

THE CHURCH AND

NEW MEDIA



BLOGGING CONVERTS,
ONLINE ACTIVISTS,
AND BISHOPS
WHO TWEET

BRANDON
VOGT

ENDORSEMENTS FOR *THE CHURCH AND NEW MEDIA*

Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan, archbishop of New York

"My expectation is that this book will give the Church courage and wisdom to embrace New Media as one of the premier gifts of God to evangelists of our day."

Cardinal Seán O'Malley, O.F.M. Cap., archbishop of Boston

"This book demonstrates how New Media is already impacting the Church and outlines many practical steps for dioceses, parishes, and individual Catholics to embrace it more broadly.... Everyone involved in communications and evangelization ministries for the Church should read it."

Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington

"From the quill to the printing press to the modern app, the Church has faced the challenge of preaching the Word of God in a way that each generation will hear it. *The Church and New Media* offers an insightful contribution to the way in which the Church passes on the Gospel message in the age of new social communication. This book helps us understand both the potential and the challenges of blogging, tweeting, and all the multiple forms of the new communications. I am pleased to recommend this very useful guide for individuals, parishes, and diocesan workers who seek to use the New Media to proclaim the Gospel and pass on the faith."

Archbishop Charles Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., archbishop of Denver

"*The Church and New Media* is the best kind of reading: timely, vivid, and rich in valuable information. For anyone seeking to understand and use today's new technologies in advancing the Catholic faith, this book is an unsurpassed resource."

Monsignor Paul Tighe, Secretary of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Social Communications

"Brandon Vogt's book *The Church and New Media* is a wonderful guide to the emerging presence of American Catholic voices in the digital arena. The book is not primarily an instruction manual telling us how to use New Media; more significantly, it shows us what can be done. By showcasing some proven initiatives, it invites us to reflect on how we can witness to our faith in the new 'public square' that is being created by social media. We can learn from the expertise of those who are already actively ensuring that the Church is present in this 'new continent,' but perhaps more importantly, we can take heart from their enthusiasm and be encouraged by the fruitfulness of their labor."

Mike Aquilina, author and executive vice president of the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology

"If St. Peter, St. Ignatius, and St. Augustine had access to today's New Media, they would do exactly the same things as the contributors to this book. *The Church and New Media* carries the Church's mission into the digital age and is better than a graduate degree in media. You'll learn 'what works' from Catholics who are already spreading the Gospel through these tools. Marshall McLuhan would be well pleased."

James Martin, S.J., author of *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything*

"This important new book reminds all Catholics of the need to use any means at our disposal to spread the Gospel. After all, Jesus of Nazareth used easy-to-understand images like birds, seeds, and clouds in the medium known as the parable to convey his message. Today's evangelical media are blogs, websites, and social media (and no doubt something invented in the last few months). If Jesus could speak about the birds of the air, then we should not be afraid of Tweeting."

Amy Welborn, popular Catholic author and blogger

"In *The Church and the New Media*, Brandon Vogt presents helpful essays from a variety of Catholics active in online ministry. The experiences and advice of this diverse group of bloggers, social networkers, and Internet evangelists will be helpful to any Catholic seeking to utilize the Internet to present the Catholic faith, as well as to understand its risks and potential."

Elizabeth Scalia, managing editor of the *Catholic Portal* at *Patheos.com* and the blogger known as "The anchoress"

"As the Catholic Church makes a dynamic entry into the virtual arena — encouraging its priests, religious, and laypeople to embrace alternative media, and introducing its own multi-media brand in *News.va* — *The Church and New Media* is that rarest of things: precisely the right book, released at precisely the right time. Brandon Vogt has a true journalist's ability to bring disparate components together for analysis and breakdown; here he manages to use well-known and newer voices to demonstrate the power of this revolutionary means of evangelization, and its lasting impact. This is relevant, timely reading for Catholics who wonder how emerging media can positively impact the life of faith in the 21st Century."

Sister Helena Burns, media literacy educator for the *Daughters of St. Paul and Pauline Books and Media*

"*The Church and New Media* is the book for all engaged Catholics to be reading and talking about! It is full of sage advice for utilizing the exciting panoply of new media.

"Its unique format lets the Catholic New Media movers, shakers, and early-adopters tell their own stories. The book introduces us to some of its stellar leaders who are answering the call of both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI to carry out the New Evangelization."

Mark Hart, vice president of Life Teen International and author of *Blessed Are the Bored in Spirit: A Young Catholic's Search for Meaning*

"*The Church and New Media* is a timely and necessary read for all serving the Church today. The book's lucid insights and practical ideas should be shared and replicated by Catholics around the globe.

"For years, the Church has been challenged to share the Gospel with a screen-based culture. But *The Church and New Media* offers some viable solutions, a sorely needed guide for the Church today.

"If those entrusted with handing on the faith subscribe to the principles within this book, the Gospel will undoubtedly take root in our modern, tech-savvy culture."

Dan Andriacco, author of *Screen Saved* and communications director for Archdiocese of Cincinnati

"Brandon Vogt has compiled an outstanding handbook of digital evangelism, written by some of the most successful pioneers in the field. From theological underpinnings to practical advice, this book has something new to tell you wherever you are — from Catholic mom with a blogging itch to diocesan professional. I particularly appreciated the often-repeated admonition to avoid negativity in our digital communications and instead embrace the faith with joy. That's the way to evangelize!"

John Dyer, author of *From the Garden to the City: The Redeeming and Corrupting Power of Technology*

"Brandon Vogt has assembled some of the best examples of Catholics stepping into our media-saturated, technology-dominated world in order to draw people to Christ. Vogt is careful to point out the potential negatives that can come with today's technology, but rather than concluding that we should fearfully reject the new tools, he and his fellow writers show us how to enthusiastically and deftly embrace them."

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15 14 13 12 11 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

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ISBN: 978-1-59276-033-6 (Inventory No. T1170)

LCCN: 2011927411

Cover design: Lindsey Riesen.

Cover art: Statue of St. Peter, Shutterstock; stained-glass image of Moses, The Crosiers.

Interior design: Amanda Falk.

Interior art: Image of ChurchAndNewMedia.com home page courtesy of Brandon Vogt.

Printed in the United States of America

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// INTRODUCTION: THE DIGITAL CONTINENT //

Brandon Vogt

The Church and Old Media

Christianity reveals a God who uses all sorts of media to get his message across, from pillars of fire to bright stars, from burning bushes to a talking donkey. He delivered the Ten Commandments on chiseled rock, painted rainbows to signal his covenant, and used a cross to display his love.

However, the Bible doesn't mention God using emails, blog posts, podcasts, or e-books — and when the prophet Habakkuk [2:2] quotes God saying, "Write the vision; make it plain upon tablets," he wasn't promoting iPads, either! Even though these technologies don't show up in Scripture, history has shown that God showers down new mediums at specific times to spread his Word in new ways.

For its first one-and-a-half thousand years, Christianity's dominant form of communication was hand-copied print, with parchments, scrolls, and books transmitting sacred writings. These texts were used in the liturgy and were proclaimed at special religious gatherings. During these early centuries, if Christians wanted to absorb pieces of Scripture, they typically had to find a community that would read them aloud.

The 15th century, however, saw Christianity's first major communication shift. When Johannes Gutenberg invented the movable-type printing press, he influenced not only *what* Christians communicated but *how*. Through Gutenberg's invention, religious texts were quickly produced, copied, and disseminated across the world. This shifted the focus of Christianity from listening to reading, from the community to the individual, and from concrete images to abstract theology.

Roughly 450 years after this radical change, a new technology called "radio" entered the scene. The Catholic Church

was one of the first to harness this new medium, with the charismatic Fulton Sheen beginning his weekly *Catholic Hour* in 1930.¹ The show's audience grew quickly, and after two decades, four million people tuned in each week to hear America's most famous evangelist.

In 1951, Sheen was appointed auxiliary bishop of New York and soon moved — along with the Church — to the world's next new technology: television. Sheen's *Life is Worth Living* show continued his radio success, attracting 30 million weekly viewers at its peak.²

Sheen wasn't alone as a prominent Catholic television personality. In 1981, Mother Angelica debuted EWTN, the Eternal Word Television Network. The network's early programming was broadcast from a garage at Our Lady of the Angels Monastery in Alabama. Today, EWTN is the largest religious media network in the world, reaching more than 146 million homes in 127 countries.³

Throughout history, the Church aptly discerned the power of each of these past technologies — print, radio, and television — even in light of each medium's disadvantages. But while the Church recognized the potency of these prior tools, nobody could have foreseen the power of what came next.

The Digital Revolution

In 1943, the president of IBM purportedly claimed that “there is a world market for maybe five computers.” A few decades later, the president of another technology company asserted, “There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home.”⁴

In hindsight, neither man could have been more wrong. The last few decades have witnessed a digital explosion unimaginable 50 years ago, sparked by the advent of the Internet and its World Wide Web.

As in earlier times, the Church was quick to adopt these new tools. The Vatican created one of the Internet's earliest sites in 1995, making many Church documents available on the Web. The Vatican webpage modeled the style of most other pages over the next half-decade: static, information repositories featuring one-way communication — from the website to the user.

But a second wave of innovation began with the new millennium. The early 21st century introduced the burgeoning New Media, encompassing blogs, social media, text messaging, and other digital tools.

Though the classification is nebulous, New Media has many typical features that distinguish it from its predecessors. New Media usually provides on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device,⁵ accomplishing this through the vast interconnectivity of the Web.

But a primary, defining characteristic of all New Media is *dialogue*. While traditional media features static content and one-way flows of information — like the Vatican's early website — New Media transmits content through connection and conversation. It enables people around the world to share, comment on, and discuss a wide variety of topics. Unlike any of the past technologies, New Media is grounded on interactive community.

One of the first examples of New Media emerged around the turn of the millennium. Blogs — short for “web logs” — were introduced as websites featuring regularly updated entries. In contrast to traditional sites, blogs allowed readers to interact with the original author, forming the social backbone of the digital revolution.

Blogs helped spark the first social network, Friendster, which debuted in 2002. Friendster gathered real-world friends into an online community and became popular fast: in its first

three months, the site gained three million users. Friendster was followed a year later by MySpace, which competed with Friendster but sported a more youth-friendly culture.

In 2004, a new social networking site was launched by students at Harvard University as a way to connect U.S. college students.⁶ Facebook, as it was eventually branded, had an appealing exclusivity — you had to have a college email address to join. This made it especially popular among young adults, who didn't want to mingle online with parents or children. The site gained over 200 million users in its first eight months, eventually opening itself up to the world.⁷

YouTube was the next major New Media creation. Produced in 2005 and now owned by search-engine giant Google, YouTube is the most popular online video destination. The site receives over two billion views per day, nearly double the prime-time audience of all three major television networks combined.⁸

One year after YouTube, the micro-blogging service Twitter was introduced, inviting users to share “tweets” of 140 characters or less. The site now has over 190 million users who generate 65 million new tweets each day.⁹

The statistics surrounding these and other New Media tools simply boggle the mind:

- The average American spends 66 hours per month on a computer outside of work.¹⁰ While pornography had once been the dominant Internet activity, social media has now taken the top slot.¹¹
- Facebook, the Internet's most popular website,¹² has over 500 million users, half of whom log in every single day. If Facebook were a country, it would be the world's third largest, behind only China and India.¹³ Facebook users spend over 700 billion minutes each month on the site, sharing over 30 billion pieces of content.¹⁴

- YouTube visitors watch over two billion videos every day. Every minute, 24 hours of new video are uploaded to the site.¹⁵
- Singers Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber, and Britney Spears each have over 6.5 million Twitter followers.¹⁶ Any message they “tweet” will instantly reach millions of people in a matter of seconds.
- The Internet features over 200 million blogs, according to conservative estimates.¹⁷ More than 75 percent of Internet users regularly read blogs.¹⁸
- Almost half of Americans have listened to a podcast, while two-thirds of those people have listened in their car.¹⁹
- Seventy-two percent of Americans — including 87 percent of teens — communicate through text messaging.²⁰ Last year alone, Americans sent 1.8 trillion text messages.²¹

Existing in a world that has dramatically embraced New Media, the Church finds herself at a crossroads. This is the new habitat for the majority of Christians.

The question is, will the Church take up residence too?

The Digital Continent

At the 43rd World Communications Day, Pope Benedict XVI encouraged Catholics to boldly enter the “digital continent.” Despite being over 80 years old, Benedict keenly recognizes this digital world for what it is: a ripe mission field for the Church.

Many individuals have already staked claim to chunks of this online land, establishing rich hubs of evangelization and formation. Others have built welcoming communities that are expanding every day. And some have harnessed the power of New Media to serve the common good.

Throughout this book, you’ll find contributions and highlights from many New Media pioneers, guides who are

navigating the Church through uncharted digital waters. The book is divided into four sections, each emphasizing one of the Church's main online missions.

The first section covers New Media and evangelization. Father Robert Barron explains how he uses New Media to engage the secular online world — including its “new atheists” — while answering what he deems the “YouTube heresies.” Jennifer Fulwiler recounts how she blogged her way from atheism to Catholicism. And Marcel LeJeune, a college campus minister at Texas A&M University, describes how New Media connects young adults to the Church.

In the second section, which covers New Media and formation, you'll learn how these tools can form and strengthen one's faith. Mark Shea explores the beauties and dangers of Christian blogging, while Taylor Marshall discusses how New Media can unwrap ancient truths. Father Dwight Longenecker then describes how he uses his blog to dialogue with people from other Christian traditions.

The book's third section concerns New Media and community. Scot Landry and Matt Warner offer a wealth of practical tips on how dioceses and parishes can implement New Media tools. And Lisa Hendeby explores the growing online community fostered by New Media's social nature.

The final section covers New Media and the common good. In his chapter, Thomas Peters rallies Christians to be faithful online activists. And Shawn Carney tells the story of how the world's largest pro-life movement used New Media to save lives and change hearts.

In addition to each of these chapters, dozens of sidebars appear throughout the book. Some feature excerpts from Church documents relevant to New Media, while others highlight Catholics who are using New Media creatively and effectively.

Throughout the book, you'll discover many unique vantage points on the Church and New Media relationship, from young to old, clergy to laypeople, and men to women. Since this digital revolution spans all demographics and all spheres of the Church, this book approaches it from many different angles.

One final note: New Media can at times be intimidating. But the learning curve isn't steep, and you're not alone.

To help you out as you journey across the digital continent, I've included a Glossary in the back of the book, which defines some common New Media terms. In addition, the book's Appendix provides many New Media recommendations, while the book's website (www.ChurchAndNewMedia.com) includes even more helpful content.

Giving the Internet a Soul

The Church can't change her responses to Gutenberg's printing press, the radio, or the television; they are forever fixed in history. But at the onset of this digital revolution, her response to New Media is wide open.

The world is waiting and listening in the virtual sphere. Will the Church remain silent, or will her voice be proclaimed from the rooftops (and the laptops)? Will she plunge the message of Christ into Facebook feeds, blog posts, podcasts, and text messages, or will she be digitally impotent?

If the Church's promotion of evangelization, formation, community, and the common good is to continue throughout future generations, she must harness these technologies and utilize them well.

In this book, you'll witness the Church's first steps across the digital continent. And by the end, you'll be compelled to join the march yourself.

May this guide stir your imagination and excitement as you help give the Internet a soul!

“Without fear we must set sail on the digital sea, facing into the deep with the same passion that has governed the ship of the Church for two thousand years.... [W]e want to qualify ourselves by living in the digital world with a believer’s heart, helping to give a soul to the Internet’s incessant flow of communication.”²²

— POPE BENEDICT XVI (2010)