

## THE USE OF NEW MEDIA IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH KORIŠTENJE NOVIH MEDIJA U KATOLIČKOJ CRKVI

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### *Abstract*

A driving engine these days is not manual work, steam power or electricity, but information. Social and economic life is especially based on formation, searching for and classification of information. New information and communication technologies enable a man to get it everytime, everywhere and via the simplest way, regardless whether he or she is at work or relaxing. Web pages, social networks, QR and AR codes help companies to target all potential customers and to persuade them of their need of offered products and services. This description may be applied not only to financial markets, but also to „market of religions“. One of the results of religious pluralism together with secularism is a wide range of spiritual offers and religiously clear societies are on the decrease. Particular religious societies active within information society must actively try to keep old and gain new “customers“. Besides that, the instruction to spread religion, termed in Christian context as evangelisation is a constitutional element of particular religions and, as a rule, it comes directly from their founders. In our paper we would like to describe activities of the Catholic Church in use of new media. Only recently pope’s twitter account has been covered by media worldwide. Together with efforts of Vatican to keep abreast of the times, we will pay our attention to similar activities of lower levels (diocesan, monastic or parish ones) and we will mention several examples from Slovakia and we will not avoid the theological concept of “evangelisation of the digital continent“.

### *Sažetak*

Pokretač danas nije ručni rad, snaga pare i električne energije, nego informacije. Društveni i gospodarski života pogotovo, temelje se na formiranju, traženju i klasifikaciji podataka. Nove informacijske i komunikacijske tehnologije omogućuju čovjeku da svaki put, svugdje i na najjednostavniji način, bez obzira na to je li on ili ona na poslu ili se opuštanje, dođe do informacija. Web stranice, društvene mreže, QR i AR kodovi pomažu tvrtkama da ciljaju sve potencijalne kupce te ih uvjere u njihovu potrebu za ponuđenim proizvodima i uslugama. Ovaj opis se može primijeniti ne samo na financijska tržišta, nego i na "tržište religija". Jedan od rezultata vjerskog pluralizma, zajedno sa sekularizmom je širok raspon duhovnih ponuda i religiozno jasno definirana društva su u padu. Posebno vjerske udruge koje djeluju u sklopu informacijskog društva moraju aktivno pokušavati zadržati stare i pridobiti nove "mušterije". Osim toga, upute za širenje vjere, nazvane u kršćanskom kontekstu, evangelizacija, u pravilu, dolazi izravno od njihovih osnivača. U našem radu smo željeli opisati aktivnosti Katoličke crkve u korištenju novih medija. Tek nedavno Papin Twitter profil dobio je pažnju u medijskom svijetu. Zajedno s naporima Vatikana kako bi zadržali korak s vremenom, mi smo našu pozornost usmjerili na slične aktivnosti na nižim razinama (dijecezanska, samostanska ili župna), te navodimo nekoliko primjera iz Slovačke i nećemo izbjeći teološki koncept "evangelizacije digitalnog kontinenta".

### **Religious Leaders and Social Media**

The *14th Dalai Lama* (religious name: Tenzin Gyatso) is the most active on social media among

religious leaders worldwide. He started using them in 2010, when he started with his own account on facebook, followed by You Tube, Twitter and Google + (table 1).

**Table 1: The use of social media by Dalai Lama (on May 21, 2013)**

Social medium	Name of the Account	Date	Number of Followers
Facebook	Dalai Lama	March 3, 2010	5,111,973
YouTube	Dalai Lama	March 12, 2010	25,163
Twitter	@DalaiLama	April 20, 2010	7,021,274
Google +	Dalai Lama	November 7, 2011	3,518,018

**Patriarch Kirill** of Moscow and All Russia (secular name Vladimir M. Gundyayev) has been active on facebook since May 15, 2012. Until May 21, 2013 he has had 8,188 friends on facebook account Патриарх Кирилл. "There is a growing interest on the web for what he does and the Patriarch's presence on Facebook is a step forward to meet Internet users," /1/ a source inside the Orthodox Church told news agencies. His step was even more surprising, as it was him who personally urged Russians not to trust the Internet, which he claimed was a tool that could be used to "manipulate" people.

**Pope Tawadros II**, Coptic Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark has been using

Twitter since November 27, 2012. He has had 147 tweets in English and in Arabian in total. His account @PopeTawadros has 54,417 followers.

Social media are intensively used by **Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury**, who is a religious leader of the Church of England. He has been on Facebook since April 6, 2011, his profile was followed by 4,285 people on May 29, 2013. His Twitter account @ABCJustin was launched on November 2, 2011 and it had 32,176 followers. His You Tube account was launched on March 7, 2007-when the Church of England was led by Rowan Williams. There were 1,486 followers on May 29.

**Table 2: Religious leaders and social media (on June 4, 2013)**

	Dalai Lama	Pope Francis	Kirill	Tawadros II.	J. Welby
Facebook	5,111,973	x	8,188	x	4 284
YouTube	25,163	x	x	x	1,485
Twitter	7,021,274	6,507,503	x	54,417	32,173
Google +	3,518,018	x	x	x	x

Even the **leader of the Catholic Church** has his Twitter account. The account of

Benedict XVI @Pontifex was created on December 3, 2012. Monsignor Claudio Maria Celli, the president of the Holy See's social-communication council, stated, "Twitter allows a new type of evangelism. Which means the pope can reach a new demographic and engage in a dialogue with the faithful." /2/ He told this infor-

mation Radio Vatican on February 23, 2012. According to anticipatory information, the name of Pope's account should have been @BenedictusPPXVI. But, at the press conference on the day of the creation of the account, it was released that the name would be @pontifex and there would be further foreign languages besides English. /3/ Within next 24 hours 350,000 people followed this account.

**Table 3: Pope's Twitter account (on May 21,2013)**

Language	Number of Followers
@Pontifex	2,522,137
@Pontifex_es	2,401,193
@Pontifex_it	750,850
@Pontifex_pt	335,580
@Pontifex_fr	140,023
@Pontifex_de	106,440
@Pontifex_ln	101,791
@Pontifex_pl	88,485
@Pontifex_ar	61,004
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,507,503</b>

An interesting fact is about the account in Latin, which was not created with the others, but later, on January 20, 2013. Despite the fact that Latin, a universal language of the Church, is regarded to be a dead language, the account in Latin @Pontifex\_ln has more than 100,000 followers which is more than the accounts in Polish and Arabian.

Pope Benedict XVI tweeted for the first time on December 12. They were answers to questions related to living faith, which could be sent by anyone to the account with the hashtag #askpontifex. „Dear friends, I am pleased to get in touch with you through Twitter. Thank you for your generous response. I bless all of you from my heart.“ Pope Benedict XVI pushed the button on a tablet brought to him at the end of his general audience, while his tweet appeared in 8 languages on wide screen in the Paul VI Audience Hall. On the same day he answered three chosen questions.

Vatican informed that Pope will not administer his own profile alone from the very beginning, but he will approve messages before publishing. /4/ “All Pope’s tweets will be his own words: no one can put any message to his mouth and to claim that they are Pope’s tweets.” Greg Burke, Vatican Senior Media Advisor, emphasized./5/

Journalists were mainly interested in why Pope had not chosen the most popular social media, Facebook. Greg Burke explained that when choosing the social media, the most important criteria were simplicity to use and speed of message /6/. Despite the fact that Twitter, as the other social media, is based on sharing and following of others, Pope does not follow anyone through his

account and he does not share tweets of other people.“ He does not follow anyone as he does not want to discriminate anybody,” explained Antonio Spadaro, editor-in-chief of *Civiltà Cattolica* and an author of blog *Cyberteologia.it*. In case that Pope would choose to follow anyone, there would raise questions why he has chosen exactly this one and not the others. The same approach can be seen in case of Dalai Lama./7/

Until February 28, when Benedict XVI unexpectedly left his office, he gained 3,028,000 followers /8/ since the beginning of his account, he launched 38 tweets- the last one shortly before 8 p.m. when his abdication became official. The account was thereafter blocked (followers could be added) and a new Pope should decide about its future.

Pope Francis followed activities of his predecessor and published his first tweet four days after his election („Dear friends, I thank you from my heart and I ask you to continue to pray for me. Pope Francis.“) on March 17, 2013. @Pontifex became the first account which became inherited by someone. Until April 29 (48 days) Pope Francis gained more than 2,700,000 followers. The average increase was 60,000 new followers a day. The reason is not only his popularity from Latin America, but also his frequent tweets- since June 2, 2013 he has published 57 tweets. Curiosity is also an increase of the Spanish mutation of the account @Pontifex\_es. While on February 28, there was a huge discrepancy in English and Spanish mutation of the account (1,609,970 vs. 739,016). Nowadays, the numbers are similar (table 3).

There are a lot of people who follow some other cardinals on Twitter, the cardinals are usually of the highest rank in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, right after Pope. On May 24, there were 250 cardinals, 113 of them were younger than 80 and that means that in case of Conclave, they could vote a new pope. 12 of them have their own accounts on Twitter, they had 294,262 followers on June 3, 2013. The most followed account was @CardinalDolan, which is the account of Timothy Michael Dolan, Archbishop of New York (122,817 followers). Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture (@CardRavasi), ranked second with 52,787 followers. Four from the 12 cardinals are from the USA, two from Mexico, one from Brazil, one from Philipphines, South Africa and Spain. Only one of them has his Facebook profile- Archbishop of Manila, Luis Antonio Tagle.

Presence of religious leaders on social media may serve not only to spread messages and religious teachings, but also to an interreligious and ecumenic dialogue. An episode from the end of May, 2013 proves it. The official seat of the Church of England, Lambeth Palace retweeted the idea of Pope Francis on prayer on its account @lambethpalace. Despite the fact it is only a "virtual gesture", it outlines potential of mutual dialogue of religions and churches in a „digital continent“.

### The Holy See on the Internet and Social Media

The Holy See entered the world of the Internet on December 25, 1995 when there was published the Christmas message of John Paul II, greetings in different languages and his blessing *Urbi et Orbi* on [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va). Within the first 48 hours 307,786 users from 70 countries visited the webpage. Another version of the webpage was available during Easter holiday in 1997. At present, the webpage is available in 8 different languages including Chinese, and it is claimed to run in Russian and Arabic /9/. Besides the official webpage of the Holy See, there are a lot of pages of particular Vatican offices and institutions using the domain .va, e.g., Vatican City State ([www.vaticanstate.va](http://www.vaticanstate.va)), Pontifical Swiss Guards ([www.guardiasvizzera.va](http://www.guardiasvizzera.va)), the daily L'Osservatore Romano ([\[www.va\]\(http://www.va\)\), but even the webpage dedicated to sexual delicts of Catholic clergy \(\[www.resources.va\]\(http://www.resources.va\)\). /10/](http://osservatoreroma-</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

Pontifical Council for Social Communications (Ufficio Internet della Santa Sede) is responsible for administration of webpages with the domain .va. It is one of three departments of The Department of Telecommunications of Vatican City State (Direzione di telecomunicazioni dello Stato della Città del Vaticano). The department belongs to the Governorate./11/ Since March 31, 1996, they have been in charge of own Vatican webserver./12/ The priest Lucio Adrian Ruiz is the *director* of the Vatican's website now and there work about 20 employees.

The Holy See also founded a news service [www.news.va](http://www.news.va) besides the official website. Pope Benedict XVI launched it personally via the iPad on June 28, 2011. Consecutively, Pope informed about it on his twitter account: "Dear friends, I just launched News.va. Praised be our Lord Jesus Christ! With my prayers and blessings, Benedictus XVI." It was historically the first message published by Pope on any social network. On the first day 257,632 users from more than 200 countries visited the website./13/ In its first days of existence, there were two language versions- the English and Italian. Spanish, French and Portuguese followed soon afterwards. In his interview for the daily L'Osservatore Romano Claudio Maria Celli, President of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications (Vatican "Minister for Communications") said that Pope Benedict XVI is "surprised and fascinated by the world of Internet and he also added that "from now on it is enough to have just an iPhone or iPad and you know what happens at Pope Benedict's home /14/. Although Pope does not use the Internet or a computer, he is as an academician interested in new ways of getting knowledge and social communication. He spoke of the 'vast horizons' of new media 'urgently demand a serious reflection on the significance of communication in the digital age'. News. va does not form original content, but it concentrates news from Vatican radio, The Vatican television Center, Press Office of the Holy See and Fides News Agency. One may define it as an aggregational portal, or a multimedia platform. "News.va seems to be very useful mainly for journalists who may find new basic overview of issues important for Vatican to communicate in that very moment ,"

Paolo Rodari, a vaticanist from the Italian daily *Il Foglio* says /15/. The interconnection with social networks as Twitter or Facebook, the video sharing service YouTube or the photo sharing website Flickr enhances effective communication. The Holy See has its own account on the video sharing service YouTube- [www.youtube.com/vatican](http://www.youtube.com/vatican) since January 2009. Even Pope Benedict XVI appreciated this step in public /16/. Henrique de Casto, a managing director for Google, said in a written press release that YouTube was pleased its online users "will have access to the words of the pope on some of the most important issues facing the world today." /17/ It was not a step into the unknown. There was video news published daily on the webpage of Vatican Radio ([radiovaticana.va](http://radiovaticana.va)) about a half a year before the official launch. Vatican Television Center and the company H2O News cooperated in production of news. News videos were moved from the Radio Vaticana webpage to YouTube after strengthening of production and securing of translations into different languages. So now people interested can find videos from the most significant events in Vatican at one place. There are one or two videos added daily, most of them do not exceed two minutes. Since the election of Pope Francis "the Vatican YouTube" has been providing also full versions of his public appearances. The web visit rate during its first six days "Vatican YouTube" was 750,000 users and 15,000 subscribers. "Google analysts whom we addressed confirmed that, in comparison with main institutional channels of worldwide nature, these numbers confirm that our website is totally comparable with visit rates of the others, which were, in fact, launched much earlier and so have richer archives," Federico Lombardi, the current director of the Holy See Press Office, assumed /18/. French was added later to English, German, Spanish and Italian mutations of news videos. Pope's Easter message and blessing *Urbi et Orbi* in 2009 was launched in 27 languages including Arabic, Japanese, Esperanto or Tamil. It was not dubbing, only captions, but it still made record, as never in the history of YouTube was a video launched in so many languages /19/. Besides a usage of general communication platforms

as YouTube or Twitter, the Church runs also its own means. On the occasion of 43rd World Communications Day the webpage [pope2you.net](http://pope2you.net) was launched on May 21, 2009 which is the outcome of The Pontifical Council for Social Communications (*Pontificium Consilium de Communicationibus Socialibus*). New website should contribute to popularization and spreading of the message of Pope Benedict XVI for this day, which was "New Technologies, New Relationships. Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship." Via e-mail, virtual postcards and social networks Facebook and Twitter visitors can share ideas not only from this message, but also from several messages in years to come. People can get news (articles, audiofiles, videos) on current issues in the Catholic Church via iPhone applications. Christmas wishes not only to relatives, but also to Pope himself could be sent via the webpage [pope2you.net](http://pope2you.net) in 2010. The webpage recorded 2,000,000 visitors and users sent 70,000 virtual postcards with Pope's Benedict XVI ideas and images /20/. However, recently, the webpage has not been updated and it searches for its further use. The Holy See has been present on Twitter since March 20, 2010. Vatican Radio launched the account [@news\\_va](https://twitter.com/news_va) in six language mutations and published the first tweet on the Pastoral Letter of the Holy Father Benedict XVI to the Catholics of Ireland which covered sexual scandals of clergy in this country. On the occasion of the upcoming beatification of John Paul II on April 3, 2011, there was added the account of the webpage [Pope2you.net](http://Pope2you.net) under the name [@Pope2YouVatican](https://twitter.com/Pope2YouVatican) on Twitter which had 28,795 followers on Twitter. Next year, on June 28, 2012 on Twitter there appeared the account of news webpage [News.va](http://News.va) under the name [@newsva](https://twitter.com/newsva) in English and Italian. The first tweet informing on launching of new news service was published by Pope personally: "Dear friends, I just launched [News.va](http://News.va). Praised be our Lord Jesus Christ! With my prayers and blessings, Benedictus XVI." He did not use a traditional computer or notebook, but iPad by Apple. It was for the first time in history when Pope joined communication on social media. Consecutively, new accounts [@news.va](https://twitter.com/news.va) in Spanish, Portuguese and French were added.

**Table 4.: Number of Followers of Accounts @news\_va and @newsva (On May 23, 2013)**

@news_va		@newsva	
@news_va_en	161,366	@newsva_en	9,576
@news_va_es	58,717	@newsva_es	9,200
@news_va_it	21,934	@newsva_it	5,851
@news_va_pt	21,127	@newsva_pt	2,166
@news_va_fr	7,306	@newsva_fr	1,810
@news_va_de	4,386	x	x
<b>total</b>	<b>274,836</b>	<b>total</b>	<b>28,603</b>

Table 4 shows that number of followers of the account of the Vatican Radio is almost 10 times higher than the account of News.va. Moreover, names of the both accounts are very similar, which is confusing for Twitter users. A decision to form a new account alongside a favourite one, with a similar name, was not correct. Although we have mentioned only four Vatican Twitter accounts (in various language mutations), presence of Vatican institutions and representatives not only on this social medium, is more variable. According to summary at the official web page of the Holy see, the domain .va is used by 36 web pages of Vatican offices. Besides the page of the Vatican Radio, which we mentioned above, four others are connected with social media: Pontifical Council for the Family, Pontifical Council for Culture, Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization and Pontifical Council for Social Communications. Each of these institutions has its own Twitter profile and Facebook profile, some of them use Google+, You Tube and Flickr. Moreover, in time of sede vacante, even Secretariate of the State of Holy See started its own Twitter account.

### Catholic Applications for Mobile Formats

According to published results of The Center for the Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University, from the 70 million Catholics in the United States, well 2.9 use an app linked to faith/21/. It is almost impossible to count the number of mobile applications for Catholics. In our article we will pay our attention to the most frequent ones. **Laudete**, formerly "Catholic One", the application is still free for iOS and Android and KindleFire. It is so far regarded as the most valuable mobile application. It is very comprehensible and available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, Italian, Polish and

Slovenian. It includes various items, from Order of Mass through different prayers in different translations to and papal encyclical letters /22/. For following Pope Francis, there is an application called **Pope App** and it is still free for iOS and Android For up-to-date, it has live stream. This application was developed by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications utilizing Vatican News Service as an all-access pass to Pope Francis with official papal-related content in a variety of formats. /23/

*iBreviary Terra Sancta it is free for iOS and Blackberry and Android and Kindle Fire and the new Kindle Fire HD. It is not just a Breviary, we speak of a complete Roman Missal (3rd ed.). It contains The Liturgy of the Hours, the Daily Missal for the celebration of the Mass, Catholic Prayers and Rituals.*

**iMissal** contains The Missal, various Bible versions, prayers and Saint daily applications. There are HQ videos, audio readings in all the sections. It is easy to read because one can bump up the text size with the zoom-in tool or set it to desired size in settings. Text is re-formatted to fit when zooming. Vatican strongly promotes its official application Vatican.va App or the application dedicated to Pope Francis, The Pope App. As far as invention of this sphere is concerned, Polish citizens can be regarded as pioneers- there are plenty of applications of this kind, even the one thanks to which one may find the nearest church with the shedule o Holy masses. For the future, people expect an increase in the application modifications to meet different needs of customers in all the spheres of life, the life of faith is not an exception.

## Conclusion

In our paper we tried to describe a wide variety of activities of the highest representatives and central institutions of the Catholic Church on the Internet, especially social media. The lower we got on the hierarchical ladder, the more activities on the "digital continent" we found. Accounts on social networks are common for the whole dioceses, parishes, catholic movements and communities together with their representatives- bishops, priests or common laypeople. Even more interesting fact will be to observe what unexpected situations the Church will have to face in contact with still more popular and used mobile applications. Bishops from New Zealand had to react to usage of the applications in tablets instead of Roman Missal in churches /24/, Frederico Lombardi, the director of the Holy See Press Office, had to enter the media discussion on virtual confession /25/ which was started by the application *Confession: A Roman Catholic App*. We surely may assume that not only the Catholic Church, but also other churches and religions will start to use more intensively potential of new information and communication technologies not only in their favour, but also in common dialogue.

## Notes

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- /2/ Mons. Celli: presto su Twitter gli Angelus del Papa. Il Messaggio di Quaresima diviso in 40 „tweet“. In [http://it.radiovaticana.va/news/2012/02/23/mons\\_celli\\_presto\\_su\\_twitter\\_gli\\_angelus\\_del\\_papa/it1-565577](http://it.radiovaticana.va/news/2012/02/23/mons_celli_presto_su_twitter_gli_angelus_del_papa/it1-565577)
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/22/ More at <http://catholicapps.com/laudate/>

/23/ More at <http://www.news.va/thepopeapp/>

/24/ The text of the statement is available at:<http://www.cyberteologia.it/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Ipads-at-Mass.jpg>

/25/ Padre Lombardi: no alla ‚Confessione per iPhone‘. Nessun controllo restrittivo sul rinnovamento liturgico voluto dal Concilio. Available at:  
[http://it.radiovaticana.va/news/2011/02/09/padre\\_lombardi\\_no\\_alla\\_%E2%80%98confessione\\_per\\_iphone%E2%80%99.\\_nessun\\_controll/it1-460921](http://it.radiovaticana.va/news/2011/02/09/padre_lombardi_no_alla_%E2%80%98confessione_per_iphone%E2%80%99._nessun_controll/it1-460921)