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Introducing Catholics & Cultures: Ethnography, Encyclopedia, Cyborg

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CATHOLICS & CULTURES

Scholarship for the Pedagogy of Global Catholicism

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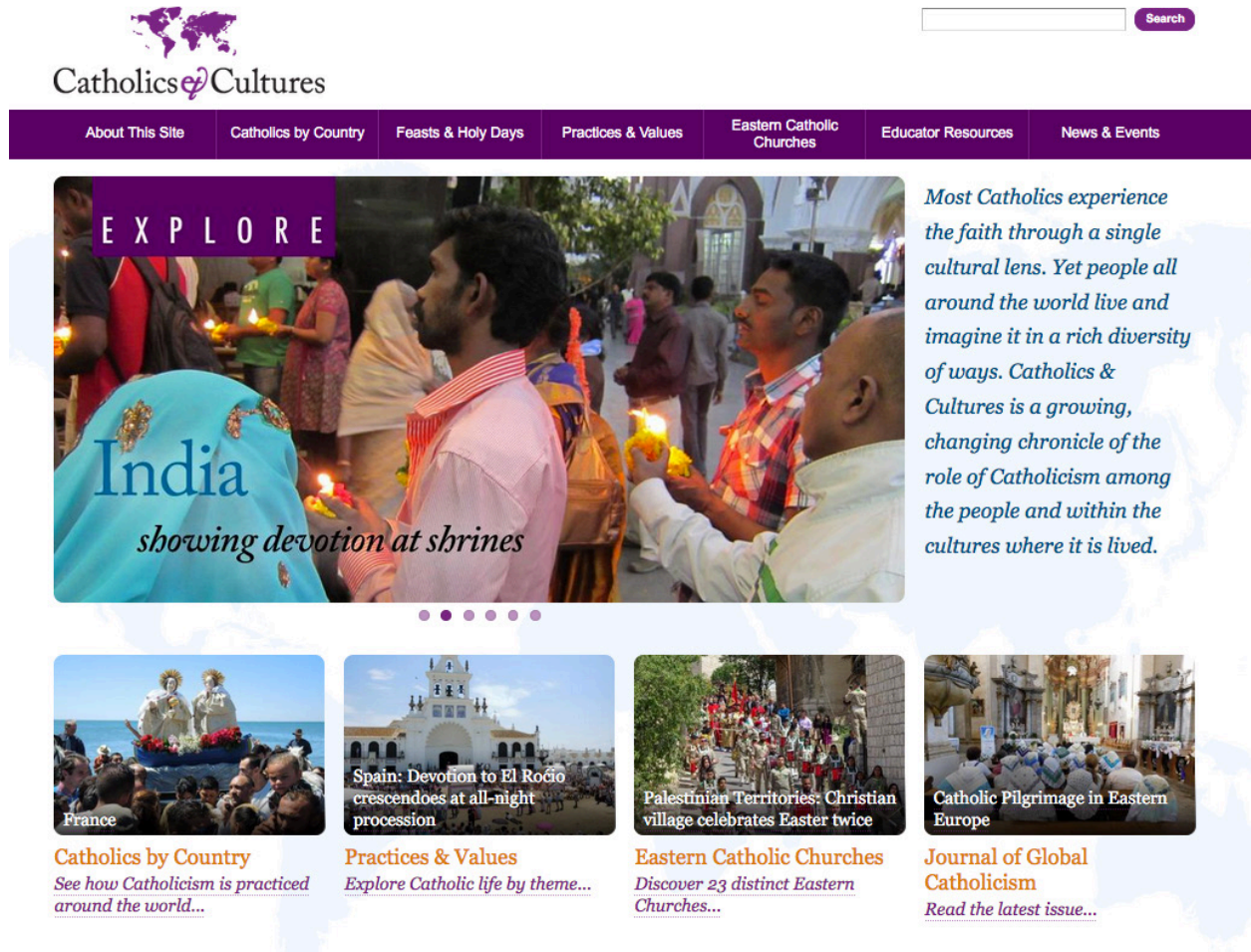
MATHEW N. SCHMALZ

Introducing Catholics & Cultures: Ethnography, Encyclopedia, Cyborg



Mathew N. Schmalz is Founding Editor of the *Journal of Global Catholicism* and Professor of Religious Studies at the College of the Holy Cross. He received his B.A. from Amherst College and his Ph.D. in the history of religions from the University of Chicago. He has published more than fifty articles and essays that engage global Catholicism (particularly in South Asia), Catholic theology and spirituality, Mormonism, and The Watchtower movement. He is co-editor of *Engaging South Asian Religions: Boundaries, Appropriations, and Resistances* (SUNY, 2012, with Peter Gottschalk) and author of *Mercy Matters: Opening Yourself to the Life Changing Gift* (OSV, 2016). Schmalz has also written more than one hundred opinion pieces that have appeared in *On Faith*, *Crux*, *The Huffington Post* and in the print editions of *The Washington Post*, *Commonweal Magazine*, *US Catholic*, *The National Catholic Reporter*, *the Providence Journal*, and *the Telegram & Gazette*. He has provided expert commentary to *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *ABC's Good Morning America*, *NPR*, *CNBC*, *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, and *U.S. News & World Report*, among others.





Catholics & Cultures

About This Site | Catholics by Country | Feasts & Holy Days | Practices & Values | Eastern Catholic Churches | Educator Resources | News & Events

EXPLORE

India
showing devotion at shrines

Most Catholics experience the faith through a single cultural lens. Yet people all around the world live and imagine it in a rich diversity of ways. Catholics & Cultures is a growing, changing chronicle of the role of Catholicism among the people and within the cultures where it is lived.

France
Catholics by Country
See how Catholicism is practiced around the world...

Spain: Devotion to El Rocío crescendoes at all-night procession
Practices & Values
Explore Catholic life by theme...

Palestinian Territories: Christian village celebrates Easter twice
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Journal of Global Catholicism
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The Catholics & Cultures home page found at catholicsandcultures.org.

OVERVIEWING CATHOLICS & CULTURES

A project developed by [Thomas M. Landy](#) as part of the mission of the [Rev. Michael C. McFarland, S. J. Center for Religion, Ethics and Culture](#) at the College of the Holy Cross, Catholics & Cultures explores what Pope Francis has called the “[dialects of the Global Church](#).” Coming online in 2015 and now with more than two million lifetime page views and nearly one million users, the [Catholics & Cultures website](#) presents a unique platform for scholarship and pedagogy relating to lived Catholicism. As of this writing (December 2020), the site has full entries, photo essays, and digital videos connected with six continents and thirty countries, ranging from [Argentina](#) to [Ukraine](#). Additionally, Catholics & Cultures has its own [YouTube channel](#) with 177 videos documenting aspects of Catholic life throughout the world. The site has been accessed from 233 countries, with the top three countries for users being the U.S., the Philippines, and India.

The articles included in this special edition of the *Journal of Global Catholicism* examine the pedagogical and scholarly implications of the Catholics & Cultures site. But before introducing the individual pieces contained in this issue, some introductory reflections are in order to set Catholics & Cultures within its broader academic context. The Catholics & Cultures project is both classificatory and comparative: it organizes cases studies or vignettes of lived Catholicism and provides a framework for comparing Catholic practices across cultures. While it is the first Catholic resource of its kind on the World Wide Web, the site intellectually reaches back to draw upon methods long part of comparative scholarly study. But through its use of layered and interlinked text, image, and video, the Catholics & Cultures site also opens up new possibilities for exploring—and reimagining—the dynamic play of unity and diversity in Catholicism as lived and experienced by Catholics throughout the world.

ORGANIZATION AND AESTHETICS

The last decade has seen an expansion of resources on the World Wide Web for the academic study of religion. For example, there is the [World Religions and Spirituality Project](#), an initiative headed by [David G. Bromley](#) at [Virginia Commonwealth University](#). For the study of new religions in particular, there is the work of Dr. Massimo Introvigne and the web resources provided by Centro studi sulle nuove religioni ([CESNUR](#)). There are also numerous sites, such as that hosted by the [Wabash Center](#), which provide pedagogical resources and support for scholars through the medium of cyberspace. Against this background, what initially distinguishes Thomas Landy's work in the Catholics & Cultures site is not only that it is focused exclusively on Catholicism but that it draws more extensively on the resources provided by the World Wide Web to complement static text and image idioms of presentation. While more might be done in the future to draw upon Virtual Reality technologies to develop a more immersive experience, one of the most salutary aspects of the Catholics & Cultures site is the layered combination text, image, and video that facilitates fuller appreciation of the cultural context for Catholic practice.

Given how fraught the study of Catholicism can be, a particularly valuable aspect of the Catholics & Cultures site is that its textual contributions and glosses actually avoid explicitly addressing some of the broader debates about the nature of “Catholic.” For example, users will find no mention of the debate over whether Catholicism is a normative category or a descriptive one.¹ Instead, the Catholics & Cultures site connects with its users by immediately delving into an exploration of Catholic life *in situ*. The site’s entries record and frame the actions of people—not all of whom are baptized Catholics—in ways that do not impede users in their efforts to survey and appreciate lived Catholic practice. A different presentational approach, such as one that immediately situates Catholic phenomena in relation to official institutional or discursive spaces, might divert attention away from lived Catholicism on the ground and toward elements that are usually associated with Catholicism as a putatively seamless, unchanging, whole. Nonetheless, the categories structuring the site do constitute a rather conventional list of features of Catholicism such as “feast and holy days,” “practices and values,” and “Catholics by country.” In giving content to these basic organizational categories, the Catholics & Cultures site relies upon two old and familiar scholarly traditions: ethnography and encyclopedia.

For historians of religion, the classic explication of the traditions of ethnography and encyclopedia is Jonathan Z. Smith’s 1971 article, “Adde Parvum Parvo Magnus Acervus Erit.”² In his discussion, Smith explores various methodologies of comparison and critiques comparative scholarly techniques that rely upon simple binary opposition. With regard to the ethnographic tradition, Smith traces its origins back to the fragments of *Xenophanes* in the 5th century B.C. that described

- 1 Understanding the category “Catholic” as normative would inevitably lead to an evaluation of whether certain practices conform to doctrines and canons of the magisterium. By contrast, a descriptive approach would see Catholicism as a collection interrelated clusters of practices and ideas relating to the Church more broadly as a community. For example, a Venn diagram would embody elements more closely related to the “descriptive” approach.
- 2 Jonathan Z. Smith, “Adde Parvum Parvo Magnus Acervus Erit,” *History of Religions* 11, no. 1 (August 1971): 67-90, <https://doi.org/10.1086/462642>. See also Jonathan Z. Smith, “Adde Parvum Parvo Magnus Acervus Erit,” in *Map Is Not Territory*, ed. Jonathan Z. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 240-264. Page citations in this essay will be from the *Map Is Not Territory* edition.

the Ethiopians. In times past, ethnographic comparisons usually took the form of travelogues that privileged the traveler's eye. This idiom, according to Smith, still influences modern day anthropological ethnographies and can be perceived in their often idiosyncratic organizational apparatus as well as in their tolerance for figurative or self-indulgent reflections.³

Obviously, the collection and collation of data for Catholics & Cultures relies upon Thomas Landy's keen observations. And the content of the site is overwhelmingly ethnographic, drawing as it does from case studies of ritual, feasts, and other aspects of lived Catholic practice. But unlike ethnographies of times past, the site's vernacular is not accented by the personal tone and cadences of a travelogue author surveying the diverse Catholic cultures of the world. Instead, the site focuses on the presentation of synchronic data with some background information and statistics added to introduce specific countries, rituals, and feasts. The site is also unlike contemporary academic ethnographies, since it does not include self-referential meditations on the ethnographer's gaze and explications of how that gaze includes and inevitably excludes particular phenomena. This lack of meta-discourse, it should be noted, represents a judicious stylistic choice that keeps attention on Catholicism as lived as opposed to on how it is portrayed.⁴

Moving to the encyclopedic tradition, Smith locates its beginnings in the writings of *Hellanicus* in the 5th century C.E. and then charts the tradition's development into the modern age through examples such as J. G. Frazer's entries in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.⁵ Among the problems with the encyclopedia, in Smith's words, is its tendency to rely upon "contextless lists, held together by mere surface associations rather than careful, specific meaningful comparisons with interest in exotic content."⁶ In light of Smith's polemical appraisal, the comparative

3 Smith, "Adde Parvum Parvo Magnus Acervus Erit," 247.

4 The issue of whether to extensively discuss the "ethnographer's gaze" is a complex methodological and stylistic question. On the choice in relation to the Catholic identity of the ethnographer and Catholic phenomena, see Mathew N. Schmalz, "American Catholic, Indian Catholics: Reflections on Religious Identity, Ethnography and the History of Religions," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 13 (January 2001): 91-97, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006801x00129>.

5 Smith, "Adde Parvum Parvo Magnus Acervus Erit," 252.

6 Smith, "Adde Parvum Parvo Magnus Acervus Erit," 253.



connections made through Catholics & Cultures might seem to be supported by rather shaky classificatory scaffolding. But the categories used by the site do draw upon established themes and practices identified in what could be called “the Catholic encyclopedia” and are thus recognizable to non-academically trained Catholics as well as to researchers.

Smith elevates the academically self-enclosed over the popularly accessible when it comes to comparison. If Catholics & Cultures were to move in a direction that academic comparativists might find more palatable, the most readily available framework is diffusion—a method that would synchronically and diachronically trace particular devotions and rituals in and across cultures. Such an approach would also have to negotiate an important divergence emerging in the academic study of religion between scholarship focused on “routes” and scholarship focused on “roots.”⁷ To apply this distinction to Catholics & Cultures, an emphasis on “routes” would map a devotion’s or ritual’s path away from its place of origin and then diagram how it changes and evolves. By contrast, an emphasis upon “roots” would concentrate on the beginnings of a devotion or ritual as well as its specific performative context. As of now, Catholics & Cultures favors “roots” over “routes” but that need not remain the case—or even a binary choice—given the adaptable architecture of the site.

In pushing the possibilities of Catholics & Cultures to even more speculative levels, there still remains a good amount cyber-grist for the virtual comparativist’s mill. For example, a more expansive thematic emphasis in the site—one that considers narrative in addition to ritual—could develop into a resource akin to the *Motif Index of Folk-Literature* pioneered by American folklorist, [Stith Thompson](#).⁸ Content ranging from the tropes and structural elements of Catholic discourse and story-telling to the gestures, offerings, and contexts of ritual could—at least theoretically—be collated and correlated and their appearances, divergences,

7 The distinction between “routes” and “roots” is made in Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 7.

8 Stith Thompson, *Motif Index of Folk-Literature; A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends* (Bloomington, Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1955-58), 6 v.

and confluences charted and mapped. The Catholics & Cultures site could also self-consciously adopt a more morphological approach such as that deployed in Catholics' theories of inculturation, which posit an essence to Catholicism that incarnates itself in and through diverse cultural forms.⁹ Incorporating morphology into Catholics & Cultures would lead to interesting, and predictably contentious, discussions about what taxonomic categories—and specific taxa—best correspond to observable aspects of Catholic phenomena as refracted through a global lens.

Having spun out various theoretical possibilities for the site as a platform for a comparative study of Catholicism, it is important to acknowledge that Catholics & Cultures does not seek to vindicate itself vis-à-vis established academic theories and methodologies. But no apology should be made for declining the theory and method gambit since there remains no consensus in religious studies about whether foregrounding theory and method is a mark of superior scholarship. As exemplified in the essays in the well-received *Theory in a Time of Excess*, some scholars find religious studies to be over-theorized while some argue that is it under-theorized.¹⁰ Indeed, as Aaron Hughes observes in his “Introduction” to the volume, the very term “theory” over the last thirty years is used so much that it has become “coterminous with virtually all forms of scholarship on religion.”¹¹ To further muddy matters, as Christopher Kavanagh argues in his extended reflections on the essays included in *Theory in a Time of Excess*, there is often a tendency to equate “theory” specifically with “critical theory” in a way that “tautologically restricts the theoretical boundaries of the study of religion field and neglects the contributions of more empirically inclined theorists.”¹² For now, the field of religious studies still remains divided among descriptivists, theologians, and theorists, who themselves,

9 For a specific case study of inculturation and its morphological and political aspects, see Mathew N. Schmalz, “Ad Experimentum: Theology, Anthropology and the Paradoxes of Indian Catholic Inculturation,” in *Theology and the Social Sciences*, ed. Michael Barnes (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 161-180, https://crossworks.holycross.edu/rel_faculty_pub/9/.

10 Aaron W. Hughes, ed., *Theory in a Time of Excess: Beyond Reflection and Explanation in Religious Studies Scholarship* (Sheffield, UK: Equinox Publishing 2017).

11 Aaron W. Hughes, “Introduction,” in *Theory in a Time of Excess: Beyond Reflection and Explanation in Religious Studies Scholarship*, ed. Aaron W. Hughes (Sheffield, UK: Equinox Publishing 2017), 6.

12 Christopher M. Kavanagh, “Too Much, Too Little, or the Wrong Kind of ‘Theory’ in the Study of Religions?” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 30 (2018): 463, doi: [10.1163/15700682-12341439](https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-12341439)



as Kavanagh implicitly suggests, might more clearly delineate their differing commitments.¹³

That scholars debate the status of given theories or question their relevance is not, of course, an argument against theorizing. But given the contested landscape and boundaries of the academic study of religion, a particularly noteworthy aspect of *Catholics & Cultures* is how its empirical and descriptive orientation reaches to bridge the gap between the academic and the popular, the arcane and the accessible. On one level, the intent underlying this effort is most likely informed by understanding how web-based content is usually accessed: through a topic search that directs a user to a single page. Given that many users find *Catholics & Cultures* in this way, it makes sense to develop individual entries as fully as possible instead of recursively elaborating complex, and cross-referenced, categories and classificatory schemes. On another level, however, the reluctance to utilize robust theories of comparison could be perceived as a mild act of resistance. After all, *Catholics & Cultures* uses encyclopedia and ethnography in ways that recognize and appreciate how there is an audience for serious scholarship waiting—and living—beyond the bounded and privileged spaces of the academy.

While the layered combination of text, image, and video is a standard part of sites and platforms on the World Wide Web, it is important to remember that the advent of the Internet inspired—and continues to inspire—scholarly reflection on how web based technologies in cyberspace change our perceptions and senses of embodiment.¹⁴ Spurred by Donna Haraway's influential "A Cyborg Manifesto," cyborgian aesthetics as well as philosophies and theologies of transhumanism—not to mention cyborgs themselves—have become important subjects of academic discussion and debate.¹⁵ Accordingly, any academic use of web-based

13 Kavanagh, "Too Much, Too Little, or the Wrong Kind of 'Theory,'" 464.

14 For an early examination of issues surrounding Internet culture, see Rob Shields, ed., *Cultures of the Internet: Virtual Spaces, Real Histories, Living Bodies* (London: Sage Publications, 1996). See also Daniel Miller and Don Slater, eds., *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).

15 Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Woman: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991 [1985]), 149-81. On Cyborgian aesthetics, see Aaron Parkhurst, "Becoming Cyborgian: Procrastinating the Singularity," *The New Bioethics* 18, no. 1 (May 2012): 68-80, <https://doi.org/10.1179/2050287713Z.0000000006>. For an example of



One of the nearly 200 dance groups, or bailes, participating in the 10-day feast for the Virgen del Carmen at La Tirana, Chile. Photo by Thomas M. Landy/catholicsandcultures.org.

technologies needs to contend with cyborgian potentialities, dynamics and theoretical constructs. Within these discursive contexts, “the cyborg” is not just a combination of human and machine, but a “blasphemous” metaphor and myth that undoes phallogentric pretensions to clarity and completeness by celebrating hybridity over unity, irony over congruity, and affinity over identity.¹⁶

On a superficial level, exploring Catholics & Cultures requires cyborgian components: you have to have a monitor, keyboard, and mouse and you also need to be sure that both you and your equipment are plugged in and wired.¹⁷ A smart phone—the cyborg signifier *par excellence*—might also work, as would a touch sensitive tablet. As of yet, the disparate nodes created by these cyborgian interfaces have not yet been networked into a larger community or virtual research landscape of the kind that might be celebrated by theorists enamored with cyborgian

philosophical and theological engagement with transhumanism, see Calvin Mercer, “Bodies and Persons: Theological Reflections on Transhumanism,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 54, no. 1 (March 2015): 27-33, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dial.12151>.

¹⁶ Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto,” 156.

¹⁷ For interesting reflections on the implications of such seemingly simple operations, see Søren Mørk Petersen, “Mundane Cyborg Practice: Material Aspects of Broadband Internet Use,” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 13, no. 1 (2007): 79-91, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1354856507072859>. Peterson argues that users of the Internet can be “perceived” as “mundane cyborgs.”

possibilities.¹⁸ In principle, however, there is nothing preventing Catholics & Cultures from becoming a cyborgian context for community and research if the site were given further publicity and supplier interface upgrades, or pursued more extensive connections with other Internet resources and communities.

What is fundamentally at issue for contemporary theorists of the cyborg, as it was for Haraway back in 1985, is understanding various iterations of cyborg metaphors and myths as issuing from, and reciprocally enabling, the breakdown of established boundaries between human, animal and machine, as well as the boundary between the physical and the non-physical.¹⁹ And it is in relation to boundaries that the Catholics & Cultures site reflects what could be described as a nascent cyborgian aesthetic.

To choose somewhat arbitrarily among many aspects of Catholics & Cultures, consider the entry, "[Dancing for the Virgin at La Tirana in Chile](#)." This entry begins with an overview of the July feast dedicated to the Virgen del Carmen in which some 200 groups ceremonially dance, having spent the previous year in rigorous preparation and practice. Within the Catholics & Cultures site, a general description of the feast is positioned or planted like the trunk of a tree, with links branching out to sub-studies considering the use of prayer, the creation of sacred space, the multiple influences on the feast, and the daily schedule. Temporal and quotidian boundaries can be blurred, rearranged, or transgressed depending upon how and when the content is accessed. Moreover, users can process the videos in a variety of ways ranging from playing with motion and graphical display to exploring side-by-side comparisons with other videos from La Tirana as well as with thematically similar videos from different parts of the Catholics & Cultures site. A menu of links also prompts connections to other feasts in different geographic locations, to entries about other uses of dance throughout the Catholic world and, of course, to numerous culturally distinct examples of Catholic devotion to Mary. The

18 On networked communities in cyberspace, see Steven G. Jones, ed., *Virtual Cultures: Identity, Community in Cybersociety* (London: Sage Ltd., 1998).

19 Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," 153-54. See also Constance Penley, Andrew Ross, and Donna Haraway, "Cyborgs at Large: Interview with Donna Haraway," *Social Text* 26, no. 25 (1990): 8-23, doi:10.2307/466237.

La Tirana entry can also be accessed obliquely through the “Practices and Values” menu that contains crucial categories for using the site as a comparative resource.

The structure of “Dancing for the Virgin at La Tirana in Chile” might seem fairly ordinary by today’s standards, even though it does represent a substantial improvement over many other academic websites. But this conventionality is really the outgrowth of familiarity since the Internet and Internet-based platforms are so much part of everyday life. “Dancing for the Virgin at La Tirana in Chile,” along with the other entries on the Catholics & Cultures site, broadens the perceptual field for considering Catholic practices in and of themselves as well as through comparative juxtaposition. As scholars and bloggers alike have continually emphasized, Internet technologies enable different ways of seeing and experiencing objects and events just as hyper-linked and layered text enable different ways of forming and connecting impressions and ideas.

The specific aspects of the Catholics & Cultures site, along with their associated cyber-potentialities, generate an aesthetic: an implicit structure or styling shaped and oriented by interrelated principles and possibilities. The overall aesthetic of Catholics & Cultures is cyborgian not just in its blurring of boundaries—physical, temporal, and conceptual—but in the agency and equipment required from the user in order to successfully navigate in and through its content. Unlike a printed and bound monograph, the Catholics & Cultures site is a multidimensional resource, ever deepening and expanding its permeable vertical and horizontal margins in and through cyberspace.

Given its nascent cyborgian aesthetic, it very well may be that Catholics & Cultures will be seen as a forerunner for Catholicism’s engagement with post-modern themes and concerns through the medium of the World Wide Web. Of course, the site itself does not make grandiose claims about its relevance or impact. This modesty is misplaced: under Catholics & Cultures’ cyber-surface lie latent possibilities that other intrepid researchers or commentators might wish to excavate and extend. Many forms of lived Catholicism in the United States are already chimeras: Latin-Mass Catholics use E-rosaries and confession apps; septum piercings complement scapular wearing. In the age of COVID, Catholic worship and



devotions have assumed cyborgian qualities as the context for worship, once limited to a specific geographical place such as a parish or shrine, is transposed into a cyber-realm that can be accessed by Catholics throughout the world. In these contexts, the cyborg can be found, manifesting itself to emphasize irony over congruity; hybridity over unity.

While Catholics & Cultures does not explicitly reveal—or revel in—apparent disjunctions, it might point the way to more destabilizing forms of presentation like pastiche, bricolage—or simply giving informants the opportunity to comment on their own portrayals on the site. Inspired by how Catholics & Cultures has raised new possibilities for considering Global Catholicism, another web platform might make use of a more eclectic and destabilizing presentational idiom akin to that deployed by Gloria Anzaldúa in her literary work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.²⁰ In reflecting on her own experiences as Chicana, multi-sexual, and queer, Anzaldúa deploys numerous versions of English and Spanish, and draws upon the tropes offered by personal narrative, poetry, and history to retrieve the hybridity and ambiguity of the “non-unitary subject.”²¹ When such methods and aspirations are brought into engagement with the study of Global Catholicism, questions and queries inevitably follow: Can Catholicism—the monolithic tradition *par excellence*—be considered a non-unitary subject? How could such a non-unitary polymorphism be presented or evoked? And would there be anything learned from such an approach? Catholics & Cultures suggests—gently—that cyberspace might at least provide a productive context for embarking on such a chimeric quest.

When it comes specifically to American Catholicism, its jagged and rough contours can assume phantasmagoric, if not monstrous, shapes. When social media fuels the ambivalent and ambiguous practices of lived Catholicism, the Catholic chimera really does breathe fire. There is nothing more vituperative than contending Catholic discourses in cyberspace. Catholics & Cultures reveals the pettiness of such debates by introducing contexts of lived Catholicism in which the specific concerns of Western—particularly American—Catholics are unknown or

20 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).

21 Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, “Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*: Cultural Studies, ‘Difference,’ and the Non-Unitary Subject,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 28 (1994): 5-28, doi:10.2307/1354508.

irrelevant. Catholics & Cultures becomes if not a safe space then at least an alternative space—both global and Catholic—that can calm the Catholic chimera by freeing it from the cage, which American Catholicism has built.

A Catholic engagement with cyborg theory and other forms of post-modernism has political as well as intellectual ramifications that reveal very real conflicts and fissures among various approaches to understanding and presenting Catholic life. But deconstructing Catholicism need not be something wholly negative or destructive—at least not in the ordinary sense. Deconstructing can set a context for realizing different kinds of connections and appreciating more capacious configurations of affinity and identity. But even with its multiple ministrations to diversity, Catholics & Cultures can still inspire renewed appreciation for the “universal Church”—a descriptive category that opens up a wealth of theological possibilities for consideration. After all, it could be argued, in order for any object or phenomenon to be identified at all, it must have an underlying essence that perdures through time and space. For now, the trajectories of the interpretative potentialities put in motion by Catholics & Cultures would seem to depend most immediately on how the site’s descriptive and comparative methodologies can engage the cyborgian practices and perspectives made possible by working in and through the World Wide Web.

SCHOLARSHIP FOR PEDAGOGY

Taking Catholics & Cultures seriously as scholarship is a necessary first step in unpacking the multiple applications and uses of the site. And since Catholics & Cultures is not monolith but cyborg, it is not a self-enclosed scholarly creation. In October 2019, a group of scholars gathered at the Hilton O’Hara in Chicago to spend a weekend discussing the Catholic & Cultures site.²² The pieces included in the edition of the *Journal of Global Catholicism* are the product of that workshop. Each article probes the contours and content of Catholics & Cultures in order to surface latent possibilities and tease out extensions to existing functions. Taken as

22 The workshop was sponsored by the McFarland Center for Religion, Ethics and Culture. Many thanks are due to Thomas Landy, Danielle Kane, and Patricia Hinchcliffe for their generous support and professionalism.

a whole—though not necessarily in order—these scholarly contributions address three aspects or implications of the site: its organizational structure; its relevance for the study of Global Catholicism; and its pedagogical applications.

In “A Widened Angle of View: Teaching Theology and Racial Embodiment,” Mara Brecht argues that Catholics & Cultures can help white students reconsider how “tethered” global Catholicism is to official Catholic teaching and thereby examine racialized assumptions made in Catholic discourse. Laura Elder observes in “Focus on the Busy Intersections of Culture and Cultural Change” that ritual and performance spaces are “busy meaning intersections of meaning making” as she encourages the Catholic & Cultures project to consider cultural change more deeply. These two articles affirm how effective the Catholics and Cultures can be as a tool in the undergraduate classroom while simultaneously suggesting new areas academic inquiry that the site could fruitfully engage.

Anita Houck, in “Ritual Among the Scilohtac: Global Catholicism, the Nacirema, and Interfaith Studies,” presents a provocative comparison between the Catholics & Cultures Project and Horace Miner’s famous article, “Body Ritual Among the Nacirema.” Houck argues that the Catholics & Cultures site could move beyond its focus on ritual and also—interestingly and again provocatively—suggests that the content and structure of the site could cultivate a feeling of surprise. Houck concludes by situating the Catholics & Cultures site within current theological discussions of inclusion and multiplicity.

Marc Loustau also pursues a provocative line of argument in his “Teaching Sexuality on the Catholics & Cultures Website: A Refreshing Turn toward the *Longue Durée*.” Loustau focuses on the issue of teaching sexuality in the religious studies and theology classrooms. He observes that the Catholics & Cultures site occasionally uses a “contemporary issues approach that considers sexuality in relation to legal and legislative decisions and government policies.” Loustau credits the Catholics & Cultures for pursuing a *longue durée* (lit. “long duration”) approach that that emphasizes “long term and deep structural processes driving cultural and religious changes.” Loustau surmises that advocates of including sexuality in religious studies and theology curricula would “applaud” a greater emphasis upon Catholic



attitudes toward sexuality as part of a study of Catholicism worldwide.

The issue concludes with two articles that focus on pedagogy and its relationship to issues of intellectual accessibility for students. In “The Value of Online Resources: Reflections on Teaching an Introduction to Global Christianity,” Hillary Kaell, who uses the Catholics & Cultures site as part of a Global Catholicism course, asks the questions: “How can we encourage students to use online sources? How can we empower them to seek out answers to their questions?” Her article then considers specific examples of how Catholics & Cultures can be deployed in the undergraduate classroom. Stephanie Wong’s contribution, “Catholics & Cultures: A Panoramic View in Search of Greater Understanding,” draws attention to the vast array of content on the site while arguing that there needs to be greater attention given to “heuristic tools” for navigation and making “sense of Catholicism’s rich diversity.”

The effort to make sense of Catholicism’s “rich diversity” returns us to the distinctiveness of the Catholics & Cultures project. As the articles in this issue make clear, in number and in conceptual importance there are overwhelming possibilities suggested by Catholics & Cultures in its present form. With the site still evolving, it is crucially important to stress the adjective “overwhelming” since the labor that elevated the site to its present level was contributed—with some specific exceptions—by just two individuals: content developer Thomas Landy and content editor Danielle Kane. Any follow up to, or extrapolations from, this issue’s recommendations for the Catholics & Cultures site will require time, resources—and many more helping hands on keyboards and track pads. But given what Catholics & Cultures has already realized in addition to what it promises, the scholars writing in this issue come together to affirm that the most important uses for the site relate to pedagogy. Whether students are Catholic or not, whether they consider themselves digital natives or not, Catholics & Cultures offers learner-users numerous ways to engage the Catholic tradition and to reflect more generally on how religion can be lived in diverse cultural contexts. As scholarship for the pedagogy of global Catholicism, Catholics & Cultures remains a unique resource whose potential will be most meaningfully realized not around the seminar tables of elite academic conferences but amidst the desks—and computer monitors—of ordinary classrooms.



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Cover image: The lead dancer of Barangay San Nicolas Proper's dance troupe carries an image of the Santo Niño in the Grand Sinulog parade, Cebu, Philippines. Photo by Thomas M. Landy/catholicsandcultures.org.