Book Review

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New Media and the Mediatisation of Religion, edited by Gabriel Faimau and William O. Lisetaokana, addresses the impact that new media has had on religious experience, discourse and identity in Africa. This book gathers African scholars who provide narratives of religious experiences in the wake of new media appropriation by some Pentecostal churches in countries like Botswana, Malawi, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. While several chapters focus on media use by Pentecostal groups, the book also includes studies of media use by other religious groups, including Boko Haram. New media in this book connotes the use of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp by political and religious groups. The former employ social media to reinforce gender stereotypes using the Bible; the latter to spread terror, and to showcase church services and other church events in order to proselytize, advertise and interact with those that subscribe to their media platforms. Hjarvard's definition of mediatization is used as "signifying a new socio-religious condition where the media, in general, plays a role in the development of the self-development of an institution" (p. 13).

The chapters interrogate the intersection between new media and religion in Africa which has resulted in the promotion of what can be deemed religious digital cultures. It addresses issues relating to the role that new media appropriation has played in the decentralization of religious spaces, fluidity of Christian identity, the shaping of Pentecostal religious discourse and how religious leaders are portrayed. This is also an insightful and useful resource for understanding the way media shapes religious discourse and the complexity of media presence, which has potential to alter the way beliefs are practiced and religious identity is perceived in Africa. This book is key in that it demystifies perceptions that see Africa as slow in adapting to new technologies.

This book is an interdisciplinary enquiry with each chapter introducing the reader to various methodological approaches. These include positioning theory, reflexive research, interpretive and actor-oriented approach, content discourse, framing analysis, and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power. The authors have used these methods to creatively demonstrate how some religious actors, including Pentecostal churches, in the various African countries have taken advantage

of social media tools as a means to advance religious ideas and make them easily accessible (p. 52).

In the case of some religious groups, it highlights the fact that appropriation of new media by churches has decentralized physical places of worship by giving people autonomy to access religious experiences at their convenience in a more personal way. This has consequently made space for a form of cyber ecumenism. Togharasei in Chapter 5 makes reference to what he calls "e-Christianity" which brings Christians together in a communal way as a religious cyber community. He makes reference to a new form of Christian ecumenism not in the traditional sense, but the "ecumenism of individual Christians" (p. 92) who access social media profiles of various churches.

Another aspect this book deals with is the issue of Christian identity in the wake of new media and mediatisation of religion. It successfully demonstrates how the increasing number of people accessing religious spaces via social media in Africa and across the world has led to the collapse of religious boundaries, enabled easy access to social media contexts and compressed time and space over conventional church traditions. This has led to a possible undermining of power and authority in traditional churches (p. 40) and a compromise on denominational identity and loyalty.

Togharasei in Chapter 5 attempts to explain what constituted Christian identity from early Christianity in comparison to the twenty-first century. He explains that these identity markers over the centuries followed "one's faith in Jesus Christ, by the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian, baptism, congregating as part of fellowship and post-colonial Christian identification to accommodate African values, cultures and beliefs." He argues that the appropriation of new media has made Christian identity "fluid, hybrid and dynamic by decentralising religious activity" (pp. 83–90). It can be argued that this blurring of religious lines between religious spaces and experiences in the wake of social media has enriched the Christian experience and made it easily accessible. It can also be said that media appropriation is perhaps another way Pentecostalism ensures its survival.

References are made to "religious surfing and cafeteria-style religious practice" in which spirituality seekers piece together doctrines and practices from their favourite teachings from an array of churches online. While Maunganidze makes a bold claim that the use of new media appeals to those that have lost denominational loyalty (p. 39), this cannot be used as a blanket statement to apply to every Christian that uses social media to access religious content. What new media has allowed people to have is the choice to access various religious spaces, not only on Sunday but at their convenience. Furthermore, it also enables them to access what may be lacking in their own denomination or congregations and to be discipled remotely via cyberspace.

An interesting accomplishment of this book is that it allows African scholars to tell the African story. What would have been more helpful is if it had more representation from countries other than Botswana, Nigeria, Malawi and Zimbabwe. The fact that four out of nine chapters were written on Botswana and

in some cases analysing similar churches meant some of the information was somewhat similar.

The book also successfully explains how new media has been used to socially construct how religious leaders are portrayed online, especially prophets (p. 50). It draws our attention to the fact that the majority of churches which have fully appropriated the use of new media are prophetic ministries. Therefore, the use of new media gives these churches an avenue to portray their leaders as central and powerful figures who are spiritually competent, have good business acumen, smart, well dressed, credible and authoritative based on linguistic strategies employed and imagery portrayed. Examples are provided of how linguistic strategies are used to make their messages appealing. This is evidenced by how prophetic discourses are articulated online and offline. It is clear that these churches have adopted the use of new media to ensure the church remains relevant and in-step with the twenty-first-century Christian.

What is demonstrated in this book is not media driving religion, but media used as a tool to enhance religious, including Pentecostal, experiences in twenty-first century Africa. It is also fair to say that the same platform that has been used to reinforce the legitimacy of religious groups and their leaders has been used to quickly publicize scandals attached to the same. The book has also demonstrated how media appropriation has been retrogressive. This is exemplified in the case of Malawi where social media was used to promote patriarchal beliefs by manipulating religious texts thereby reinforcing gender stereotypes to oust a female political contestant (p. 140), and in Nigeria, used to spread terror in the wake of the Boko Haram insurgency (p. 158). What the book does successfully is showcase chapters dealing with a variety of topics related to the way religion is practiced online and the effects of new media adoption in accelerating prophetic activism, prophetic imagination and prophetic discourse, connections between cyber sociality and religiosity, religious discourse and identity among youth. Overall, this book opens new avenues for investigating the impact of new media and mediatization among Pentecostal churches in Africa.