CHAPTER 31

Changing Uses of Old and New Media in World Christianity

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Introduction: Outline and Definitions

The availability and uses of different media have significantly increased over recent decades. Within rapidly evolving communicative contexts, churches regularly interact with multiple kinds of media, while Christians serve both as media producers and consumers. Alongside newspaper articles, radio broadcasts and television programs, there are ever increasing numbers of web sites, phone "apps," and digital short films. There are a number of factors that have contributed to this exponential growth: advances within communicative technologies and the convergence of different media, as well as the rise of global Pentecostalism and the spread of diverse Protestant and Catholic movements. Within these different traditions media are used for a wide variety of purposes, from teaching or evangelism to self-expression or self-promotion. Such communication often crosses national, continental and ethnic boundaries.

Media production and reception by Christians around the world are so varied and complex that a brief chapter such as this cannot provide an exhaustive survey. Instead, we concentrate upon concrete examples, in order to consider contrasting media productions, contexts and uses found across global Christianity. Though they may appear to be unique to Christian communities, the reasons for using media are not always overtly theological. There are, for example, surprising similarities in purpose between the Bolshevik use of media to challenge the church in the 1920s and the Western missionaries who used media to "evangelize" within former colonies. Such dynamic purposiveness also makes for surprising collaborations, similar to the one described below between political revolutionaries and Roman Catholic Christians in Guatemala.

This discussion is structured around three aspects of media: histories, productions and receptions. These categories are not airtight. For example, media production is

no longer restricted to professional, highly trained producers, as individuals, with no formal training, are now able to create digital productions themselves using mobile phones and the internet. Moreover, communication technologies are evolving and converging so rapidly that radio, television and film can no longer be solely viewed as discrete media. Movies, programs and broadcasts can all be found online. In order to understand the evolving role of media within World Christianity it is also necessary to consider media histories, social contexts, and technological transformations. These elements have contributed to how Christians have used and are using these developing media technologies, as well as how belief and practices have been shaped by their use.

Alongside histories, productions, and receptions, it is useful to distinguish between "primary" and "secondary" media. Primary media include spoken or sung words, facial movements, and other forms of non-verbal communication. The communicator, who uses primary media, must normally be present. This is a direct form of communication where voice, face, or body is the actual tool of communication. The use of primary media by Christians would include monks singing unaccompanied plainsong in monasteries, street or field preachers speaking to crowds of listeners, or liturgical dancers performing expressive interpretations of biblical stories. "Secondary media" refers to forms of communication where the original creator does not need to be present for the media to be effective. In a traditional sense, a pen, a brush, a chisel, or musical instrument may serve as a tools of secondary media. Historically, Christians have made extensive use of secondary media: Missionaries embraced the use of pamphlets, tracts, and posters to promote their understandings of Christianity (Morgan 1999). These early uses of media by Christians have a postcolonial legacy that we discuss below.

These two categories of primary and secondary media are made more complex by the advent of "electronic media." In this third category, through radio, television, films and computers, the communicator can appear to be present while overcoming barriers of time and space. "Electronic media" is often now also divided between "old media" (such as the telegraph, film, and radio) and "new media" (such as the internet, the mobile phone and other more recent technologies that rely upon digital technologies). Through different "old" and "new" media, space and time can be compressed, so that distant places are brought close and lengthy events abbreviated. These two categories of old and new media are not watertight and often overlap in contemporary practice with the use of the internet, so that a video- or audio-recording of a church service might be distributed over the internet as streaming video or as an audio podcast.

The embracing of these rapidly expanding and changing forms of media by Christians around the world can be seen as a move beyond earlier criticisms of the media. The widespread use of both new and old media stands in contrast to those in past decades, particularly in the West, who were highly critical of new or dominant forms of media, such as radio, film or television. Each new communicative technology became a target of criticism. For example, several highly critical accounts of television emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, which partly reveal logo-centric theologies, as well as a nostalgia for the printed word and the logical, linear world that it apparently upheld (Muggeridge 1977; Ellul 1985; and Postman 1985). Such criticisms have not, however, undermined the use of television or other media by Christians for a host of communicative ends. The extensive uses of media in World Christianity today reveal more confident engagements and creative productions.

Histories

Any historical account is complicated by the fact that electronic media, even the so-called "old media," are not very old in comparison to many of the non-electronic media used by Christians. Many of these somewhat confusingly named "old" technologies did not exist until the past century and a half, or in the case of the internet, only a few decades ago. This means that use of the electronic media is still a relatively new phenomenon. Television, for example, became increasingly popular in Europe and North America during the 1950s, but it took several further decades for it to be put to extensive use in the South or "developing world." As a brief survey of selected media "histories" in World Christianity reveals, there are ambiguous legacies in media use that continue to persist. Media were used to colonize, oppress and even enslave. These histories are not, however, determinative of current use. Instead, use of media in World Christianity carries both continuities and discontinuities with earlier communicative legacies. Media can still be used to caricature or demonize the other, though it can also be used to promote peaceful engagement with former enemies (Mitchell 2012).

The ambiguous use of media can be clearly seen in the colonial entanglement between media and Christianity. Because many of the so-called "old media" were first used by Christians during periods of colonial expansion by Western nations, the history of Christian use of these media technologies is entangled with that of colonialism. This can be seen in the histories of film in both West and East Africa. During the early development of cinema in the first part of the twentieth century, moving pictures were both produced and used by incomers to Africa. In particular, foreign missionaries and colonial authorities made use of moving pictures for educational or evangelistic purposes. Though the novelty of these films, displayed using portable projection equipment or in purpose-built outdoor or indoor cinema, often drew large crowds, early reception of these films varied. For example, Amadou Hampaté Ba, a well-known author from Mali, recalls a screening shown in his village in 1908, which the French governor insisted that the local population should view. In opposition, as Bottomore summarizes, the religious leaders pronounced that it was a:

> "satanic seduction" and those people who did turn up thought the images diabolical and closed their eyes. A generation later films were shown in the village and Ba persuaded his mother to watch and a few days later she thanked him for this, because she now decided that cinema was not, after all, irreligious. (1999: 216)

This account shows how for many across the world, initial suspicion of cinema (inspired in part by personal belief and religious authorities) was either moderated or even replaced by appreciation for film. Responses to film evolved as the medium became more commonplace. This can be seen in other parts of the world.

In a similar way, the early reception of film by religious authorities in tsarist Russia was ambivalent or suspicious. Initially, the cinematic portrayal of Jesus was a complete taboo and provided the basis for Russia's first film censorship document

in 1898: "On the inadmissibility of holy subjects being shown by means of the so-called 'Living photography'." Just over a decade later, in 1913, the tsar famously suggested, "I consider cinematography to be an empty, useless and even pernicious diversion." Yet this denouncement cloaked a more ambivalent attitude. Following the precedent set by the czar, who employed a court film-maker to record significant events, between 1907 and the World War I over 1,800 newsreels were produced and a number of fiction films which depicted religious themes and figures. After the 1917 revolution, the new communist leaders were even more enthusiastic about the use of film for propaganda purposes. An article by Leon Trotsky in *Pravda* on "Vodka, the Church, and the Cinema" (July 12, 1923) reveals the belief that film could be used to undermine Christianity in post-revolutionary Russia: "The cinema amuses, educates, strikes the imagination by images, and liberates you from the need of crossing the church door." In other words cinema had the potential to replace the need for visiting traditional places for worship. Trotsky and other early Soviet film-makers believed that cinema could be used as a powerful tool of persuasion to promote the new atheistic regime.

Several Western governments observed how the Bolsheviks in post-revolutionary Russia used film as a tool for propaganda and deployed this example in various locations throughout Africa. The British Colonial office, the International Missionary Council, and the Carnegie Trust supported the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (BEKE) which was set up in 1936 for work in East Africa. The project produced thirty-five black and white films that covered educational topics including soil erosion, infant malaria, and the Boy Scouts. These films were shown to over one hundred thousand people and this paved the way for a new effort begun in 1939, the Colonial Film Unit, which sought to persuade African audiences to support Britain during the Second World War. The films reflect faith in the colonial enterprise and they have been criticized for idealizing the West and caricaturing African culture and traditional religions.

It was not until the 1960s that Africans themselves began to produce films in significant numbers, the success of which can be seen in the All-African film festival (FESPACO) in Burkino Faso, which began in 1969. Many of the films produced under these auspices question the religious traditions that were being brought to Africa. In this way, they offer a critique of the darker sides of the missionary efforts of both Islam and Christianity. The film *Ceddo* (1977, directed by Ousmane Sembène from Senegal) is one the best known films to tackle this subject with the "*ceddo*" or "commoners" attempting to resist the encroachments of both Christian and Islamic missionaries. This critical posture, however, is not universal. As we discuss further in the section on "Productions," there is now a growing movement in West African film towards locally produced productions, which commonly portray certain kinds of Christianity in a highly positive light. Locally produced Nollywood (i.e., Nigerian) films have become big business. Portraying charismatic forms of Christianity has proved attractive to film audiences not only in West Africa but also in Southern and Eastern Africa. In the next sections we examine different Christian uses and experiences of old and new media in contexts across the world. These portraits provide the basis for an examination of the reasons and contexts for Christian use of media.

Productions

"Productions" serve as the initial stage in the circuit of communication as they provide the basis for the creation of media. This stage includes both the productive processes (e.g. filming, editing, or scriptwriting) and the social relationships by which media outputs come to be made. A substantial change in Christian use and generation of media has come in the past century with regards to infrastructure. While early expressions of Christian media employed existing public and private mass communications infrastructure, more recently Christian media producers have begun to purchase and to develop their own radio and television broadcasting infrastructure. This is, in some cases to gain further control over evangelism, but also as an avenue to enlarging the prestige of individual preachers or churches. These productive enterprises also involve a wide variety of media including television, music, and radio.

In a study of Pentecostal preachers in South America, Smith and Campos observe how preachers in Brazil have "built successful religious franchises that have accumulated sufficient resources to finance major incursions into the commercial media" (Smith and Campos 2005: 49). This marks a new frontier for non-Western Christian use of media. As in many other cases across the world, early experiments by Brazilian evangelicals in television media were frustrated by high costs for production and commercial air time and as a result much of the initial Christian television broadcasting deployed in Brazil, starting in 1978, was imported from the US (p. 57). The recent success of the Universal Church of the Reign of God (IURD) provides a locally developed example of a Christian media empire in Brazil which is able to accumulate necessary funds to underwrite major media ventures. The founder of the IURD, Edir Macedo, acquired a commercial network Reid Record in 1989 for $45 million and the headquarters and production equipment of a TV station, Jovem Pan, for $15 million (p. 58). On the basis of this acquisition, IURD's marketing strategy "includes the use of all forms of media: radio, television, newspapers, magazines and the Internet" (p. 58). While the localization of Christian production of media is a noteworthy change, as Smith and Campos go on to relate, this newly indigenous media empire has also provided the basis for intensified commodification of religious faith pioneered by North American television preachers: "The Pentecostal television preachers market individualized consumer religion . . . consumers, whatever their social class, enter the marketplace and take from the shelf those symbolic goods they need to get them through the week: an ounce of self-esteem, a packet of hope, a portion of pardon, essence of encounter with the divine" (p. 61). In the case of IURD, this is facilitated by media broadcasts with a "blessing address," which direct people towards local temples where offerings are received. The authors of this study suggest this "highly centralised network of temples" function as "religious franchises, capable of generating a large and reliable flow of cash" (p. 59). While this new Brazilian venture serves as an example of a new local autonomy from Western productions, they nevertheless maintain some connection to the commercial paradigms latent in North American Christian television production.

Another new local expression of Christian media can be found with the contemporary use of film and television in parts of Africa. Here again, one finds local elements, which have been adapted to fit perceived audiences. Just as above, some media critics

argue that practice in this context also contains vestiges of colonial media production practice. Several African countries have not yet produced a full-length feature film, and cinemas and video shops in certain parts of Africa are dominated by films from Hollywood and Bollywood. Significant exceptions to this rule are Nigeria and Ghana. These two countries are experiencing something of a renaissance in locally produced films. Films produced here are gaining circulation and popularity across Anglophone Africa. Particularly noteworthy in these films is the prominence of religious themes, which reflect local beliefs and practices. Yet these films are not without controversy. They frequently caricature, stereotype or even demonize traditional religious leaders (Mitchell 2004). By contrast, in the same films, pastors from the independent Pentecostal or Charismatic churches are often portrayed as powerful and dynamic as they help to overcome evil forces. In one example, in the Nigerian film *Magic Money*, the final scene portrays a showdown between a Christian pastor and African traditional priest where both summon help from their respective Gods. Both dance on the spot and gesticulate aggressively, but the Christian pastor is able to call upon a more powerful force and the traditional priest is literally laid low. In this way, some Nollywood films slide into what has been described as an unjustified attack upon traditional religion. These are consciously produced to appeal to audiences composed of Charismatic or Pentecostal Christians (Meyer 2005).

While in the previous example, media are mobilized to provide entertainment and education for Christians, in another example with the television-saturated Christian context of Ghana, we find that the reciprocal situation is also possible, where media can contribute to the shaping of Christianity. Scholars in communication studies have identified this phenomenon as part of what is described as "mediatization," where "religion is increasingly being subsumed under the logic of the media, both in terms of institutional regulation, symbolic content and individual practices" (Hjavard 2008: 11). In a study on televised Christianity, J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu argues that neo-Pentecostal Christians in Ghana have developed "a unique religious discursive practice suited to the demands of the media" (2005: 10). In this way of thinking, producers are not passively (or exclusively) shaped by mediatization. Instead, the engagement between producer and media is more dynamic. Asamoah-Gyadu notes that the worship services of Charismatic Ministries (CMs) are often developed specifically around parameters set by television production. Drawing upon the critique of television developed by John Fiske in *Television Culture*, Asamoah-Gyadu argues that the medium and production of television creates a visually generated cultural reinforcement. This is because, as Fiske explains, television production uses elements such as angle and focus to give us a seemingly "perfect view of the scene" (2011: 5). He goes on to argue that "much of the pleasure of television realism comes from this sense of omniscience that it gives us" (p. 5). On this basis, pastors are visually presented as "social heroes" of the charismatic gospel of prosperity. While some scholars (see Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose 1996) deny that this is an authentically African expression of Christianity, Asamoah-Gyadu argues that a more subtle appropriation is at work: "The media ministries of Ghana's CMs reflect modern African ingenuity in the appropriation of neo-Pentecostal techniques, style and strategy in organization and expression" (2005: 21). While it was assumed that the fall from grace of many televangelists in the USA (such as

Jimmy Baker or Jimmy Swaggert) in the 1980s marked the end of this genre of Christian broadcasting, the examples from Brazil and Ghana demonstrate how forms of Christian production media can find iterations with both contrasts and similarities in different global contexts.

Another crucial element of Christian use of media has been the occurrence of innovation in the production of content. In recent expressions in World Christianity, one finds new creative alliances. An example of this can be found in El Salvador with the collaboration between anti-government guerrillas and elements of the Roman Catholic Church who came together based on a shared desire for political change (Darling 2008: 132). Radio Venceremos, founded in 1981, serves as a prominent example of media use by Christian liberation theologians. The use of radio was a crucial choice as most other media in El Salvador lacked the same footprint. The largest newspapers had a circulation of 100,000, and Salvadorans owned only about 20,000 televisions, in contrast to 1.5 million radios. As Darling's interviews revealed, airing rebel arguments opened up a public media space and created "a community of listeners across the country and around the world who had access to information and a point of view that the government had denied them" (p. 139). The role of local Christians in the venture was of crucial importance for its success: "From the first broadcast, the rebel station looked to the Church to justify the rebellion to listeners, who were potential sympathizers, potential recruits" (p. 141). Broadcasts also used biblical analogies to justify participation in the rebellion and aired recordings of special masses for the dead at massacres by Fr. Rogelio Ponseele. The latter in particular provided validation by church leaders of news reported which had been denied by Salvadoran and American government. As Darling relates, "the broadcast became crucial to the struggle for credibility. He was vouching for the guerrilla claims that the massacre did happen, backing that claim with his integrity as a priest" (p. 143). The alliance between priests and guerrillas was not always easy or agreeable, yet this alliance provided the basis for what Darling argues was the "development of a public sphere"(p. 146).

In concluding this section on "productions" it is useful to observe that, in contemporary media production by Christians, commercial success is not guaranteed. In some cases, the shape of Christianity in a particular location frustrates attempts by Christians to develop local media productions. In the study by Smith and Campos cited above, the authors provide Guatemala as a counter-example to Brazil. As their study shows, in Guatemala similarly entrepreneurial preachers have failed to achieve the same levels of media infrastructure development. In the Guatemalan context, "the spontaneity of Pentecostalism has combined with a nascent entrepreneurial spirit to produce hundreds of independent local churches" (Smith and Campos 2005: 55). Yet the consequence of this success is "the highly fragmented social and ecclesial climate" which "has led to fierce competition for the loyalty of the faithful between religious entrepreneurs" (Smith and Campos 2005: 49). As a consequence of this fragmented and competitive climate, Guatemalan Christian television production has a limited impact on the broader society (p. 55). In this example, television is not culturally sidelined, as the competition just described is oriented towards the ownership of a television or radio program but Christians have nonetheless failed to develop the unified and economically viable expression that was found in Brazil.

Across the various productions described above, one finds uses of both new and old media in World Christianity which betrays both new and old production paradigms. Vestiges of colonial influence may remain, as in the stereotypes of traditional African religion in Nollywood film and Brazilian appropriations of televised "consumer" Christianity, yet in all cases it is an open question as to whether local producers may challenge Western production paradigms through creative and subversive uses of electronic media. Here Christians use media in unexpected ways: to effect political change, "perform" or celebrate prosperity, and provide entertainment. Similarly, producers are influenced by media with the possibility of mediatization in Ghana, yet these engagements between Christians and media production are not necessarily predictable as producers manage to craft creative alliances and self-representations.

The significant point here is that representations of Christianity in film and other media are not as straightforward a communicative process as a producer may expect, particularly in trans-national productions. Audiences can be active, dynamic, and creative (Hoover 2006). One finds a similar mixture of creative appropriation in tension with the demands of media technology when looking at the life of media after it has been produced as in the case that we turn to next with "receptions."

Receptions

"Receptions" refer to the experience, engagement, and interaction with media by audiences. What one finds about Christian use of media from an examination of receptions is that it is unpredictable. Postures towards media and receptions may vary from one region to another and from one style of audio-visual media to another within the same Christian community. In a dissertation, Dwight Friesen analyses the Jesus film *Karunamayudu* (1978) produced by commercial film-makers in South India. Friesen produced a biography of this movie, from its creation and production to its multiple receptions. The film is significant in part because of its popularity: it is one of the world's most viewed Jesus films and is screened by more than 270 exhibition teams there every week (Friesen 2010: 1). Friesen notes how the film's final structure and style differs from the original screenplay written (in English) by Fr. Christopher Coelho. In particular, through his analysis, he finds that the film "Indianises the story of Jesus" (p. 128). While Friesen notes how "Coelho was also keen to present Jesus as 'truly human' in keeping with a Lukan portrait of Jesus the merciful healer" the "Hindu producers of Karunamayudu were more interested in casting him 'in the style of Hindu mythology, as a superman and magician doing the sensational' "(p. 131). These subtle changes and the hybrid of Christian and Hindu visual symbolism of the film do not make it less appropriate for Christian devotion and the film continues to be used for apologetic purposes in India. This demonstrates the dynamic where media content may take on an unexpected turn in meaning.

There is another equally important conclusion regarding media "receptions" from this study and this is to highlight the potential value that local productions of Christian films in World Christianity offer to Western audiences and critics.

Assessing the more obvious hybrid Jesus in *Karunamayudu* also invites a reflection on whether there may be similar but unnoticed inflections in Jesus films which have been produced in the West (p. 126). Christians across the world do not only use media, but they also "re-use" it in new creative appropriations. Friesen's study reflects a further significant move within film criticism of religion in movies, which has tended to be Hollywood-centered and Eurocentric (e.g. Skinner 1993). This research stands alongside several other recent studies that have begun to reverse this trend: attending religious themes and films outside the Western film-making context (May 1997; Plate 2003; Mitchell 2007).

In developing a clearer understanding of various forms of media reception, television provides another useful example, in part because of its ubiquity. It is a part of the domestic landscape across the Christian world, with many homes in the developed world having multiple televisions not only in the sitting room but also in bedrooms, kitchens, and bathrooms. Even among poorer industrialized nations, one rarely finds a community without television, as they are located in bars, shops, railway stations, airports, and hospitals. A broad survey of media "receptions" in World Christianity may provides us with a preliminary answer to the question of where and when Christians use media: everywhere and at a wide variety of times. With regards to television, wherever electricity is easily available, it has become part of the urban wallpaper and Christians are increasingly experiencing Christianity through television. In one example, as many as 2 billion people saw John Paul II's funeral at the Vatican, in Rome, on April 8, 2005. The ubiquity of television has made the medium the object of a number of strident critiques including several by Christian theologians as noted above.

It is important to note that reception is far from a universally passive experience. Instead, as media theorist, Stuart Hall argues, there are different modes of reception, or semiotic "decoding" as he describes it (Hall 1999). While production constructs a message, producers do not have absolute control over the subsequent life (as noted above under "creations") or the *reception* of that message. There are different postures of reception that an audience may take ranging from passive acceptance of a media message to a more active negotiation of meaning. In particular, the ways in which viewers use the content of television broadcasting has come under increased scrutiny (see Hoover and Clark 2002).

Though Christians may use media production for the enhancement of prestige and the deployment of teaching and evangelism, Christian receivers of media also use it to construct meaning. Following the shift in communication studies in recent decades towards the "audience," there has also been a shift in scholarly study of how *viewers* from different Christian traditions actually create meaning around television today (Horsfield and Medrano 2004). This has led to a reconsideration of the ways in which audiences develop practices of viewing that ensures that they can resist, negotiate or play with the meanings of what they see. For example, just as the use of radio broadcasting in Guatemala was meant to expand public space, some viewers in China during the 1980s appear to have used certain television programs as "a cultural reservoir of alternative visions," which allowed them to "question traditional values and official interpretations" and thereby helped "them to imagine alternative ways of living" (Thompson 1995, 178 after Lull 1991). Television, and more recently other new media,

provide viewers with symbolic resources that they may then appropriate and recycle as they attempt to define their own identity, narrate their own life stories and understand the traditions and communities of interpretation that they belong to (Mitchell 2003: 339–340). New Christian uses of media leave open the possibility of an active audience, though this may not universally be the case.

Just as media reception may be less predictable than instrumental accounts of media may suggest, the Christian experience of media and, in particular, reception of audio-visual media in a particular cultural site may also be historically unstable. This is demonstrated in research by Sham P. Thomas conducted on television in the homes of Marthomite Christians in Kerala, South India (Thomas and Mitchell 2005). As Thomas relates, Marthomite Christian identity includes a ban on audio-visual media, particularly films. Even recently "it would be a scandal if a priest or bishop was seen to have gone to a cinema or theatre" in parts of Kerala (p. 30). Several decades ago, the supremacy of film in India was challenged with the television broadcasting of the first Hindu epic serial *Ramayan*. This provided the basis for a substantial shift in attitudes in India towards audio-visual media. For Christians, the domestic viewing context in which television was received made it less threatening than film. In India, this domestic context is seen as more "family friendly" because viewers have the ability to censor their viewing and choose their viewing company (p. 34). In this way, Christian attitudes towards one form of audio-visual media (film) did not guarantee that their attitude towards another (television) would be the same. Instead elements such as "viewing context, audience composition and control while viewing" were just as important in determining Christian reception of media (p. 33). The crucial point to be taken from these contexts is that Christian receptions of media are rarely static. Instead, they often have a complex interrelationship with their context such that a strong taboo regarding one form of media may give way to strong support for another. Christian receivers of media across the world are rarely passive, in fact they may covertly pursue alternate forms of media criticism and creation.

Conclusion: Media Innovations and World Christianity

The digital revolution is radically changing how both communities and individuals use and interact with many forms of electronic media. This is particularly the case with the internet. According to the International Telecommunications Union, over 2.7 billion people (39% of world population) and over 750 million households (41% globally) use the internet, with a rate of 77% in developed countries (WTID 2013). This represents a massive increase from 2005 when rates were 7.8% in the developing world (15.8% overall) and a total of just over 1 billion internet users; and from 2000 when individual internet users represented just 6.5% of the world population; and 1995 when the overall global internet user rate was under 1% (World Bank Statistics).

One of the newest contexts for Christian use of media is therefore that of the internet. As already noted above, the expansion of the internet has been extraordinarily rapid and internet access has begun to be ubiquitous not just for Western Christians, but in a far more global sense. This internationalization of access represents a significant

change in usage for the world and it is paralleled in World Christianity. A widely cited distinction, first made by Christopher Helland (2000), between "Religion-Online" and "Online-Religion" can provide a map for describing how the internet is actually used by Christians around the world today. On the one hand, Christianity-Online (where Christians attempt to use the internet as a platform for communicating about Christianity which exists in an offline context) can be found in the numerous sites set up by specific Christian denominations such as those emerging out of the Vatican in Rome, or international groups such as *Iglesia Ni Cristo* or revival movements such as *El Shaddai* in Manila, and mega or smaller churches all over the world such as in Seoul, Accra, or Rio.

The fragmentary nature of "new media" makes it more difficult to analyze discretely, yet this is also where one finds a growing "Online-Religion" for World Christianity. There are now thousands of examples of web-blogs and web pages that reveal the individual poster's own spiritual journey or existential questions. Portrayals of internet media as fragmentary can, however, lend a false sense of novelty to the context in which media is deployed, assuming that in previous generations and epochs Christianity has been institutionally monolithic and that this contemporary generation is the first to emphasize individual spiritual practice, trans-national communication, or communicative bricolage. It is important to recognize that this increasing awareness of the fragmentary nature of media (as a result of the explosion in the number of television channels, radio stations, and web sites) is also accompanied by a new awareness of the convergence of media as owners and producers of content in this fragmented marketplace are increasingly converging as a result of merging technologies and consolidated ownership of media outlets. These new fragmented and fragmenting forms of media such as internet-based social media communication represent an important area for future research, particularly in the non-Western context. So too is the blurring of the distinction between online and offline religion (e.g. Campbell 2008).

Though the situation of media fragmentation and increased media use by Christians may not be completely novel, new media perform a dynamic mediative role for Christians across the world, facilitating communication between not only one and many, but also among individuals. Different media may serve to bridge the gap between persons or groups of people, yet the very media which can compress vast distances and bring people closer together can also be used to accentuate difference, to extend divides and to inflame already tense situations. Consider for example, the use by extremist Hutus of a local radio station (RTLM) and several newspapers before and during the Rwandan genocide in 1994 to stir up ethnic hatred (Mitchell 2012). Media may serve as a communicative bridge, but it can also create a communicative barrier. These potentially opposing uses underline the importance of informed critical perspectives upon Christian use of media in World Christianity. Such a critical approach is not dismissive of the various forms of media production, creation or reception by Christians across the world but which nevertheless evaluates the reverberations that evolving media can have across religious and ethnic communities. Across the world one finds a dynamic use of media by Christians who have found methods to appropriate different forms of media in both creative and traditional ways to teach, evangelize, perform, and communicate about Christian faith and practice. This dynamic use of media is remarkable and yet it is also consonant with the diverse texture of Christian communities around the world.

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