

Eric Hoenes Del Pinal, Marc Roscoe Loustau, and Kristin Norget, eds. *Mediating Catholicism: Religion and Media in Global Catholic Imaginaries*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. 245 pp. ISBN: 978-1-3502-2817-7.

As part of a series titled “New Directions in the Anthropology of Christianity,” this book brings together perspectives from all over the world on the religious use of media and the mediation of religion, particularly in the case of the Catholic Church. Coming in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many faith communities to make use of modern communications media to continue to provide spiritual care to their adherents despite health restrictions, this welcome volume provides invaluable insights on this increasingly important and emerging area in the contemporary dynamics of religion.

Building upon the principle of the Incarnation, Catholicism has always been a religion very much at home with mediation and mediatization. One of the articles in this book aptly calls this juxtaposition of religion and media a “pleonasm” since religion always involves mediation in one form or the other. Aside from the seven sacraments, vibrant and colorful expressions of popular piety in various places around the globe en flesh invisible realities by means of sensible signs. With the advent of modern technology, mediation takes on a distinct dimension, which this book explores, this time from the perspective of communication instead of systematic theology or sacramentology.

In the first article titled, “Mediatizing Holy Week: Guatemalan Catholic Experiments with Radio and Facebook,” Eric Hoenes del Pinal reflects on two experiences of using modern media to promote traditional Lenten observances in Guatemala: first in 2005 using FM radio and second in 2020 using social media at the height of the pandemic. His riveting and holistic analysis involves not only the use of technology or other communicative elements but also encompasses the sociological factors at play, such as commercial and economic interests, that are equally important to understand the way these media platforms operate.

Next, Katherine Dugan’s “NFP Online: The Mutable Religious Space of Social Media” traces the experiences of a Catholic Facebook

group made up of couples who have been using or are trying to use Natural Family Planning. Here we see the dynamics of Web 2.0 or the so-called ‘social media’ that brings together people of similar interests or concerns in online communities, more popularly known as social networks. Looking deep into the group’s exchanges where practical and technical matters such as menstrual cycles coalesce with faith convictions, she examines it deftly from the framework of three tensions that she identified in this virtual religious space: intimacy and anonymity; vulnerability and authority; the exceptional and ordinary.

From Africa, we have Ludovic Lado’s “The Stakes of Catholic Media Practices in Chad.” Here he probes the local Catholic Church’s use of media in comparison with the practice of other faith communities in the area. What he discovers is a deficit in engagement, especially when it comes to newer forms of media such as the Internet. He then proceeds to analyze this in a brief but incisive manner revolving mainly on the horizontal nature of online communication versus the Catholic Church’s traditionally vertical disposition.

Marc Roscoe Loustau’s chapter, “‘This station only runs on love’: Post-bureaucratic Evangelism in a Transylvanian Catholic Media Organization” looks into the experience of Radio Maria Transylvania, an affiliate of The World Family of Radio Maria which is present in over seventy countries around the world. Tracing the success of what is now “one of Romania’s largest Hungarian-language broadcasters” in a highly ambivalent climate that seems to stifle but at the same time support religious expression, this very interesting article, filled with many anecdotes, explores the management aspect of Catholic broadcasting where effective business practices combined with the values of Christian leadership and service.

Meanwhile, Hillary Kaell’s “A Touch of Love: On Words, Things and the Global Aspirations of U.S. Catholics” investigates the entextualization of the word “love” and how it is used particularly in the sponsorship materials of Unbound, the largest Catholic sponsorship organization in the United States. Here she tries to understand how the use of the word love, beyond being an effective way to bolster sponsorship appeals, is able to shape a certain theology of sponsorship

in the process. Aside from this, a section of the article explores the organization's relationship with the institutional Church, and the role of media in its dynamics, which is certainly of interest to any Catholic organization.

Julius Bautista's contribution titled "Religious Celebrities and the Expansion of Suffering in the Philippines and Timor-Leste" analyzes how the celebrification of religious figures like Bishop Belo of Timor-Leste and the transformation of religious events such as Lenten crucifixion rituals in the Philippines into a media spectacle often "flattens" them to a formulaic narrative that barely does justice to their deeper existential, spiritual and moral aspects. In this intriguing ethnography, Bautista takes a critical look at the way media can sometimes distort religious subjects when it covers them without enough rigor, depth, and nuance or usurps them for various agenda.

Afterward, we have Thomas Csordas' article, "Exorcism in the Media" which touches on the Catholic ritual of driving out demons, frequently portrayed in different forms of media especially in horror films, at times even based on actual events. In particular, this article focuses on two documentaries that feature exorcists, as it analyzes and later on compares their treatment of exorcism.

We also have "Abundance and the Late Capitalist Imagination: Catholicism and Fashion at the Metropolitan Museum" by Elayne Oliphant. In this very keen and insightful article, she reflects on the highly phenomenal yet equally controversial 2018 exhibit at the Met, titled, "Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination." Her discussion centers on the notion of abundance, which, as it turns out, can be a curious meeting place for Catholicism – at least in its sense of fashion as in bygone days – and today's capitalist and consumerist culture.

Penultimately, Kristin Norget's "Miraculous Sovereignities: Mediation and the Señor de los Milagros in Lima, Peru" inquires into the cult of the famed image of Christ in Peru and how grand spectacles such as these, beyond being "merely religious" can also be mediations of power and instruments of its legitimation and consolidation. In what she

terms as the “theopolitics of the miraculous,” Norget’s rich and detailed ethnography of the largest Catholic procession in Latin America if not the whole world delves into the not-so-subtle political undercurrents at work in this sacred event.

Last but not least, we have Luis Mauro Sá Martino’s “The Mediatization of Catholicism: Some Challenges and Remarks” as a fitting close to the volume, where he highlights certain insights and questions that he had while reading the earlier essays. An especially interesting section of his chapter dwells on the figure of Brazilian charismatic priests, Father Marcelo Rossi and Father Fábio de Melo who rose in popularity due to the way they engaged with media and popular culture.

Overall, this book, which comes at a very exciting time when faith communities are at various levels of discovering, exploring, and maximizing the media at their disposal, would be a great addition to any library as an indispensable resource when it comes to the field of religion and society, especially under the aspect of communication. It certainly helps that the book is written in a way that is accessible and engaging not only for scholars and academics but also for communicators and pastors for whom they would surely be of much interest and help.

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