

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

In Blogs We Trust

Looking for some sizzling reading at the beach this summer? Break out the Coppertone and break open *The Church and New Media*. Okay: it's not Danielle Steele or John Grisham, but this book by blogger Brandon Vogt is a fascinating and—dare I say it?—provocative piece of work, though in this case “provocative” means “provoking thought.”

To look at how the church does—and more often, does not—communicate in the 21st century, Vogt has assembled nothing less than an all-star cast of writers, bishops, bloggers and assorted chin-scratchers. Consider this: The book is framed with a foreword written by Cardinal (and blogger) Sean O'Malley, and an afterword by Archbishop (and blogger) Timothy Dolan.

There are chapters by Fr. Robert Barron, Mark Shea, and Lisa Hendey, among others. Along the way, readers get a vivid and revealing glimpse at how social communication in the church is carried out these days—with everything from Kindle to Facebook to podcasts thrown into the mix. There's a lot of practical insight, along with some kernels of honest-to-God wisdom. (Full disclosure: My own blog, “The Deacon's Bench,” gets a passing mention, too, in a section on blogging clergy.)

A priest who blogs, Fr. Dwight Longenecker, notes:

Clear communication is always passionate. The beauty of the blog is that a writer can say whatever he wants in whatever way he wants to say it. The blogger can speak from the heart, and a blog is best when he does so. Remember, the word “enthusiasm” comes from the words *en theos*, meaning “God within.” Writing with a fire in your heart and a love for your topic means that you will find yourself living out Blessed John Henry Newman's motto: “Heart speaks to heart.”

There are some close-up looks at popular bloggers, and some helpful advice on how to get a blog up and running.

As Mark Shea observes:

As you continue to blog, keep a little list in the back of your mind of other bloggers who might be interested in a given piece you've written and send them a link suggesting they might like it. The more your blog is present to the public consciousness, the more chances readers have to say: “It's that guy again. I liked his piece on “Prayer and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance,” so I think I'll check out his new piece on “Underwater Basket Weaving and the Second Coming.” The trick is to realize that readers develop loyalty to writers, not topics. If they come to like you, they'll read whatever you choose to write about, because they like you.

There's a lot to feed the brain and tickle the fancy of anyone who spends any time in the “digital continent” of blogging.

Sweetening it all is this little coda to the book, which explains where all royalties will go:

Practicing the Catholic social theme of solidarity, 100 percent of the royalties from this book are going toward establishing school computer labs throughout the Archdiocese of Mombasa, Kenya. Besides providing the computer hardware and software for children in poor, rural areas, the kids will be trained in computer-literacy skills. For scores of children, this book will be a ticket to the “digital continent.”

It doesn't get much better than that.

Check out Brandon Vogt's website for information—**churchandnewmedia.com**. You can also order the book via Amazon.com.

It's a worthwhile investment—in every sense.

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