Online Religion?

The Evolving Religious Information Landscapes of Zen Buddhism and Roman Catholicism

Tim Gorichanaz, PhD student
College of Computing & Informatics
Advised by Deborah Turner

Why does Catholicism seem to have such regard for in-person religious worship, whereas Zen does not? Is it related to the authoritarian structure of the Church? The religion's basis in belief? Or is it simply a matter of established tradition?

With Mass attendance at a four-decade low, could inactive Catholics be brought back into the fold by the legitimization of online practice?

Addressing these issues may be pivotal for the Church in the coming years: Buddhism is flourishing in America, while Catholicism is receding.

Tim is grateful to Deborah for her boundless support, feedback and advice, all of which have been essential to this research.

References
[1] See: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/catholicism-zen_buddhism_b_5eb7a65be4b05e0f7d716b0d
[17] Tim is grateful to Deborah for her boundless support, feedback and advice, all of which have been essential to this research.

Zen Buddhism
- Path to individual salvation
- Emphasis on practice: seated meditation
- Came to U.S. in 20th century
- In U.S., burgeoning; mostly converts
- Teaching through in-person orality
- "Special transmission outside scripture"

Online Zen
- Possible based on religious information landscape; indeed, borne out in reality
- Numerous online sanghas with remote membership options
- "Most of my practice has been done at home ... reading books, blogs, and websites and listening to podcasts. ... [Internet access] allows me to also interact with any teacher or other practitioner who also has an internet presence."

Roman Catholicism
- Hierarchical, led by pope
- Emphasis on belief: loving, serving God
- Came to U.S. in 17th century
- In U.S., ebbing; mostly heritage
- Teaching through structured catechism
- Central: Sacraments, reading Bible

Online Catholicism?
- New media offerings for prayer, catechism and supplementation (not replacement) of Sacraments
  - "Mass is the cornerstone of our faith life because of what lies at its heart: the Eucharist."
  - "No, you can’t do it online."

New media in religious information landscapes
- App and podcast usage: key smartphone behaviors
- Apple largest maker: iOS most widely used
- Examined top 10 apps and podcasts in U.S. iTunes Store for queries zen and catholic