among the Syro-Malabarians are greatly fostered. On the other hand, the YEN centres round a ministry, validated by faith in one God who is revealed in the Bible. Its membership is open to whoever that accepts Jesus as the redeemer, the Bible as the word of God, and church as an opportunity to be connected in service. Its website, interestingly,

does not give any space for matrimony or migrant service. Its ecclesial authority is a pastor, rather than hierarchical structure.

While the SMC website is bilingual with Malayalam and English, the Yesu En Nesar is totally in English. The linguistic cast of the websites is an interesting dimension to explore. The Pentecostal church, which is based in a rural village near Pondicherry, with relatively less literacy, education, and mobility, has its website cast entirely in English, and the SMC whose members hail from a state that has high literacy, education, and greater mobility, has its website in Malayalam and English! It would imply that the virtual "presenting" of different churches has different types of audiences in mind. While SMC aims at a person who can read both Malayalam and English, the YEN targets an English reader, though its potential membership is drawn from the surrounding villages because one of the conditions of the membership is to physically partake in church activities at least once a week. While that being the case, why is YEN's virtual presence cast in English, and SMC's bilingual? One of the answers could be that the YEN aims at changing a potential member into someone who can read English, while SMC aims at changing a person into a reader of both Malayalam and English.

Virtual Christian Communities: How are they Imagined?

The few elements of the virtual churches that we have looked at above take us to a discussion on the kind of communities virtual Christian entities are imagining and constructing today. As regards Internet communication, David J. Elkins (1997) argues that messages passed on through telecommunication-based technologies are targeted to particular audiences, who are either pre-fixed or sought to be included. Unlike the mass media of the earlier phase of communication technology, which addressed the "masses" universally, Internet sites address particular audiences, especially virtual ethnic communities. Thus, we have particular identities targeting similar identities, particular religionists targeting similar religionists, like-minded people targeting

like-minded people, and so on. The argument of Heidi Campbell (2012) that religion online "mirrors" the contemporary society rather than producing a new genre of religiosity holds good here. Campbell opines that religion online, rather than being a framework of its own, carries the framework of religion offline, and religion online is in active interaction with offline practice of religion. She argues (2011) that such is the case especially in our "networked" society, wherein "complex interplay and negotiations" occur "between the individual and the community, new and old sources of authority, and public and private identities…" (p. 3).

In my study here, SMC seems to correspond to this insight; the offline SMC seems to extend itself virtually. Asia is known for its strong community ties, mediated through kinship, caste, etc. Virtual Christianity seems to cohere with these communitarian structures, through rituals, symbols and belief-systems. The corollary of this type of virtual Christianity is the migratory pattern that Asians are known for. Contrary to the general perception that the migrants choose places according to availability of jobs or other opportunities, according to Raymond Brady Williams, Asians migrate along "well established transnational networks" ("South Asian Christians in the West", p. 253), and religion, including Christianity, journeys along these established routes, negotiating relationships and constructing identities in diasporas. In this context, as Williams notes again, "[M]arriage advertisements on Websites discriminate through a hypertext organisation so that a South Asian Christian family interested in marriage negotiations can explore potential candidates by denominations, ethnicity, language facility, caste, residence and a multitude of other factors" (p. 253).

However, the other website Yesu En Nesar, with its highly advanced webcast, seems to organise the church differently. Hierarchy, tradition, matrimony, migrant service, etc. are not to be found in its site. "An open invitation to anyone" regardless of traditional or alien identities, but only to commit oneself in faith (God, Jesus, scripture) and service is visible in the sites and links of this website. There seems to be

a borderlessness in this virtual Christian site; it offers Christianity as a possible choice, without pointing out to any traditional ties, and invites the visitor to consider the possibility of conversion and commitment. This invitation looks to be germane to the sojourning contemporary world. However, how would it combine its open invitation with its conditionality of joining the particular church in Pondicherry is a matter open to discussion. Similarly, how the language of English appeals to an ordinary person from the locality is a question that remains to be answered; and, interpreting its exclusively purist faith in Jesus is a continuing challenge for our world today.

It would be claiming too much to generalise anything based on the content analysis of these two websites on virtual Christianity. However, some indicators could be identified: i) Indian Christianity has taken to its virtual presence in an open-minded manner; ii) it has at least two faces: one that maintains a community, with traditional ties, and the other, that which attempts to construct a new community, validated by the Bible as the word of God. These two faces have something to say on the nature of contemporary virtual religious communities in particular, and religious communities in general. The insight of Grace Davie about the modern trend of "believing without belonging" does not seem to obtain here, because both the virtual churches seem to stress the importance of participating in community activities, though there is a qualitative difference between the two. While the SMC tries to extend its offline community ties into online churches, YEN attempts to construct an open-ended community with weekly participation in offline activities as the only requirement. This not-so-subtle difference seems to bespeak of the kinds of religious communities emerging in India today: traditional religious communities are trying to reassert their presence even while new alignments of communities with open-ended membership are also beginning to exist with new attributes. Their virtual presence too carries this difference.

Bibliography

Burnett, Gary. "The Scattered Members of an Invisible Republic: Virtual Communities and Paul Ricoeur"s Hermeneutics." *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, Vol. 72, No. 2 (Apr., 2002), pp. 155-178.

Campbell, Heidi A. "Assessing Changes in the Study of Religious Communities in the Digital Religion Studies", https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23753234.2016.1181301

----------. "This is My Church: Seeing the Internet and Club Culture as Spiritual Spaces." In In *Religion Online – Finding Faith on the Internet*, ed. Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan, 107 - Routledge, 2004.

Dawson, Lorne L. "Religion and the Quest for Virtual Community." In *Religion Online – Finding Faith on the Internet*, ed. Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan, 75- Routledge, 2004.

Davie, Grace. "Believing without Belonging – A Liverpool Case Study." Archives de sciences sociales des religions, 38e Année, No. 81 (Jan. - Mar., 1993), pp. 79-89

---------- "Believing without Belonging – Is this the Future of Religion in Britain?"*Social Compass* 1990, 37 (4), pp. 455 – 469.

Helland, Christopher. "Online Religion as Lived Religion – Methodological Issues in the Study of Religious Participation in the Internet", *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 1.1 (2005)

Thomson, Kenneth, ed. *Readings from Emile Durkheim.* New York : Routledge, 2004.

Williams, Raymond Brady. "South Asian Christians in the West." In *South Asian Christian Diaspora:Invisible Diaspora in Europe and North America*, ed. By Selva J. Raj and Knut A. Jacobsen. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008, pp. 249-264.

Winter, Michael and Christopher Short, "Believing and Belonging: Religion in Rural England." *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Dec., 1993), pp. 635-651.Aichele, George. *Simulating Jesus – Reality Effects in the Gospels*. London: Routledge, 2011.

Engaging Pope Francis' *Laudato Si* in the Discourse on Environmental Communication

Jeramie N. Molino

Abstract

Consumerism and irresponsible development tremendously contribute to environmental degradation and global warming. Cognizant to such reality, Pope Francis published his encyclical Laudato Si' with the subtitle "On Care for our Common Home". In it, the pope critiques consumerism and irresponsible development, laments environmental degradation and global warming, and calls all people of the world to take "swift and unified global action." The importance of the encyclical marks what portends to be the Roman Catholic Church's full pastoral engagement on issues related to climate change, biodiversity, environmental protection, water, and natural resource rights, and ethical technology. Laudato Si' can be considered as a document of the Roman Catholic Church on environmental communication. The International Environmental Communication Association (IECA) claimed that Environmental Communication is an interdisciplinary field of study that examines the role, techniques, and influence of communication in environmental affairs. Work in this area is concerned with several interconnected dimensions of communication. Employing discourse analysis, the objective of this paper is to engage Pope Francis' second encyclical Laudato

Jeramie Nunag Molino, PhD, is an associate professor at Saint Louis University, Baguio City, Philippines. She holds a Bachelor Degree in Education, MA in Religious Studies, and PhD in Educational Management. Concurrently ***s***he is finishing her PhD in Applied Theology at De La Salle University, Manila. Her research interests are on Ecofeminism, Eco theology, Environmental Communication, Women Studies, Youth Studies, and Empirical Studies.

Si'in the discourse of environmental communication. The primary questions that this paper seeks to answer are the following: What are the salient points in Laudato Si' that compel us to rethink the nature of environmental communication? How can we re-define environmental communication based on the theological and moral précis of Laudato Si'? What model of environmental communication can we infer from Laudato Si'that is responsive to the need for an integral and sustainable ecological development? This paper is one of the many to deal with Laudato Si'; however, it is the first to engage Laudato Si'in the discourse of environmental communication. This paper contributes to the discourse in environmental communication by promoting a theological and moral discourse. It communicates the appeal from Pope Francis addressed to "every person living on this planet" for an inclusive dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet.

Keywords: *Pope Francis, Laudato Si', environmental communication, ecotheology.*

Introduction

On June 18, 2015, Pope Francis released the encyclical letter entitled *Laudato Si',* the first encyclical written entirely by him.[1] With the purpose of addressing directly the modern environmental crisis, the encyclical has the subtitle "On Care for Our Common Home". The first two words of the document "*Laudato Si'*" means "may you be praised." In it, the pope critiques consumerism and irresponsible development, lament environmental degradation and global warming, and calls all people of the world to take "swift and unified global action." This is the first time in the Church's history the subject of the protection of the environment, "the care of our common home" is addressed in an encyclical. This rich and complex document analyses the causes of today's ecological challenges, acknowledging the scientific consensus

[1] Francis, *Laudato Si',* accessed April 20, 2020, Vatican.va, 1. See also, Howard Damian, "Laudato Si': A Seismic Event in Dialogue between the Catholic Church and Ecology," Thinking Faith, June 18, 2015, https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/laudato-si%E2%80%99-seismic-event-dialogue-between-catholic-church-and-ecology.

but adding an original analysis of the social, cultural, ethical, and spiritual dimensions that are associated with the degradation of the environment.

The document received much attention in the media at the time of its release and continues to be an important reference in the discourse on the environment. Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* renewed the world's attention to the ecological crisis and gave rise to lively discussions about ecological issues and humanity's responsibilities to our common home.[2] However, long before the conceptualization of the encyclical *Laudato Si'* the environmental movement was already ignited by a spark from a writer's pen, or more accurately, Rachel Carson's typewriter. The publication of Carson's *Silent Springs* in 1962[3] marked the beginning of the environmental crusade in the United States which has now spread throughout the world. Indeed, Carson was a biologist, but as *Time Magazine* commented, she was first and foremost a writer.[4] Hence, we can say that environmentalism was first and foremost ignited by a discipline belonging to communication advocacy

Until the present, myriad local and international campaigns by religious and secular groups on behalf of the environment have been initiated. However, despite these numerous efforts, problems persist with environmental issues becoming increasingly extreme and

[2] Anatoly Angelo R. Aseneta, "*Laudato Si'* on Non-Human Animals," *Journal of Moral Theology* 6, no.2, (June 2017): 230-245, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&site=eds-live&scope=site&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAiB8W170814001511&authtype=sso&custid=s9343122.

[3] Gary Kroll, "The 'Silent Springs' of Rachel Carson: Mass media and the origins of modern environmentalism," *Public Understanding of Science* 10, no. 4, (October 2001): 403-420, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3109/a036878.

[4] For instance, *Time Magazine* included Carson on a list of the top hundred "scientists and thinkers" of the century noted by Peter Matthiessen, "Environmentalist: Rachel Carson," *Time Magazine*, March 29, 1999, 187. Accessed 29 April 2020 from http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,990622,00.html.

affecting humanity up close and personal.[5] The scientific consensus has been that the present environmental crisis, which not only impacts nature but also humanity, especially the poor, is primarily human-caused. There is also a broad consensus that this crisis must be solved in an interdisciplinary and dialogic manner. Thus, part of the multi-dimensional effort to address the crisis must involve effective environmental communication research, media attention, increased public awareness, and campaigns by environmental pressure groups, and also international agreements.[6] Towards this consideration, this paper aims to examine what environmental communication can offer in terms of developing new models that could contribute to devising a more sustainable and comprehensive solution. Employing discourse analysis, the objective of this paper is to engage Pope Francis encyclical *Laudato Si'* in the discourse on environmental communication. The primary questions that this paper seeks to answer include: What are the salient points in *Laudato Si'* that compel us to rethink the nature of environmental communication? How can we re-define environmental communication based on the theological and moral précis of *Laudato Si"*? What model of environmental communication can we infer from *Laudato Si'* that is responsive to the need for an integral and sustainable ecological development?

Environmental Communication in Perspective

Environmental communication in the simplest terms is communication about environmental affairs. According to the International Environmental Communication Association (IECA), "This includes all of the diverse forms of interpersonal, group, public, organizational, and mediated communication that make up the social debate about environmental issues and problems, and our relationship to the rest of nature. It is both a lay activity and a field of professional

[5] Frances Harris, ed., *Global Environmental Issues*, 2nd ed. (New York, United States: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 3.

[6] Harris, *Global Environment Issues,* 3.

practice."[7] The IECA further explains:

> Anyone who is participating in these discussions is engaging in the activity of environmental communication. That includes everyone from the most passionate environmental advocates, to the fiercest opponents of ecological protections. In this sense, it is both a lay activity that anyone can undertake and a field of practice that professional communicators have created.[8]

For IECA, environmental communication is an interdisciplinary task that draws its theories and methods from a variety of fields including communication, environmental studies, psychology, sociology, and political science.[9] Environmental communication has become a discipline in itself with some universities engaging in research and publishing their findings in scholarly journals.[10] The task is not limited to the universities; environmental communication is being carried out by numerous sectors of society including ordinary citizens, politicians, civil servants, scientists, corporations, religious institutions, labor unions, indigenous peoples, environmental organizations, journalists, and media workers.

In the modern age, this dialogue not only takes place in the physical space but also on the Internet. The topics discussed by these groups cover the gamut of scientific, social, economic, political, philosophical, and moral dimensions of the crisis. According to Robert Cox, "Environmental communication is a pragmatic and constitutive vehicle for understanding the environment as well as

[7] Mark Meisner, "Environmental Communication: What It Is and Why It Matters," The International Environmental Communication Association, November 2015, accessed January 30, 2020. https://theieca.org/resources/environmental-communication-what-it-and-why-it-matters.

[8] Meisner "Environmental Communication."

[9] *Ibid*

[10] *Ibid*

our relationships to the natural world." Entrenched in the pragmatic role is a constitutive one that raises our consciousness of the possible effects of environmental problems upon our health and well-being.[11] Hence, recognizing the interdisciplinary nature of environmental communication as proposed by IECA, this paper will engage the topic of environmental communication from a theological approach. The four areas of theological discourse (biblical, systematic, moral, and spiritual) will be presented in the light of Christian discipleship.

Eco-theology as environmental communication

Environmental communication plays an important role in communicating interdisciplinary responses to the environmental crisis. It involves myriad groups and individuals across religious, political, and social contexts. The theological contribution from religious thinkers has become an important part of the discourse. Although the contribution of religion to the environmental cause came later, the Christian voice in the discourse since has not been lacking. Thomas Berry is a prominent representative of the Christian perspective. In the book *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future,* Berry argues that planet earth is now in its state of downturn where existence is interrupted, toxic, or extinguished.[12] Another Christian writer, Elizabeth Johnson asserts that environmental concern is very much associated with care for other people. Johnson writes, "Jesus' great command to love your neighbor as yourself extends to include all members of the life community."[13] Pope Francis emphasizes in *Laudato Si'* that "when our hearts are open to universal communion, this sense of fraternity excludes nothing and no one."[14] Pope Francis said that the creation accounts in Genesis teach us that

[11] Robert J. Cox, *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere* (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2013), 19.

[12] Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Towers, 1999), 21.

[13] Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 198.

[14] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 92.

"human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself."[15] Humanity is cognizant of these ecological problems but unfortunately, there are still many who remain unconcerned about care for creation. The present ecological crisis demands humanity to understand its moral responsibility and devise the necessary strategies to safeguard the environment. To treat the earth justly and to live in peace with the rest of creation calls us to become more benevolent in its household.[16] As stated by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines' (CBCP) urgent call for ecological communion, we are called to hope in the face of climate emergency, care for the poor, and embrace 'integral ecology' for the sake of our common home.[17]

In the Protestant Christian tradition, the thought of Sallie McFague has been an influential voice in both Christian and Catholic circles. McFague proposed the ecological model of "The Body of God" which "supports both radical individuality and difference while at the same time insisting on radical interdependence of all parts."[18] With an outlook that can be described as 'panentheism', McFague advocates seeing everything in God and God in everything.[19] Her model of the world as God's body and radical internationalism emphasizes that "God is with us as the source and power of all our efforts to live differently."[20] She introduces "A New Climate" in the mirror of kenosis

[15] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 66.

[16] Richard N. Fragomeni and John T. Pawlikowski, eds., *The Ecological Challenge: Ethical, Liturgical, & Spiritual Responses* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1994), 63.

[17] Romulo G. Valles*, An Urgent Call for Ecological Conversion: Hope in The Face of Climate Emergency,* CBCP News, accessed April 20, 2020 from https://cbcpnews.net/cbcpnews/an-urgent-call-for-ecological-conversion-hope-in-the-face-of-climate-emergency/.

[18] Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 28.

[19] Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How Christians Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 3.

[20] Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, The World, and*

which means "self-limitation so that others may have place and space to grow and flourish" and "the way people should act toward one another and creation."[21] McFague's eco-theology resists traditional Western Christians' perception of nature and argues against an overly anthropocentric and androcentric human-nature relationship.[22]

Long before the contemporary Christian voices, St. Francis of Assisi had already recognized creation as God's body by seeing himself not just a single creature but created with others, like *brothers and sisters in the family*.[23] In the Bible, Genesis 2 depicts humans to be just like a child – the flesh of the earth and spirit-breath-kiss of God. Moreover, as a creature among God's creation, brotherly/sisterly relationship with other creatures is possible. All of God's creation are united and bound together by God who is both Creator and Father/Mother. This sense of brotherly/sisterly relationship to creation thrived also in the hearts of poets like Benedict, Hildegard of Bingen, Robert Belarmine, and Gerard Manley Hopkins. They speak of the earth with joy, relate it with God, and perceive the human-nature relationship as that of the covenant.[24] This sense of relationship reflects Lynn White's observation that there is a connection between how we understand ourselves and how we treat our cosmos and environment.[25] This also mirrors the belief of Macliing Dulag, an indigenous Kalinga leader and warrior in the Philippines who was brutally murdered in 1980 allegedly by government forces because of his stubborn refusal to accept the government's plan to build dams on

Global Warming (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 77.

[21] McFague, *A New Climate,* 136.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] Ilia Delio, *The Emergent Christ: Exploring the Meaning of Catholic in an Evolutionary Universe* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 126.

[24] Samuel Rayan, "Theological Perspectives on the Environmental Crisis," in *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Trends,* ed. Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 228-230.

[25] Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 10, 1967): 1203-07, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1720120.

their land.[26] With his profound reverence for the land, Dulag declared that "the land owns us and land is a blessing, so has to be nurtured for it is sacred and beloved."[27]

In addition to indigenous leaders who speak on behalf of the environment from their contexts, women also feel the need to contribute their voices. Ecofeminism represents the viewpoint that a connection exists between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. Emerging in the mid-1970s alongside second-wave feminism and the green movement, ecofeminism takes from the green movement a concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit, and oppress women.[28] Ecofeminism claims an alternative principle of relationship between men and women, humans, and the land – a mutuality in which there is no hierarchy but rather an interconnected web of life. This is not an abstract theory but a concrete way that poor women care and sustain for the land and the life of their families.[29]

Eco-theology ultimately has to do with interpreting the relationship between humans, nature, and God and how to live out this relationship in our day to day life. The practical handling of life matters, however, it depends on our realization of interconnectedness and interdependence of the human, the cosmic, and the divine. For Christians, the role of Christ and the Incarnation is important in envisioning our relationship to creation. The value of all creatures of the Earth was made obvious

[26] Lode Wostyn, ed., *I Believe: A Workbook for Theology 1* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian, 2004), 45.

[27] Wostyn, *I Believe,* 45.

[28] Tyler Veak, "Review," Review of *Feminism & Ecology*, by Mary Mellor, *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 24, no. 3 (Summer, 1999): 402-404, https://www.jstor.org/stable/690155?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

[29] Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed., *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 21.

by the Incarnation, the creative Word of God. [30] A deep reflection of the mystery of the Incarnation brings us to a more profound appreciation of *God-with-us in* Christ as a theology of *God-with-all-living-things.*

This is the claim that God binds Godself to flesh and matter and embraces the whole of finite creaturely existence from within.[31] Matthew Fox stated that Thomas Aquinas saw each creature as splendid, healthy, and radiating glory of the Cosmic Christ. The Cosmic Christ, as understood by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, refers to Christ the second person of the Trinity, made man, the Ruler, the beginning, and the end of creation.[32] The Cosmic Christ has a unique relationship with creation. The concept of Cosmic Christ affirms the connectedness of Christ to the realm of creation and his participation where "all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him, all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."[33] Furthermore, the Cosmic Christ, the body of Christ is not limited to the church or even to human beings but as coextensive with God's body.[34] As we are born in this cosmic family of God, our existence calls to be response-able members.[35]

[30] Arthur Peacock and Peter Hodgson, "The Judaeo-Christian Tradition," in *Values, Conflict & the Environment,* 2nd ed., ed. Robin Attfield & Katharine Dell (United Kingdom: Avery, 1996), 141.

[31] Dennis Edwards, *Partaking of God: Trinity, Evolution, & Ecology* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2014), 59.

[32] *Catholic Dictionary* (Catholic Culture.org: Trinity Communications, 2020) s.v. "Cosmic Christ", https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary/index.cfm?id=32834.

[33] Col 1:16-20, (New Revised Standard Version).

[34] McFague, *The Body of God,* 182.

[35] Rayan, *Theological Perspectives,* 228.

Laudato Si as a Catholic Approach to Environmental Communication

Having reviewed some salient points of Christian eco-theology, we now turn to Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*. In the document, Pope Francis critiques what he calls the "technocratic" mindset, in which technology is seen as the "principal key" to human existence.[36] He also critiques an unthinking reliance on market forces, in which every technological, scientific, or industrial advancement is embraced before considering how it will affect the environment and "without concern for its potential negative impact on human beings."[37]

One of the greatest contributions of "Laudato Si" is that it offers what theologians call a "systematic" approach to an issue. First, he links all of us to creation: "We are part of nature, included in it, and thus in constant interaction with it."[38] Second, Pope Francis does not try to "prove" anything about climate change in this document. He frankly admits that the church does not "presume to settle scientific questions."[39] Third, Pope Francis reserves his strongest criticism for the wealthy who ignore the problem of climate change, and especially its effect on the poor. "Many of those who possess more resources seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing their symptoms…"[40] Fourth, at heart, this document is addressed to "every person on the planet;" it is a call for a new way of looking at things, a "bold cultural revolution."[41] Finally, Pope Francis reminds the world that the crisis being faced is an urgent one with the earth looking more and more like, in Francis' vivid language, "an immense pile of filth."[42]

[36] Francis, *Laudato Si*, 110.

[37] Francis, *Laudato Si*, 109.

[38] Francis, *Laudato Si*, 139.

[39] Francis, *Laudato Si,* 188.

[40] Francis, *Laudato Si,* 26.

[41] Francis, *Laudato Si,* 3, 114.

[42] Francis, *Laudato Si,* 21.

As the only encyclical that focuses on the issue of care for creation, *Laudato Si* is impressive in its boldness, and the pontiff's prophetic voice may be unsettling to some modern ears. Rooted deeply in the Judeo-Christian tradition, frequently referencing documents and pastoral letters from past Catholic bishops' conferences around the globe, and prominently reinforcing the environmental teachings of Benedict XVI, Saint John Paul II, and Saint John XXIII, *Laudato Si* reflects a hermeneutic of continuity rather than a revolutionary manifesto or new theology. Nonetheless, its provenance in continuity lends powerfully to the document's gravity and significance. The Roman Catholic Church has a long history in environmental care both in ecclesiastical documents as well as in initiatives safeguarding the environment. However, it is in *Laudato Si* that one finds a more intentional and forceful approach for the care of what Pope Francis calls "Our Common Home". The Pope explains:

> A correct relationship with the created world demands that we do not weaken this social dimension of openness to others, much less the transcendent dimension of our openness to the "Thou" of God. Our relationship with the environment can never be isolated from our relationship with others and with God.[43]

Pope Francis points out that a correct relationship with the environment is embodied in sustaining ecological balance by not exploiting the web of life but a practicing "metanoia".[44] Metanoia is the process of repentance and transformation of ourselves as a whole person that helps lead to a deeper discernment of the will of God.[45] The suffering creation challenges us to look at the planet and all its creatures.

[43] Francis, *Laudato Si*, 119.

[44] Diarmuid O'Murch, *Evolutionary Faith: Rediscovering God in Our Great Story* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 84.

[45] Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 143.

From his position of prominence as the leader of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis appeals to Christians, Catholics, representatives of other religions, non-believers, including international bodies, national, and non-governmental organizations, to pro-actively promote an "integral ecology."[46] From the perspective of environmental communication, there is a number of important points in *Laudato Si*' that are relevant to environmental communication, and which will be discussed in the remainder of this paper. Environmental communication in *Laudato Si*' promotes the following:

(1) *Continuity and inclusivity*: At the same time that Pope Francis presents a perspective that is in continuity with his papal predecessors (§§3-6), this vision finds convergence with non-Catholic religious and secular thinkers (§§7-9). We find that when environmentalists and other scientists work as individuals, and their efforts are more often than not work taking place in isolation, such efforts are bound to have limited success because there is a lack of continuity and collaboration with others. Likewise, efforts that reflect individualistic ideas and personal philosophy cannot easily promote inclusivity. Environmental communication must avoid the pitfall of individualistic agendas and opt the agenda of continuity and inclusiveness in communicating sustainability for the "care of our common home" (the earth). The Christian effort in promoting sustainable ecological care is not a solitary one, and by recognizing the role and voice of non-Catholic and people of no faith in the endeavor, *Laudato Si'* truly opens up the scope of environmental communication. The encyclical articulates a clear message that "everyone and every effort" is important and necessary to the dialogue and the work of caring for creation.

(2) *Positive appreciation of the sacredness and beauty of creation:* In the example of St. Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis, finds a good

[46] Ryszard Feliks Sadowski, "The Concept of Integral Ecology in the Encyclical Laudato Si'," *Divyadaan Journal of Philosophy and Education* 27, no.1 (June 2016): 21-44, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304526188Divyadaan27/1(2016)21-44.

model of having a disposition of "awe and wonder" that leads to a deep appreciation of and care for God's creation. According to Pope Francis, "He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace."[47] When we approach nature in the same way as St. Francis, we can "speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world" and "we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously."[48] In terms of environmental communication, *Laudato Si* does not take the environment as a subject for debate and discussion, but a subject of relationship, intimacy, and care. This approach towards speaking of the environment can attract more empathy and appreciation for creation than presenting a negative and confrontational message.

(3) *Interdisciplinary dialogue:* The task of safeguarding the environment from rapid degradation is a task not limited to experts, but to all who are mindful of the gravity of the environmental crisis. *Laudato Si'* makes an urgent appeal to all persons "for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet."[49] The appeal is based on the Christian conviction that God created everything with intrinsic goodness[50] and therefore, must be duly respected. The dialogue called for takes place on all levels—local, national, and international. This dialogue takes place among the various sectors of society—science, religion, politics, economics, and so on. By engaging in dialogue, the various participants can learn from each other and undergo an internal transformation. *Laudato Si'* affirms:

> ..These discussions are not imagined as mere meetings for the casting of votes or formal decision-making. Through this dialogue, the Pontiff believes, the human mind, heart, and spirit may renew humanity's covenant to care for creation. This renewal would transform our understanding of our place in creation, our appreciation of our relationship with the Creator, and our sense of what it is to be a human person.[51]

(4) *The conviction that the climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all*: The Catholic traditional language of the common good and the integrated responsibilities of each person in safeguarding this common good is a method of articulation that can benefit environmental communication. This idea of the common good is very much rooted in the idea that the human person is a relational being. Theologians, philosophers, sociologists, and other anthropologists agree that "properly and naturally, we are always integrated with the community with each other, with the creation, and with the Creator, and not just in the present but also the future. The common good is what is good for that community."[52] The attention to and articulation of the common good can be employed as a starting point in the call for interdisciplinary and interreligious dialogue that is so essential to environmental communication.

(5) *Responsible stewardship:* Humans are uniquely created and called to exercise responsible stewardship over creation on behalf of the loving Creator.[53] Over time, most advocates of environmental communication promote a network of checks and balances: regulations, incentives, cultural expectations and practices that encourage and enable progress in scientific understanding so that knowledge can be brought to bear on human needs, while simultaneously assuring responsible stewardship of powerful knowledge so that it is not used for malevolent

[47] Francis, *Laudato Si*, 10.

[48] Francis, *Laudato Si*, 11.

[49] Francis, *Laudato Si*, 14.

[50] Francis, *Laudato Si,* 65-69.

[51] Francis, *Laudato Si.* 65.

[52] Francis, *Laudato Si.* 65.

[53] Francis, *Laudato Si*, 67-68.

purposes.[54] Such stewardship will have to evolve rapidly, in concert with the pace of advances in the life sciences—to embrace a network of international agreements, legal regulations, professional standards, ethical mores, and catalogs of best practices. Effective environmental communication can transmit the idea of responsible stewardship so that it will be internalized in human consciousness and reflected in day to day activity.

(6) *Respect for creation*: Respect for creation is a familiar message articulated in the Catholic tradition. Respect for creation is part and parcel of the respect displayed towards God and all of God's creation. According to Pope John Paul II, "Respect for life and the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of creation, which is called to join [the human] in praising God (cf. Ps. 148:9)."[55] In the encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (SRS*), Pope John Paul II provides reasons for Christians to show respect to the environment: first, the natural cosmos must not be used simply as one wishes; second, natural resources are limited and some are not renewable; and third, the direct or indirect result of industrialization is always frequent with serious consequences for the health of cosmos. This reality alerts our consciences to our moral responsibility for the cosmos.[56] The Pope emphasized, however, that reverence for nature must be informed by scientific understanding.[57] Likewise, in *Laudato Si',* Pope Francis continually calls for respect of nature, which is inseparable from respect for the human person.[58]

[54] Gigi Kwik, Joe Fitzgerald, Thomas V. Inglesby, and Tara O'Toole, "Biosecurity: Responsible Stewardship of Bioscience in an Age of Catastrophic Terrorism," *Biosecurity and Bioterrorism: Biodefense Strategy, Practice, and Science* 1, no. 1 (March 2003): 27-35, https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/15387130360514805.

[55] John Paul II, *Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace,* accessed April 29, 2020, Vatican.va.

[56] John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis,* accessed April 29, 2020, Vatican.va.

[57] Nicholas Eberstadt, "World Population Prospects for the Twenty-First Century: The Specter of 'Depopulation'?" in *Earth Report 2000: Revisiting the True State of the Planet,* ed. Ronald Bailey (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000).

[58] Francis, *Laudato Si*, 5.

"Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another."[59] Therefore, the development of integral ecology rests on the idea that it is all to be respected because all are part of the common good.

Conclusion

The way we interact with the natural world is deeply related to how we view creation and our fellow human beings. Examining *Laudato Si'* from the perspective of environmental communication, one must put on a refocused lens in communicating environmental awareness. Environmental communication must learn to have a spiritual perspective. Spirituality is now part of the discussions on the environment. The greatest contribution of *Laudato Si* to the environmental dialogue is, to my mind, its systematic overview of the crisis from a spiritual point of view. Furthermore, environmental communication should have a lens of sensitivity towards the poor. The poor are disproportionately affected by climate change. The disproportionate effect of environmental change on the poor and the developing world is highlighted in almost every section of the encyclical. Indeed, near the beginning of *Laudato Si,* the pope states that focus on the poor is one of the central themes of the encyclical, and he provides many examples of the baneful effects of climate change, whose worst impacts are felt by those living in developing countries.

Environmental communication, to be effective, must be oriented toward the common good, aiming to build solidarity with both fellow human beings and all of God's creation. Engaging *Laudato Si'* from the perspective of environmental communication yields many points worthy of consideration. *Laudato Si* articulates and proclaims a message that calls for engaging in dialogue, respect of diversity, cherishing unity, and care for all—both human and creation. *Laudato Si* takes the approach of emphasizing the interconnectedness of God and

[59] Francis, *Laudato Si*, 42.

all of God's creation, and a way of living ignorant of this consciousness is no longer acceptable in the face of the escalating environmental crisis. Environmental communication must continue to call for honest, transparent, and constructive dialogue based on the principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, working for the common good, the universal destination of goods, and a preferential option for the poor and the earth.

References

Aseneta, Anatoly Angelo R. "*Laudato Si'* on Non-Human Animals." *Journal of Moral Theology* 6, no.2, (June 2017): 230-245. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&site=eds-live&scope=site&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAiB8W170814001511&authtype=sso&custid=s9343122.

Berry, Thomas. *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future.* New York: Bell Towers, 1999.

Cox, Robert J. *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere.* Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2013.

Damian, Howard. "Laudato Si': A Seismic Event in Dialogue between the Catholic Church and Ecology." Thinking Faith. June 18, 2015, https://www.thinking-faith.org/articles/laudato-si%E2%80%99-seismic-event-dialogue-between-catholic-church-and-ecology.

Delio, Ilia. *The Emergent Christ: Exploring the Meaning of Catholic in an Evolutionary Universe.* Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011.

Eberstadt, Nicholas. "World Population Prospects for the Twenty-First Century: The Specter of 'Depopulation'?" In *Earth Report 2000: Revisiting the True State of the Planet,* edited by Ronald Bailey. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000.

Edwards, Dennis. *Partaking of God: Trinity, Evolution, & Ecology.* Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2014.

Fragomeni, Richard N. and John T. Pawlikowski, eds. *The Ecological Challenge: Ethical, Liturgical, & Spiritual Responses.* Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1994.

Francis. *Laudato Si.* Accessed April 20, 2020. Vatican.va.

John Paul II. *Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace.* Accessed April 29, 2020. Vatican.va.

John Paul II. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis.* Accessed April 29, 2020. Vatican.va.

Johnson, Elizabeth. *Quest for the Living God*. New York: Continuum, 2011.

Kroll, Gary. "The 'Silent Springs' of Rachel Carson: Mass media and the origins of modern environmentalism." *Public Understanding of Science* 10, no. 4,

(October 2001): 403-420. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3109/a036878.

Kwik, Gigi, Joe Fitzgerald, Thomas V. Inglesby, and Tara O'Toole. "Biosecurity: Responsible Stewardship of Bioscience in an Age of Catastrophic Terrorism." *Biosecurity and Bioterrorism: Biodefense Strategy, Practice, and Science* 1, no. 1 (March 2003): 27-35. https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/15387130360514805.

Matthiessen, Peter. "Environmentalist: Rachel Carson." *Time Magazine*, March 29, 1999. Accessed April 29, 2020, http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,990622,00.html.

Harris, Frances., ed. *Global Environmental Issues*. 2nd ed. New York, United States: John Wiley & Sons, 2012.

McFague, Sallie. *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993.

McFague, Sallie. *Super, Natural Christians: How Christians Should Love Nature.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998.

McFague, Sallie. *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001.

McFague, Sallie. *A New Climate for Theology: God, The World, and Global Warming.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008.

Meisner, Mark. "Environmental Communication: What It Is and Why It Matters." The International Environmental Communication Association. November 2015. https://theieca.org/resources/environmental-communication-what-it-and-why-it-matters.

New Revised Standard Version. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989.

O'Murch, Diarmuid. *Evolutionary Faith: Rediscovering God in Our Great Story*. New York: Orbis Books, 2004.

Peacock, Arthur, and Peter Hodgson. "The Judaeo-Christian Tradition." In *Values, Conflict & the Environment,* 2nd ed., edited by Robin Attfield & Katharine Dell. United Kingdom: Avery, 1996

Rayan, Samuel. "Theological Perspectives on the Environmental Crisis." In *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Trends,* edited by Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, 228-230. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford, ed. *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996.

Sadowski, Ryszard Feliks. "The Concept of Integral Ecology in the Encyclical Laudato Si'." *Divyadaan Journal of Philosophy and Education* 27, no.1 (June 2016): 21-44. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304526188Divyadaan27/1(2016)21-44.

Valles, Romulo G. "An Urgent Call for Ecological Conversion: Hope in The Face of Climate Emergency." CBCP News. Accessed April 20, 2020, https://cbcpnews.net/cbcpnews/an-urgent-call-for-ecological-conversion-hope-in-the-face-of-climate-emergency/.

Veak, Tyler. "Review." Review of *Feminism & Ecology*, by Mary Mellor. *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 24, no. 3 (Summer, 1999): 402-404. https://www.jstor.org/stable/690155?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

White, Lynn Jr. "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis." *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 10, 1967): 1203-07. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1720120.

Wostyn, Lode, ed. *I Believe: A Workbook for Theology 1.* Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian, 2004.

Catholic Dictionary. Catholic Culture.org: Trinity Communications, 2020. https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary/index.cfm?id=32834.

South Asian Voice of Changing Hindu Religious Contour and Digital Media[1]

Binod Agrawal

Introduction

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the flood gate of 'digital media and religion' has swamped the western world in an unprecedented way. The digital war of religion has most attracted the Christian and Jewish scholars, followers and religious leaders. It has been followed by Islamic scholars and followers having political overtones. In the recent past, some efforts have also been made to discuss and debate the Asian religions like Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism (see Agrawal ed., 2015a and 2015b and Eilers and Vu Tue eds., 2016). However, in regards to the Hindu, Buddhist and small Jain populations, research studies remain minuscule.

[1] Some of the ideas discussed in the paper have been drawn from an earlier published paper in *Religion and Social Communication* Vol.13 No.2, 2015 (see Agrawal 2015) and Agrawal (2017) paper presented in IAMCR 2017 Conference at Cartagena, July16-20, 2017.

Binod Agrawal, PhD, is a mentor at the Media Research Centre at the School of Communications of Manipal University, Manipal, India. Dr. Agrawal is also a regional consultant of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication.

The report of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC, 2010) is testimony of such an assertion where there was no explicit mention of these religions in the debate. The SSRC report raised an important issue as to how digital media are influencing, shaping and reshaping religion globally. Six scholars of religion belonging to different fields of Social Sciences responded to this issue in the report. Heidi Campbell (https://tif.ssrc.org/2010/03/16/new-media-and-the-reshaping-of-religious-practice/) argued, "More than reshaping the practice of religion, I would argue that the uptake of new media by religious practitioners and the resulting forms of online religion point to larger cultural shifts at work in the practice and perception of religion in society. New media tools support networked forms of community, encourage experimentation with religious identity-construction and self-presentation, and promote drawing from multiple and divergent religious sources and encounters simultaneously."

Within three years, a much broader picture of digital media and religion emerged in an edited book by Campbell (2013) where Campbell included almost all major religions of the world including Buddhism and Hindu religions and broadened the understanding of religious practices in digital media world. In this respect, while most of the major world religions like Christianity, Islam and Judaism have found notable research carried out in North America, there is relative dearth of similar research in Asia or its major religions. For the purpose of this paper, the term digital media has been conceived as "an electro-mechanical device having power and ability to store, view, create, distribute, modify, read and reproduce information in a variety of forms" (Agrawal, 2015, pg.175).

Aim

The paper aims to describe and discuss *Sanatan Dharma* (popularly described as Hindu religion in the Western world especially propagated by the British colonial rulers) and the likely influence of digital media on its believers who are spread across the

world today, though the largest number of about one billion live in India.

Global Hindu Presence

In an edited volume on caste, Schwartz (ed. 1967) reported of Hindus living in Mauritius, Guyana Trinidad, Surinam, Fiji, South Africa, and East Africa. These overseas Hindus were drafted as indentured labors who were largely unskilled men forced by the British colonial rulers to migrant to work as agricultural labor on sugar plantation in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In addition, the Hindus had lived in other Asian countries since much earlier, including Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia to mention a few. After India's independence in 1947 and its partition into India and Pakistan, a new wave of migration to the west took place. There was unabated migration of a large number of Hindus as skilled workers in information technology, technical and professional areas to Australia, Canada, Europe and United States of America. Unskilled workers also migrated from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan to these countries in search of jobs on a continuous basis. So the believers of Hindu religion moved all over world.

***Sanatan Dharma* in Oral Tradition**

A Hindu by and large follows the method of oral communication in religious practices, and the Hindu religion has no single founder or prophet, or religious text (Radhakrishnan, 1968). Hence, there are multiple Hindu oral traditions of religious practices. By and large within oral communication, the *Sanatan Dharma* is practiced as *Parampara* loosely translated as age old practice or tradition. *Sanatan Dharma* is based on *Vishwash* (translated as faith or belief). An individual identifies himself/herself as belonging to a given *Sampradaya* (sect) and as member of an original linguistic region and *Jati* (caste) within India or wherever they reside in the world.

The most important characteristics of *Sanatan Dharma* are its continuity and improvisation of the ritual practices with or without ritual specialists. The rituals and sacrifices could be performed anywhere as an annual or periodic celebration by the family or individual. The celebration is prescribed and calculated as sacred *muhurt,* or precise time or duration with the help of the Hindu calendar (Agrawal, 1980, pg. 34-42). It should be noted that disputes often take place in regards to the date and time of ritual performance due to disagreements among the ritual specialists as well as discrepancies in methods of calculation, which is based on the planetary position.

Religious Signifiers

One of the most important beliefs in *Sanatan Dharma* is related to the concept of transmigration of the 'un-destructible', 'un-flammable' and 'non-wet able' *Atma* (the soul of the living being) and *Parmatma* (the supreme soul of god). Followers of *Sanatan Dharma* believe that there is an unending cycle of birth and death based on the deeds of previous life. So to break the cycle of birth and death, the performance of good deeds is essential and required to achieve *Moksha* (ultimate salvation of *Atma* to break away from the unending cycle of birth and death). *Moksha* can be achieved by doing good deeds in the present life while in the state of human being. *Moksha* is the merger of *Atma* to *Parmatma* that allows an end of the unending life cycle of death and birth.

Over several millennia, the concept of transmigration of the soul has been reinforced as it is believed that gods and goddesses also appear on earth as *Avatars* (appearance of god on the earth) from time to time to reduce human suffering and for destruction of prevailing sinful activities on earth. In this respect, the concept of transmigration of the soul, as one of the fundamental tenants of *Sanatan Dharam* prevails in the Hindu psyche. The concept of transmigration of the soul is often used for providing "rational" explanation of human misery and misfortune on the earth.

The concept of transmigration of the soul has multiple manifestations and representations in the expressive cultures, and visual, musical, and art forms in *Sanatana Dharma*. "In the multilingual composite civilization of India, Sanskrit apart from Tamil and many other languages continues to be a language of literary transmission of sacred knowledge and sacred literature. In Sanskrit it is largely as *Shruti* (oral recitation of scared text from memory over and over again spanning some time several centuries without any alteration), *Smriti* (oral social commentary recitations of prescriptive social conduct that should direct and regulate day-to-day individual and collective behavior in community and society) and *Shastra* (codification of selected and well tested oral sacred recitations both in oral and written form sometimes spanning over several centuries emerging from the human memory, experience and deliberations)… The oral method of communication remained an integral part of civilization of India. The present day Asian Civilizations are no exception in this respect where improvisation of 'oral' communications continue to be the most accepted, dominant, and trusted means and methods of exchange of information, knowledge and views in various domains of human experiences and accumulated wisdom without altering the aim and intend of communication" (Agrawal, 2017, pg. 3).

The day to day oral discourse and discussion on the concept of *Atma* and *Paramatama* and individual relationships takes place in various forums in several social strata of the composite multi-lingual civilization of India. The quest to answer the question of human self and god continues.

In *Sanatan Dharma,* live story enactment of various incarnations of gods and goddesses are common and regular features. Theatrical performances are carried out by "actors" and "actresses" who remain in a state of "liminality" during the period of festivity and hence are treated as incarnations of gods or goddesses (Kottak, 2006, pg. 267-268). Such a performance has been in vogue for several millennia in the sub-continent of India and elsewhere in Asia. Hence, it is the

author's contention that 'self-expression' through the visual medium of television will receive special attention in "polytheistic" S*anatan Dharma*.

There is growing acceptance and influence of digital media across South Asia especially in the democratic, hierarchical and multi-religious India (Agrawal, 2016). Although religious implications within socio-cultural context of digital media are yet to be fully analyzed, realized, and understood, the observations support the view that digital media have appreciable influences on *Sanatan Dharma* social structure and human relations. It is speculated that digital media may also help in blurring *Sanatan Dharma* national boundaries that might change the religious content, meaning and method of *Sanatan Dharma* religious practices.

In the remaining part of the paper, an attempt will be made to describe and analyze the Hindu responses within the *Sanatan Dharma* framework in urban India to show how digital media—a product of information and communication technology (ICT) have accentuated Hindu religious self-expression.

The Study

This paper is based on a larger study of multi-religious surveys of adult 711 respondents. The sample consisted among others of 300 Hindu adult respondents. The study was conducted in the City of Ahmedabad, Gujarat India. The Hindu sample consisted of 300 adults above 18 years of age of either sex. The sample was drawn using snowball technique. All respondents owned or had access to smart mobile phones and/or television. The respondents were provided self-administered English close-ended questionnaires by a team of seven trained field investigators. In order to improve the response rate, several trips were made to respondents' homes with the request to return the completed questionnaire. The data collection was spread over two months in February – April, 2015. Data checking, cleaning, entry and

analysis were carried out in May-June, 2015. The analysis for this paper was carried only for the sub-sample of Hindu respondents.

Respondents' Profile

The respondents consisted of 60.8 percent men and 39.2 percent women in which 53.0 percent were below 25 years of age, and the remaining 47.0 percent were above 25 years of age. With a few exceptions, all were educated with as much as 50.0 percent having a bachelor's degree. The respondents consisted of students, business persons, employed service persons, a few housewives, and very few retired persons. In this respect, the respondents represented a selected group of urban educated mobile and smartphone owners. They could be optimally defined as members of the "middle class" of Ahmedabad. As much as 90.7 percent of the respondents had access to a smartphone, 86.0 percent could access the Internet, and 63.7 percent owned laptops. Of those who owned laptops, 60.7 percent also had desktop computers. It should be mentioned that almost all respondents who were in business or service work had computer access at their workplace. Consequently, use of digital media through the smart phone, Internet, desk top and laptop were reported to be high (Table 1).

Table 1: Digital Media Access*

Access	Percent
Smart phone	90.7
Internet	86.0
Laptop	63.7
Desktop Computer At Home	39.3
Sample Size	300

Hindu Multi Lingual Digital Media and Religious Practices

Television and radio in India represent unique genres of multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-content telecast and broadcast. Several hundred exclusive satellite channels broadcast entertainment, education,

religious and news programs round the clock in India as well as beyond its national boundary. The same cannot be said about FM radio which is growing slowly. In addition, state level public service broadcasting television and radio programs in local languages are also accessible across India and beyond. Over two billion viewers and listeners in in India and the greater South Asia were able to access these broadcasts according to their choice of language. It was estimated that for each of the languages of Hindi, Urdu, Bangla, Punjabi, Telugu, Tamil, Marathi apart from English, more than 100 million people were able to listen and view these programs. The primary aim of television telecast had been to provide entertainment apart from news around the clock. In the case of radio, although entertainment was open for all, news was largely within the domain of public broadcaster like All India Radio. Smart phones carried both television and radio signals apart from print news.

Religious Digital Media Use: The analysis of the survey indicated that almost all respondents (96.0 percent) had access to direct to home (DTH) or cable television in their homes. Four out of five or 81.0 percent of respondents watched television for entertainment regardless of gender (Table 2). Further, no more than 13.3 percent watched TV to gain religious information or knowledge (Table 2). Although almost half or 49.0 percent of respondents had access to radio, there is little information about the listening habits of the people for religious purposes.

Table 2: Current Digital Media Use*

Use	Percent
Entertainment	81.0
Knowledge	70.
Professional	34.7
News	35.0
Religious	13.3
Total Sample	300

* Multiple responses

In response to few broader questions relating to Hindu religious practices to assess the way digital media had influenced Hindu religious practices indicated limited and diffused influence. Table 3 shows that religious "apps" used on smart mobile phone was at 24.3 percent. As much as 48.3 percent read religious books, but only 14.0 percent preferred to read through e-books. At the same time, these respondents felt that digital media had provided them an easy access to religious information because of the variety of available religious literature online. More than 34.7 percent of respondents listened to *Bhajan* (songs in praise of god and goddess), 43.3 percent witness *Aarti* (religious prayers during worship), 30.0 percent of respondents listened to *Mantra* (religious chants to propitiate god and goddess) and 47.3 percent viewed videos of *Garba* songs (Gujarati songs in praise of Goddess Ambe). A small number of people also downloaded religious materials using digital media (Table 3).

Mixed responses were received in Hindu worshiping behavior as indicated in Table 4 in which as much as 41.7 percent felt that the worshiping behavior remained unchanged. Also 25.3 percent felt that there was no change as a result of digital media (Table 4). At the same time 25.0 percent relied on religious leaders (Tables 5 & 6). Analysis supports the view that digital media has been accepted as the medium of self-expression rather than just religious expression.

Table 3: Religious Digital Media Use in Smart/Mobile Phone

Use	Percent
Use Digital Media Apps	24.3
Read Digital Media Apps	48.3
Read e-book	16.0
View/Listen*	
Bhajan	34.7
Aarti	43.3
Mantra	30.0
Garba	47.3
Dhun	12.7

*Multiple Responses

Table 4: Digital Media Exposure and Worshiping*

Worshiping	Percent
Increased	20.0
Decreased	43.0
Remained same	41.7
Cannot say	34.4
Sample Size	300

*Multiple Responses

Table 5: Experience of Digital Media for Religious Gain*

Experience	Percent
Deepened Religious Experience	16.3
Helped understand religion	19.7
Exposed religious dogma	3.0
Have view point on religion	12.3
Helped set goals in life	13.3
No change	25.3
Not specified	34.0

* Multiple responses

Table 6: Dependency on Religious Leaders

Dependency	Percent
To a greater extent	14.0
To some extent	27.0
Not at all	25.0
Cannot say	25.2
Sample Size	300

Closing Comment

The analysis presented so far, tends to point out that religious digital media are getting adapted, absorbed, and assimilated in *Sanatan Dharma*. While digital media is helping refine religious visual images and have created modern characters of Hindu gods and goddesses, such changes seem to have limited effects on practitioners of *Sanatan Dharma* (Agrawal, 2012). Further, digital media for many have become an essential method and means of self-expression. Given the

rapid changes in digital media, it is difficult to predict the direction and pace of change in socio-religious arena in the unbroken continuity of cultural, religious and visual landscape of *Sanatan Dharma*.

References

Agrawal, Binod C.	
2017	Digital and Social Media and Improvisation of Religious Practices in Hindu India. Paper presented in IAMCR 2017 Conference held in Cartagena, Columbia, 16-20 July, 2017.
2015	*Sanatan Dharma* and Digital Media: The Process of Adaptation, Absorption and Assimilation in Hindu South Asia. *Religion and Social CommunicationJournal of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication*Vol.13 No2 pg.174-184.

BOOK NOTES

Katz, Helen: The Media Handbook. A Complete Guide to Advertising Media Selection, Planning Research and Buying. (New York: Routledge, 2019). 235 pp.

This book is the 7th edition of a basic introduction to "media planning and buying process to help today's college students or industry professionals to understand how today's advertising media operate and how media fit into the larger picture of total brand communication" as the preface of this book says (p. VII f.). It presents the "fundamentals of media planning and buying, providing a strong and practical foundation for whatever area of market and communication you are" the preface further explains.

The book contains ten chapters which not only conclude with a summary and notes but also presents a 'checklist' with relevant questions. The chapters are clearly divided and structured for practical use and application mode from a description of 'media' to marketing objectives and different kinds of media as paid, paid digital, owned, caused, category criteria leading to proper planning.

The book is based on and written for the US market but has also many points and situations which go beyond. Religion is not part of this publication but can be 'applied' in several ways like for example in developing a proper plan (Chapter 9) for Church use and activities.

Wilson, Yumi: The Social Media Journalist Handbook. (New York and London: Routledge, 2019). 145 pp.

Our ways of communicating technology have been changed considerably in the last decade going from the traditional media like press-related to the invention of movable letters and modern printing but also radio, television and even film from technical means of

multiplication to digital ways and means which were characterized already in 1996/2000 by Cairncross as the "Death of Distance." Our ways and means of communicating are now without any limits – technically, geographically, and even somehow culturally. Now everybody can communicate with everybody, everywhere at any time and can be reached by digital means like the so-called "social media." Ways of writing, presentation of texts and pictures, however, continue to exist – only the ways and means of presentation have changed including the reach of 'audience.' It means that journalism as the art of writing still exists though in different ways of presentation and transmission. This means that the basics of journalism are still needed and do exist as ways of communication. This small book is a proof for this and shows how also in "social media," journalistic rules and ways are needed. It shows "how journalists from small, large and startup news outlets can use social media in a new way of communicating with their audience" (p. 14) but where also the audience decides what is news. Chapter 2 of the book "shows the evolution of social media information where now often 75% of mobile data are on video" (p. 22).

Journalism in social networks are considered as citizen or participatory journalism (p. 23) where journalists are invited to "inhabit digital space" in their way of communicating.

The book is divided in two sections: 1. History and Overview of Evolution of Social Media in Journalism; and 2. The Practice of Social Media Journalism (p.63 ff). In the latter, there are themes like "personal branding, how to tweet, how to find sources and 'best practices for curating and creating content' as well as also 'promoting your content'" and on the relation of social media and public relations.

For a publication like this, the special relations to Religion are not expected to be treated but the book leads also to Religion not only in asking if and how social media also reflects Religion but also how their ways of communicating also affect and/or translate the presentation and workings of Religions not only as social groups but also if and how

are these new realities are influencing their practice of communicating as being not only essential elements of Asian cultures but also the Religion-related lives and practices of persons and societies which are also to be considered as 'target audiences' (Cf. p. 112 ff.) for religious life and culture.

The small but challenging book concludes with a 4 page glossary and a 3-page index.

Iquani, Mehita and Fernando Resende (eds): Media and the Global South. Narrative Territorialities, Cross-Cultural Currents. (Milton Park /New York: Routledge, 2019). 207 pp.

The title of this publication seems to suggest a general presentation on media and the Global South though the individual contributions are geographically coming mainly from Latin America and Africa with Asia hardly present. The contributions seem to be mainly introductions, representing the concept, understanding and theories of the expression "Global South," important research from "southern contexts" and one exploring connections and flows between southern settings "based on "narrative forms both analogue and digital, traditional and subcultural" (p. 4). "This book seeks to primarily discuss and present such issues from the idea that Global South can be conceptualized a inscribed within a 'narrative territoriality' which in this case hardly seems to include Asia. "The objective is to understand media and global South issues as actually as actually being constitutive and consistent in this territoriality…"

The book is part of a publication series on "literary cultures of the Global South" which is also reflected in the same cover design for this whole series—which is also repeated actually in other related research field and concerns which might make it seemingly identical with other publications of the same publisher but not necessarily the same fields of research.

The publication ends with an index on subjects and names while every chapter concludes with notes and references.

Atay, Ahmer and Margaret U. D'Silva (eds.): Mediated Intercultural Communication in a Digital Age. (New York: Routledge, 2019). 227 pp.

This book with contributions of twelve scholars from six different countries tries to study the Media in a 'Digital Age' in intercultural perspective which includes especially the role of social media in the context of globalization. Starting from E.T. Hall as being the 'Father of Intercultural Communication' the contributions try to indicate new developments under digital perspective. As reasons for this development are indicated: 1. Mediated texts circulate globally and international; 2. They are globally available and consumed; 3. They are interacting with 'mediated' texts; and this way 4. Frame "global issues." Because of this situation and developments social media now play a larger role than traditional ones: "Cyberculture centers around communication between people who are culturally, nationally and linguistically similar or radically different" (p.3). The introduction concludes with eight interrelated goals (p.4).

The individual contributions of this volume differ in academic quality and presentation. They move (p. 22 ff.) from a balanced overview on the influence of digital to modern journalism as 'intercultural collaboration' to 'transnational geolocation'-based online dating and hookup application describing personal experiences of the authors. Thus, for example, the contribution on "Multilayered Interactions: Culture, Communication and New Media" (pp. 22 – 43) is backed up with seven pages of references on the role, potentials, and realities of interactions. An Indian contribution describes "How Cultural Performance and Identity Negotiations Take Place During Online Discussions Over a Book" stating beside others that "we need to probe deeper to understand how cultural identity is imagined and created and how identity perceptions are formed and constantly negotiated in such mediated spaces" (p. 66).

From Religions, only "Tibetan Buddhism Online" is presented, referring basically to networking and digital presence of Buddhism from the perspective of the two European authors (Finland and the UK) describing networks and digital operations in their continent but not going into the digital dimensions of Buddhism realities in Asia (pp. 136-146) though the general statement is that also for Buddhism (and Religion) "online facilities have become important vehicles, tools and sources for Religion related individuals" (p.144).

The cover design of the book is apparently the same with all publications of the series: "Routledge Research in Communication Studies" but also the series on "Literary Cultures of the South" has the same design which makes it a little bit difficult to properly identify and distinguish the books which beside the different titles makes them looking all the same.

An extensive index (pp. 217-227) helps to use the publication under various perspectives and needs.

Stephens, Keri K. (ed): New Media In Times of Crisis. (New York Routledge, 2019). 241 pp.

This publication is part of a series of books bringing "together groups of emerging scholars" published by the College of Communication of the University of Texas at Austin in the United States with the series title "New Agenda in Communication." Except for two, all other authors of the volume are also from there. The book presents in three parts altogether eleven contributions which are grouped in the following sections: 1. Focusing on Crisis Responders; 2. How Individuals Seek, Share, and Get Messages; and 3. Opportunities for New Forms of Organizing During Times of Crisis. All sections present the situations, methods, results and implications in an interdisciplinary

mode of operation (p. 2) with a "hear, confirm, understand, decide respond method." There are two helpful perspectives underlying the presentations: 1. Crisis information as "instantaneously posting messages using social media"; and 2. Using a model of social-mediated crisis communication with temporal planning into pre-, post-crisis and community resilience to help to recover. The "new media environment" is indicated by the fact that now, people carry their personal mobile devices with them everywhere to stay connected and easily join conversations (p. 4). The book intends leading to "broader perspectives to approach these topics in the most interdisciplinary perspective to date" (p 5).

The publication starts with a focus on organizing–not organizations!–"sensemaking." In the subsets to organizing as a process, crisis responders, new media, the public, and messages are considered with also seeing them as individuals: "people decide for themselves the actions they will take" (p. 6). In its final part, the book presents different ways in which groups organize to cope, collaborate, and create models of organizing in times of crisis.

The publication is clearly structured and this makes it easy to also consider single sections or parts of a situation or process. Thus for example "resilience" as a communicative competency (p. 90) lists five steps: 1. Crafting normality; 2. Affirming identity anchors; 3. Using communicative networks; 4. Exercising alternative methods of achieving goals; and 5. Restraining negative emotions (p.91). The same concern is further treated in a special chapter on "Community Resilience an Social Media" towards the end of the book (pp.177-192).

The "New Media" in the title of the publication seems to be taken for granted because it is without any special or extensive description which one might expect.

The book ends with "Conclusions and Future Interdisciplinary Opportunities" which "might need to be further addressed in small

steps" for which this publication presents already a solid grounding but also a challenge for scholars and practitioners in the field which affects human lives and experiences (p. 232). A (too) short index of only some two pages concludes the helpful publication though all chapters also end not only with 'discussion questions' but also extensive "notes" leading to further sources and further studies.

Hausman, Carl, Philip Benoit, Fritz Messere (eds.): Announcing for Broadcasting and the Internet. The Modern Guide to Performing in the Electronic Media. (New York/London: Routledge, 2019). 296 pp.

The origin of this book goes back to the 1980s though, in its present form and with this publisher, it is listed as "first edition published 2019." It is actually the basic handbook for "announcing for broadcasting" but this time also for "the electronic media." From its history and concerns, it must be considered as a basic book for announcing not only for broadcasting – as the title says, but also beyond the Internet for any kind of 'announcing' in human society which also includes Religions, where 'announcements' must be considered as an essential part within and beyond Church services, which makes this publication also important for use in religious activities though it says that it focuses on "the communicator in the broadcast media" who serves "as a conduit for communication between originator of the message and the audience" not only to 'announce' but also somehow interpret messages." Where "accuracy, fairness, honesty and integration " are paramount (p. 10 f.) for a responsible and honest performance.

The book starts with an overview about technical developments up to the sharing services today which are by far transcending the original technically restricted 'broadcasting' which is now being online in different ways (p.18).

The publication presents "effective vocal skills by practice" as a foundation (Chapter 2) "to make the most of your voice" (p.19). In this process 'understanding the message' (Chapter 3) is important which can also be applied for any religious services like Biblical interpretation in Christianity to be handled in a professional way (Chapter 4). This includes also developing a proper style (p. 63) which includes the proper handling of technical means like microphones (p. 73 ff) but also the basics of (news) announcing (Chapter 7) which not only includes respective qualities for radio/TV operations but is also related to "the craft of interviewing" (p. 168 ff).

For the authors "ethics pervade almost any discussion of the mass media" and for them it is therefore "vital to an on-air performance…" so that they present a "crash course on ethics" (p. 82 ff). Throughout the book, ethics plays an important role and is referred to many times like ethical questions and points under the title "think about it" (e.g., p. 105) or also in the "right to privacy" (p. 121) on field reporting (p. 149) but also later on the "ethics of affiliate marketing" (p. 230).

The publication goes far beyond the traditional (mass) media in addressing also "the new media frontier" and the independent performer (Chapter 12, p. 217) to be followed by chapters on podcasting, Internet video, home-based narration and voice over (Chapter 15) and carreer advancement (Chapter 16).

This book is grounded and developed from and for the North American Market but can be applied in many ways also in Asia. Beyond the geographical limitations, the book should be generally helpful for developing practical dispositions and serve far beyond media practitioners. Representatives of Religion can develop, on the basis of this book, also proper professional ways and means for their 'proclamation' and sharing the essentials of their Religion though they should also be able to adjust to their own cultural and religious situations where needed.

The book concludes–for the announcer–with a special listing on "foreign pronunciations" (pp. 285-291) and an index (pp. 292-296).

Steffen, Colleen: Soft Skills for the New Journalist. Cultivating the Inner Resources You Need to Succeed. (New York/London: Routledge, 2019). 177 pp.

This book is not divided into the traditional chapters but rather presents 34 sections for teaching "soft skills" for the new journalist. The editor presents in an easily readable language a way journalists should work, based on her more than her 25 years of experience in the field. The book starts with "attitude" (No. 1) and ends with the assurance that that the author "believes" in her students (No. 34). The presentation starts with "inner resources you need" referring beside others also to Mother Teresa of Kolkata (p. 7) as an example for humility against arrogance which easily develops in the journalistic profession with flexibility (p. 12).

The book presents very concrete elements of praxis like how to approach people, to introduce themselves (p. 40 f.) and lists as elements in reporting emotion, proximity, immediacy conflict, impact, and novelty (p. 20 ff). Based on personal experiences, the book shares tips for writing and reporting in a light and somehow entertaining way: sometimes, in fact, one seems to feel that here, a mother is sharing with her child. Journalists have a greater course to serve than to look for the confirmation of their own worldview and the preservation of their own inner peace (p.55).

All 'chapters' present graphics to give an overview of the content which summarizes the presentations and thus make the book not only to 'teach' in a pleasant way but also further clarify the respective contents with proper overviews which summarize like, for example, showing where and how the "Nutgraf" with the different "W's" (who, what, where, when, why, how) is developed and placed in a presentation (p.

74). The 'rules' for interviewing are presented graphically as "do less… but do more" (p.75).

The presentations of this publication are very pleasant and experience filled, which make them sometimes a little bit "wordy." The author also encourages to develop a proper conscience with a proper 'Code of Ethics': be accountable, act independently, minimize harm (p.143) and seek the truth.

This very comprehensive but pleasantly presented book ends with an index which helps to use it in many practical ways and applications. It is written for the US market but can easily also applied in other parts of the world as stimulating handbook for the "new journalist" as the subtitle says!

Whitaker , W. Richard, Ronald D. Smith, and Janet E. Ramsey (eds): Media Writing. Print, Broadcast, and Public Relations. 5th. Edition. (New York/ Milton Park: Routledge, 2019). 401 pp.

The first edition of this book was originally published in 2000 and now being in its 5th edition might already taken as a sign of quality and professionality. It originates from a team from the Buffalo State College in the United States. It is not only a publication just on journalism but also considers the "interrelated technologies of computer, telephone, television" as the preface indicates (p. viii). The book goes after a very balanced and solid introduction on Communication Theory and news values to the fundamentals of writing and editing to concrete steps in "Media Writing" which includes also a chapter on "Ethical Decisions in Writing and Reporting" (pp. 107 ff.). These concerns are in fact included in the whole book as essential parts and responsibilities in communication with the admonition to "exercise caution with race, religion and ethnicity" (p. 46 f.).

The book presents a "professional writing style"(p. 47 f). Every one of the sixteen chapters concludes with concrete discussion questions

and exercises as well as notes. It also presents a sense for religious language and their needs and ad well as their importance.

Now the "Media Scene," however, is "increasingly turning publishing and networking giants into mere voices in the crowd" (p. 15) and for young people the interest is not anymore on TV but rather on streaming services and the Internet with strong communication consequences. Now "about 90 percent of adults get news via mobile or desktop format either from traditional news outlets or the new opinionated information services" (p. 135), which indicates a changing 'market' with respective consequences for the ways and means with which we communicate or and even relate to each other.

The publication reflects the experiences and insights of the three editors with their own solid professional background and ability to look into and analyze situations in view of a future 'market' and needs. Here especially the importance for proper research and analysis is underlined (p. 178 ff.) but as well as the consequences for news room organization (p. 280f.) are presented. Inserted into the texts are also boxes with concrete examples and experiences mainly of the editors which complement considerations of the texts.

This book not only considers the traditional fields of print, broadcasting, and public relations as the subtitle says but also 'welcomes' the "Social Media Information Age" not only referring to the "impact of technology" but also treats the "writing for online newspapers" (p. 319) and presents "a survey of the *new media*" (p. 321 ff) with blogs, Twitter and other forms of *new media* (p. 326).

The publication also addresses the writing style for news releases and their different formats (p. 344 ff) and concludes with chapters on "writing for organizational media (Chapter 15) and "advocacy and speech writing (Chapter 16).

Every chapter of the book concludes with "chapter exercises" and

also notes on the theme. The volume concludes with an extensive index (pp. 389-401) which helps to 'use' the rich content of the publication in professional life.

This publication originates and is written from and for the US market but many considerations can be also applied to Asia and other parts of the world though this might need sometimes a proper cultural and practical adjustment.

Taylor, Bryan C. and Hamilton Bean (eds.): The Handbook of Communication and Security. (New York/London: Routledge, 2019). 431 pp.

This publication is part of a "handbook series" of the International Communication Association (ICA) where already nine other "handbooks" have been published. This book contains twenty-three studies which "explore various social communication processes through which human groups negotiate perceptions of and resources to threats against things they value" (Foreword p. xiii). The introduction of the editors states that this handbook offers no simple solution to that alternately static and mutating simple conflict. It does create, however, an opportunity to better understand how various groups have used their communicative resources to propose, sustain, and challenge the policies that guide its conduct." The book should show "how communication scholars engage with 'security' and how securities studies scholars conceptualize 'communication' (p. 4).

This volume is designed to provide a substantive depiction of major theoretical, methodological and topical themes on the study of communication and Security. The editors understand the book "merely as a foundation on which more advanced research can be built" (p. 14).

After the comprehensive introduction of the editors on "conceptualizing communication and security" individual studies are grouped into three parts: "Communication Contexts and Genres," "Special Topics" and concluding with "The Futures of Communication and Security."

Like usual for such collections, the quality of the individual contributions differ but all of them conclude with a complete list of references. Most of the authors are from the United States reflecting the experiences there. The only five 'foreign' of the twenty-nine contributors are from Australia, Canada, China and Europe. The different fields of concerns of the first part of the book include group communication, health, intercultural, organizational and political communication; in the second part ten contributions are related in a more specific way to certain topics and fields. Here, however, Religion as a specific concern and communication experience is missing not only for the US but especially also for and in a continent like Asia. After all, images and statues but especially rituals play an important role to 'protect' people and property as can be seen for example in many buildings and houses in Thailand. Many rituals in different religions are 'security' related which is a special concern of this volume and should not be missing!

This publication concludes with an extensive list of names (pp. 410 to 425) and subjects (pp. 426-431).

BOOK REVIEW

Healy, Kevin and Robert H. Woods, Jr.: Ethics and Religion in the Age of Social Media: Digital Proverbs for Responsible Citizens (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019). 238 pp.

Nowadays if one is on the lookout for a book about digital communication to read or review, there is no lack of them on the market. *Ethics and Religion in the Age of Social Media* by Kevin Healey and Robert H. Woods Jr. represents one of numerous efforts to make sense of Internet communication technology and its impact on the present and the future world. At the time that this book is being read and reviewed, only the Kindle version is available for purchase online and hard copies can only be pre-ordered.

One reason that this book may catch the attention of scholars, researchers of religion, religious leaders or students in communication is because the title of the book and its subtitle "Digital Proverbs for Responsible Citizens" seem to draw together various areas that promise an interdisciplinary approach to the examination and critique of the social media culture. To a certain degree, the authors do live up to expectations by incorporating ideas from Scriptural scholars, theologians, philosophers, social scientists and especially Martin Luther King Jr, a religious leader and civil rights activist.

From the outset, the book makes clear its agenda to critique the techno-centric worldview propagated by Silicon Valley that employs language that seemingly imitates that of religious traditions like Christianity and Buddhism. Because of the tendency to appropriate religious terminology by tech giants such as Google and Facebook in describing their mission and vision, the authors have chosen to label these "quasi-religious ideological biases" as the "moral catechism of Silicon Valley."

Although religious catechism, for example that of the Catholic Church, contains thousands of items, the catechism of Silicon Valley, as listed in this book contains 5 rather simple and succinct ideas: (1) Information is wisdom; (2) Transparency is authenticity; (3) Convergence is integrity; (4) Processing is judgment; and (5) Storage is memory. The main portion and the most interesting section of the book is devoted to refuting these catechisms and points out how Silicon Valley and its influential inhabitants attempt to misrepresent these aspects of the tech culture as ethical virtues, which they decidedly are not. Instead of being virtues, they can be extremely harmful to human flourishing and well-being. Quoting the Catholic theologian and French sociologist Jacques Ellul, the authors write, "Excessive data do not enlighten the reader or the listener; they drown him." Information alone, argue the authors, is a far cry from wisdom. Information is related to wisdom, but wisdom is not just simply having access to unlimited data, but the ability to make use of information with prudence and contributes to the common good. In the same manner, tech companies call for transparency and equate it with authenticity. Transparency, according to them, means sharing more about yourself online to family and total strangers, and this somehow helps one to realize more fully one's authentic self. The authors dispute the idea that informational transparency serves as the basis for an authentic life. A degree of privacy and secrecy, they argue, is conducive to maintaining agency and is necessary for authentic development of individuals and organizations. They point out the irony that while Mark Zuckerberg calls for more sharing online and more transparency, he himself purchased four homes in his neighborhood in order to ensure that developers would not encroach on his privacy.

In their systematic presentation of each of the catechisms and subsequent refutation, the authors on multiple occasions accuse tech giants and their software engineers of hubris and harboring self-serving agendas. This is seen in how tech companies promote algorithmic processing of data as being more efficient and better than human judgment. People are made to believe that raw data is objective and has our best interests in mind, and platforms like Google, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter seem to cater to our personal interests and values through "personalized" content. In reality, the perceptive user

will often notice that she has been pigeonholed into certain identity categories that lie beyond her ability to control. The user finds herself having to endure an identity that has been constructed by others for their own benefit. When going online to these platforms, "We are sorted into silos or categories constructed by insurance companies and banks whose exploitation of user data often amounts to economic coercion." Even when the algorithm seems to be catering to our needs, it is in fact pandering to our "anxieties, fears, anger, prurience, and tribalism." At the same time that algorithms cater to our biases, they themselves also reflect the biases of the software engineers who knowingly or unknowingly code them into their programs. This is especially problematic because diversity is not a strong feature of tech companies located in Silicon Valley.

Despite the authors' critical stance towards the catechism propagated by Silicon Valley, which they describe as reflecting techno-centrism, data fundamentalism and informationism—all of which promote blind trust in technology, they are quick to point out that they are by no means against technological development. What the authors desire to do, however, is to express their "prophetic rage" in response to "an agitated awareness that something is wrong with a growing technological mindedness that privileges strident individualism over moral responsibility and elevates technical skill and efficiency over non-instrumental virtues such as moderation and humility." The authors believe they are speaking on behalf of all people "who are interested in fostering a humane collaboration between people and machines that does not subvert human dignity to profit and efficiency."

In effect, the authors call for a "digital humanism" which inspires them to develop corollaries to the refuted proverbs: (1) Information is not wisdom, so inform wisely; (2) Transparency is not authenticity, so strive for authentic transparency; (3) Convergence is not integrity, so integrate divergent elements; (4) Processing is not judgment, so process judiciously; and (5) Storage is not memory, so remember the virtue of forgetting. In building a digital humanism, the authors call on traditional

institutions in politics, business and commerce, education and civic and professional organizations to exercise their prophetic imagination to institute change. When traditional groups and individuals, especially journalists, reclaim their traditional gatekeeping power, they can counter the present techno-centric tides in order to "remain authentically human, or analogue beings in a digital world." Any struggle, according to the author should be non-violent, and therefore, they call for an ethic of non-violence in the digital age. This ethic of non-violence, they believe could be achieved by applying the guiding principles embedded in the speech of Martin Luther King in 1961 as a framework for the digital age.

The critique of the rising techno-centrism and the proposal for a digital humanism represent the two core aspects of the work. Reading the book, one does not get the sense, and indeed the authors have stated more or less that they are not interested in reverting back to an analogue world order. The call for a digital humanism stems from their unease with the intrusion by tech companies into ethical and religious domains that are beyond their purview. By not only misrepresenting the nature of traditional virtues, but doing so in a self-centered and self-serving manner, they threaten to distort reality and reshape it in their own image.

The danger to individuals and societies presented by techno-centric ideologies, unfortunately, seem quite overwhelming, and even beyond comprehension by the average consumer of technology. If even in developed countries like the United States people would simply surrender to being manipulated by tech companies, how could people in developing countries even begin to resist this digital tide? Despite the authors' suggestion of traditional institutions asserting their power, this assumes that such institutions do actually have power, which in many countries, they do not or have very little. In this case avid but poor social media users in Asia and Africa will continue to be vulnerable to algorithmic coercion, loss of privacy and user manipulation by software engineers. Although the authors of this book have done quite well in pointing out what is fundamentally wrong with the techno-centric

worldview and its application by influential tech companies, we are left to wonder if the world, especially the less privileged countries, has a chance to withstand this digital tide.

Anthony Le Duc, svd, PhD

Religion and Social Communication
The ARC Journal
Vol. 17 No. 1, 2019

Religion and Social Communication is the semiannual scholarly journal of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC), founded in 1999. ARC is an independent research center housed at St. John's University, Bangkok, Thailand. The ARC aims to:

- Facilitate, support and publish research on subjects related to Religion and Social Communication in Asia;
- Promote related publications in the field;
- Develop a network of interested researchers and institution;
- Foster interreligious dialogue and cooperation in the field.

ADVISORY BOARD

Franz-Josef Eilers, svd, PhD
University of Santo Tomas
Manila, Philippines

Binod C. Agrawal, PhD
Manipal University
Manipal, India

Chainarong Monthienvichienchai, PhD
St. John's University
Bangkok, Thailand

Kim Min-soo, PhD
Catholic University of Korea
Seoul, South Korea

Sebastian Periannan, PhD
St. Peter's Pontifical Institute
Bangalore, India

Editor-in-Chief
Anthony Le Duc, svd, PhD
Saengtham College
Samphran, Thailand

Assistant Editor
Kenneth E. Rayco, LPT, MA
Saint Jude Catholic School
Manila, Philippines

Religion and Social Communication invites papers, book reviews and abstracts that provide scholarly insights into the fields of Religion and Social Communication in Asia. The journal welcomes contributions from professional researchers as well as M.A. and Ph.D. students who are interested to publish their academic work within the themes of Religion and Social Communication. All papers go through peer review and editorial process. The ARC reserves the right to accept or decline submitted contributions in order to meet the standards of the publication. We gratefully acknowledge all contributions.

Manuscripts may be in the range of 3,000-4000 words for essays and 6,000-8,000 words for research papers. All submissions should use the Chicago Style format for referencing. Please include an abstract of 300-400 words and information about the author (name, email, affiliation).

For further information, including submissions, subscription and inquiries, please contact: arcstjohns.bkk@gmail.com.

Journal Subscription Rates
(includes shipping and handling)
Within Asia: US$ 25 two issues/year Outside Asia: US$ 40 two issues/year

Payments by check, MasterCard, Visa or US$ cash preferred. Kindly send full account number, expiration date, account name and signature for credit cards. Checks and/or money order transfers should be payable to the Asian Center and sent to the ARC Director at the stated ARC address.

Wire Transfer to:

Thai Military Bank Co., Ltd.
Ladprao Branch
Bangkok 1900, Thailand
Savings Account No. 175-2-02119-4