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UNDERSTANDING FAITH TO TRANSCEND “FAKE NEWS” IN  
DIGITALLY MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

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Along with misinformation and disinformation, “fake news” has become a serious concern in our modern, interconnected world, and its increasing importance has sparked a kaleidoscope of diverse perspectives on such discourses, the structures and tenets threatened by it, organizations responsible for it, analytical frameworks to understand it, news making practices that propagate it, and, most importantly, the necessity of countering it. In analyzing the boundaries of the various fake news discourses, issues concerning cultural and interpersonal communication, improvements of digital communication methods, and shifts in the understanding of faith, truth and meaning come to the fore. However understood, the manipulation of the general public for ideological or economic advantage (Lazer et al. 2018) that contributes to inaccurate beliefs – even when headlines are refuted by fact-checkers (Pennycook, Cannon, and Rand 2018) – surely has detrimental effects on both the individual and societal levels, making it imperative to determine who and why is susceptible to believing fake news.

Harmony between spheres of religion and the news has never been simple. Religion has a deep emotional and personal significance for individuals and the Internet, in particular the social media platforms, offer religious people valuable opportunities for community building, information-sharing, and interfaith dialogue. However, in fostering a growing culture of participation, the world-wide web facilitates the rapid dissemination of fake news as well across contemporary digital and popular culture. Addressing this issue requires collective efforts from religious institutions, media platforms, individuals, and society to promote accurate information, critical thinking, and responsible dissemination of news and religious beliefs.

It is in this context that Rachel I. Wightman’s book, *Faith and Fake News: A Guide to Consuming Information Wisely* (2023), fills a legitimate need to address disinformation and misinformation by providing a practical guide to help Christians discern what is true and false on the Internet. As a librarian trained in information documentation, management and retrieval, Wightman aims at equipping her fellow Christian believers with the ability to evaluate online information and interact without prejudice with those who hold opposing beliefs. Striking a balance between using the Internet for meaningful religious participation and being aware of its potential pitfalls is crucial in her view for fostering positive experiences and connections within the religious community.

The volume has a logical structure that places information at its core. As such, it consists of three chapters which invite readers to *understand* the nature of information, *evaluate* information and *decide* responsibly what to do with that information within a wide variety of experiences and

consequences for Christians and their understanding of fake news. An introductory section explains social media tools, defines basic online terms, and describes the nature of prominent social media platforms.

Chapter 1 presents the *Information Landscape* and its propensity for thought bubbles in a world full of easily accessible information. The section starts with an overview of online spaces and explains how the information environment is generally structured. In candid, and often over spiritualized ways, Wightman invites her readers to look inside themselves to address their biases and to reflect on ways to consume information while remaining true to their own perspective. She warns against the filtered bubbles ecosystem of personalized information created by social media networks, search engines, and recommendation algorithms as well as against the danger of engaging with information that correlates with users' existing beliefs leading them to be shielded from diverse perspectives or opposing viewpoints.

The multifaceted nexus between religion and fake news is then uncovered by a variety of answers that the author tries to provide, which seek to address the Christians' duty in a world where information is readily available, the extent to which ingested information can influence their faith, the integration of Christian identity into information environments as well as, more critically, whether one's Christian faith can affect both the way information is evaluated and how one's online attitude and habits are formed.

Chapter 2, *Evaluating Information*, interrogates different emotional frameworks and provides the reader a series of tools and practices to address misinformation. The transition from the unsettling information landscape from the first chapter - which explained conceptual crossovers between disinformation, misinformation, and fake news and showed how algorithms affect individuals and how conspiracy theories propagate - to a more applied discussion on the Christian's ability to evaluate information and its sources in the second chapter is smooth and comes naturally in the book's narrative on wise information consumption. Wightman presents an array of tools for this purpose, including the use of fact-checking resources and "lateral reading" (Wightman 2023: 114) (researching the content's author and credentials before disseminating unverified digital content).

The last chapter, *Deciding What to Do*, affords another opportunity to make sense of faith and fake news across a more practical space, by showing methods of engaging with information in a way that encourages individuals who are wisened by the Spirit of God to grow and think critically. By practising humility, which is understood as an increased sensitivity to error, and by deliberately seeking out new perspectives, Christ-followers can profit a better opportunity to be ethically engaged in all their physical and online spaces, and, by loving their neighbours, to be able to separate them from the worldly information they consume.

There is a pervasive sense of compassion, humility, and kindness that springs from the pages of this book, giving the reader a feeling of comfort and settling peace of mind. The dialogic narrative allows for a more dynamic and engaging reading, as it gives the author's audience the opportunity to immerse themselves in the chapters while witnessing the interactions and relationships between the author/speaker and her Christian fellow readers. This sense of inclusiveness and openness enriches the book's platform for discussions and increases its readers' engagement through the practical drills and suggestions provided at the end of each section.

Upon completion of the book, one realizes that the volume is neither exclusively about fake news, nor about a particular faith and/or Christian denomination struggling to navigate across Internet disinformation and misinformation, but more about the heaps of good, practical advice that is grounded in common sense. And while the prevention strategies, expected responses, remedies, and fixes across technology and media discourses and practices, aimed at curbing circulation of fake news, are quite necessary for a healthy information ecology, Wightman's refreshing urge to be kind and respectful of others is apt to make us each transcend our petty daily grinds and reflect on a more responsible, renewed and holistic articulation of our own (un)mediated self, and similarly situated social selves around us.

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