

Daniella Zsupan-Jerome. *Connected Toward Communion: The Church and Social Communication in the Digital Age*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014. 156 pages. \$17.95.

The proliferation of digit media has contributed towards a broad cultural shift that has impacted the church. Zsupan-Jerome's intention for writing *Connected Toward Communion* entails demonstrating how digital technology and all of its accompanying conflicts actually functions as a means for community building as intended with Christ's mission, passion, death, and resurrection. In six concise chapters, the author builds on the scholarship of Meredith Gould in terms media literacy as an essential requisite for the expansion of the Gospel. Early in the text, the author addresses four pillars of priestly formation, which include: human formation, spiritual formation, intellectual formation, and pastoral formation with the new digital media outlets having a significant role to play in each. "Teaching as dispensing content no longer dominates; the digital media offer access to information at an unprecedented scale" (16). As a result the classroom, lectern, and pulpit have lost its collective monopoly on education. Zsupan-Jerome references documents such as the *Inter Mirifica* and the *Communio et Progressio* as ecclesiastical themes which provide the general message of the role of the media as a theologically sanctioned and mandated means to support the Church in its evangelistic mission.

At the brink of the dawn of postmodernity, the second Vatican Council addressed the significance of communication with respect to the trajectory of the Church in light of new advances and challenges in the digital age. "With the advent of digital media, social communication has shifted away from sheer instrumentality towards a culture marked by an increasingly participatory experience" (74). In chapter four entitled "Twenty Years Later," the author describes postmodernism as a response to the brokenness of mainstream culture and its accompanying values. Technological has been a contributing factor towards society reaching a stage in history where it must accept the reality of cultural pluralism while attempting to find innovative ways to regain the loss sense of optimism in which modernism had implicitly promised.

The book directly addresses a mission oriented Roman Catholic clergy and lay leadership audience in a Western industrialized setting. However, *Connected Toward Communion* contains equally relevant information regarding the mass media as an emerging institution that has permeated through nearly every fabric of society including the church across ecumenical lines. Zsupan-Jerome integrates ecclesiology with mass communications as a means to demonstrate that innovative advances in media technology contribute towards the perfecting of the Church's evangelistic mission. The author raises the issue of "post-humanism" as the potential for technology to break the barriers of human finitude (55). However, a more balanced approach towards such a topic would include a discussion about the potential unintended consequences that can result if humanity fails to adequately manage and contain such advancements. As a product of the age of advanced technology, electronic gadgets paradoxically provide an easy means for individuals to hide their faces and avoid intimacy. Furthermore, the author acknowledges that among the greatest dysfunctions of new forms of mass media include discussion board hate speech, and cyberbullying. Such actions contribute to increased social isolation while undermining the dignity of humanity.

The author accomplishes the difficult goal of drawing the connection between communication and communion. Beyond the two words having a common etymology, one of the purposes of the sacrament of communion entails an invitation of fragmented parts of the community to the whole of the Body of Christ. “In the Eucharistic encounter, word and sacrament communicate Christ’s presence, inviting us into a communal encounter to physically receive as sacrament that which has been proclaimed as word” (109). Not only does the Eucharist function as a means of communication, but it also exemplifies the celebration of Christ as the ultimate communicator.

Although the text stresses the importance that media presence has for both priestly formation and integrating remote communities into one greater universal network, the book could further benefit from a discussion of alternatives to digital media because a significant portion of the world’s population lacks access to modern technology. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, the U.S. digital divide results in exclusion of approximately fifteen percent of the population from relative access to the internet (58). Due to the wider digital divide on a global level, the book could have further addressed the strengths and the needs for church communities in least industrialized nations where authentic communal relationships exist despite relative technological deficiencies. Nevertheless *Connected Toward Communion* serves as a cutting-edge ministerial resource for meeting the needs of the Twenty-first century.

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