

BOOK REVIEW

Liviu Vidican-Manci, *Propovăduirea Evangheliei în era digitală. Impactul catehezei și al predicii asupra „generației digitale” prin utilizarea noilor tehnologii ale informației și comunicării [Preaching the Gospel in the digital era. The impact of catechesis and sermons on “the digital generation” by using the new technology of information and communication] (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2020), 254 p.*

Preaching the Gospel in the digital era is a necessary and important work for our present technological society, which is so familiar with the online environment. At the same time, the work is a very good spiritual help for our modern society. It represents the results of Father Liviu Vidican-Manci's efforts of approaching, understanding and entering the mind and soul of the digital generation, in order to read and understand this hidden code of faith, as the image with the Holy Cross suggests, from this book's cover. The image of the processor and the binary code 1 and 0, within the Cross, represents somehow the fact that we have the responsibility to discover and to preach God even in those places where we may think He is missing. We can still find God in other forms, into the soul of these young users, their thoughts and ideas, freely expressed in this *global digital community*.

In this book, the author raises a series of important questions, which arouse interest and make us realize the fact that in this virtual space we are not always safe, whether we are young or adults, *digital natives* or *digital immigrants*. The internet is called virtual space, but in fact, its users and the problems that can occur, are as real as possible. Therefore, the Church's discourse has to be adapted to our current times, by using the digital means of communication and socialization. How can we make the *catechesis* and the *pulpit* digital and still keep their efficiency? Probably this remains every person's challenge, as a priest, preaching from the church's *pulpit*, as a teacher, speaking from school's *pulpit*, or even as a parent, model and teacher from the *pulpit* of his house.

In the first part, the author introduces us into the digital space terminology and the specific concepts of the exact disciplines, terms like: internet, URL, HTTP, HTML, Web, ICT (Information and Communication Technology), digital natives, digital immigrants and so on. The author is also making a brief historical approach of this subject in order to better understand the evolution of the internet and its roles in our daily life. An important point is the division among specialists between those two categories above-mentioned of digital space users, *digital natives* and *digital immigrants*, both categories with their particularities. These characteristics are not general, and they do not fully describe a certain category of users (digital or immigrant). Is this division justified or is it just creating a considerable gap between people of different ages?

Further on, the author presents the Romanian school's educational policies and also the tendency of adopting new digitalization projects, namely education based on information and communication technology. The entire catechetical process of preaching the orthodox faith should be combined with the educational process of children, even when we discuss about digitalization. The perspective of combining these methods remains open, because it is very important that technology could not completely replace traditional formation and education. We must always take into consideration every positive and negative effect, in order to determine the efficiency of implementation of digital process in education.

The next chapter presents religion in the digital era, as it is perceived in studies of foreign authors like Stewart M. Hoover, Heidi A. Campbell, Tim Hutchings, Elaine Graham, Anita Cloete and so on. Into the new virtual space new forms of manifestation of faith start to take place, not only as forms of communication and preaching faith. On the Internet, new religious congregations started to appear. First appeared cyber-churches, but also new forms of cult and digital rituals¹. Are these new online religious forms complementary, acting as addition to *offline* religion, or do they become a substitute for real-life religion? In the process of digital education, the true relationship between communication, communion and community is very important.

Chapter IV describes Christian Church's opinion about the digital phenomenon. From the beginning, Christian Churches had embraced the capabilities of the internet, considering it is a good way of preaching the

¹ See Heidi Campbell's studies: *Digital Religion Understanding religious practice in New Media worlds*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2013); *Networked Theology. Negotiating faith in digital culture*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Ebook edition created 2016; "Religion and the Internet", *Communication Research Trends. Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture*, 25, no. 1 (2006).

Gospel, a field for the development of Christian mission and a true religious market. Somehow, the internet could enhance people's religious experience, but certainly it could not fully replace it. The Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Church rely on the theoretical and practical aspects of this digital revolution, using each instrument to its full potential in order to expand the Church's work and message in the world, without ignoring the negative aspects of the digital space.

The position of the Orthodox Church regarding the digital space takes over the main part of this book. Generally, the Orthodox Church has adopted a reluctant, cautious, sometimes critical approach, regarding the internet. In order to include as many aspects as possible, the author studies the Orthodox Churches of Russia, Greece, Albania, Romania and also the great international orthodox conferences from Athens (2015) and Crete (2018). Depending on the purpose for which it is used, the internet could become a valuable instrument of preaching the faith. In this space it is recommended to develop our ecclesial responsibility, pastoral wisdom, moral discernment, in order to support the traditional Christian values.

The second part of the book is the practical one, where the author analyses the impact, the quality and the efficiency of preaching through new communication technology, performing three studies. The first study consists of three questionnaires applied on one hundred fifty-one teenagers, following different aspects: demographic data, knowledge and religious behaviours of the participants and so on. The second study, applied to the same number of people, follows the differences between spoken catechesis and the one transmitted through electronic ways as well as their impact on teenagers or *digital natives*. Even the digital catechesis seems to have the same results as the spoken one, bringing progress both in terms of knowledge and behaviour. Finally, the third study analyses the process of preaching via You Tube, focusing on certain speeches of church ministers, catechists and preachers, on the way the preaching were prepared and on the listeners' comments on catechesis subjects.

The author underlines the importance of educating and preparing the future preachers, referring to the responsibility of every diocesan centres, through every Faculty of Theology, in this sense. The message, the style, the duration of the presentations, need a careful reorientation in contact with the digital environment, so that the process of preaching can prove its efficiency and fulfil its purpose, that of making known the message of the Church in the sphere of a global society.

BOOK REVIEW

Therefore, we recommend for reading Father Liviu Vidican-Manci's work, a necessary and a beneficial challenge to evaluate our position towards the digital environment, especially in these times when our lives and attention are directed to information and communication technology.

BOGDAN GABOR

*PhD, Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Cluj-Napoca,
gabor_bogdan1990@yahoo.com*