

BOOK REVIEW

**Mario Rico C. Jacoba and Agnes M. Brazal.
2025. *Cyberchurch Neighborhood of Others
(Kapwa): An Ecclesiological Model for a
Digital Age***

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This review evaluates *Cyberchurch Neighborhood of Others (Kapwa)*, which presents a comprehensive ecclesiological model rooted in Global South realities and Filipino theology. Rico Costa Jacoba and Agnes M. Brazal argue that cyberspace is a genuine relational environment for authentic Christian communion rather than a mere technical tool.

The authors integrate the Parable of the Good Samaritan with the Filipino concepts of *kapwa* (shared inner self) and *pakikipagkapwa* (engaging the other) to define digital neighborliness as a practice of compassion and responsibility toward the vulnerable. By reimagining Avery Dulles' classic models of the Church, they demonstrate how ecclesial life "subsists" in digital "sacramental nodes" of mission and solidarity. Emphasizing the experiences of migrants and the marginalized, this work reframes digital ministry as a postcolonial practice of accompaniment, offering a vital framework for contemporary missiology and religious education.

Rico Casta Jacoba develops in this book the ecclesiological model he first proposed in his doctoral dissertation at De La Salle University, where he described the church as "Cyberchurch neighborhood of others". His academic work focuses on faith, pedagogy and digital culture in Filipino Catholic life, with particular attention to migrants and digital natives whose everyday religious practices already move across digital platforms. His co-author, Agnes M. Brazal, is a prominent Filipino theologian known for her contributions to liberation and postcolonial ethics, migration theology and cyber theology, and she has helped shape Asian theological discussion on social communication and digital media.

Writing together, Jacoba and Brazal bring a Global South, postcolonial lens to their subject. Their starting point is the conviction that theology must take seriously

the experience of those who are marginalized, and they apply this conviction to the digital sphere where inequalities and exclusions also operate. The book appears at a moment of rapid digital transformation, heightened by the COVID19 pandemic, when many churches moved quickly into online and hybrid forms of worship and community. Much of the existing literature on digital religion and online church arises from North Atlantic contexts and often concentrates on specific questions such as liturgy, leadership, or online authority. In contrast, Jacoba and Brazal set out to offer a comprehensive ecclesiological model that is rooted in Filipino experience and attentive to wider Global South realities.

Their central claim is that Cyberchurch neighborhood of others (*kapwa*) should be regarded as a full model of church for the digital age, not simply as a temporary emergency measure or a digital extension of the parish. For them, cyberspace is not a neutral tool but a real relational environment in which authentic neighborly relations and Christian communion can develop, even among believers who are widely scattered geographically. The book speaks to theologians, missionaries, religious educators and church leaders who recognize that the main question has shifted from “how do we stream?” to “what kind of Church is taking shape online, and who is included or excluded in that process?”

The authors develop their case in three major movements. First, they describe the range of online church and Christian community expressions that have emerged over recent decades. They focus in particular on contexts where people feel distant from institutional Church life, on the experience of migrants and diaspora communities who rely on digital platforms for sustaining faith and relationships, and on the pandemic, when even very traditional congregations had to adopt online and hybrid forms. In these situations they identify a spectrum stretching from “religion online”, which centres on information and broadcaststyle content, to “online religion”, which involves interaction, participation and community building. They then locate Cyberchurch within this spectrum, arguing that many digital communities already function as real church even if existing ecclesiology has been slow to recognize them.

Second, they construct the theological core of their model. Luke 10.25-37 (the Parable of the Good Samaritan) is read alongside Emmanuel Levinas’ ethics of the face of the Other and Filipino concepts such as *kapwa*, a shared inner self, and *paki-kipagkapwa*, engaging another as an extension of one’s own self. In this framework, *kapwa* describes a shared interiority that connects “one of us” and “not one of us”, without erasing difference. “Neighbor” is thus defined less by physical closeness and more by the responsibility to respond to the vulnerable other encountered along life’s pathways, including digital roads. Liberationist concern for those at the margins deepens this reading. The Good Samaritan becomes a paradigm for digital ethics in cyberspace as a new Jericho Road, people carry wounds of exclusion, exploitation and loneliness, and may be overlooked or harmed through online indifference or

hostility. In this context, *pakikipagkapwa* names a deliberate practice of neighborly compassion choosing to notice, pause and care for others encountered on screens and platforms.

Third, Jacoba and Brazal test and integrate their proposal using Avery Dulles' classic models of the Church Institution, Communion, Sacrament, Herald, Servant, Community of Disciples and his theological criteria such as Scripture, tradition, identity and mission, Christian virtues, contemporary experience, fruitfulness and relations with those outside the Church. They argue that Christ's Church "subsists" in Cyberchurch as a "sacramental node" of communion and mission, even though that life is mediated digitally. Each of Dulles' models is reimagined for digital settings: institutional aspects appear in moderated platforms, online governance and community guidelines; communion takes the form of networked relationships that cross geographical boundaries; sacramentality is expressed through mediated experiences of presence, prayer and sacramental practice; herald and servant roles show up in digital preaching, teaching, advocacy and solidarity; and the community of disciples is seen in groups that learn, serve and discern together using digital tools. Throughout, the authors stress that digital environments are marked by racism, sexism, classism and other forms of exclusion, and that any faithful Cyberchurch must confront these realities rather than ignore them.

The book's argument is coherent and well organized. The image of the neighborhood of others (*kapwa*) provides a strong throughline that holds together the descriptive, theological, and ecclesiological parts of the work. By moving from mapping practice, to constructing a theological synthesis, to evaluating the model through Dulles' categories, the authors offer a structure that connects lived experience with doctrinal reflection in a clear way. This makes the book accessible to readers with pastoral and practical interests while still engaging those concerned with systematic theology.

The theological and theoretical framework is one of the book's most notable strengths. By drawing on Dulles' models, the authors locate their argument within a recognized ecclesiological tradition and show how that tradition can respond to digital change. At the same time, their use of *kapwa* and *pakikipagkapwa* pushes beyond many Western accounts of digital religion. These Filipino concepts challenge individualistic assumptions by presenting the self as fundamentally relational and responsible, an approach that fits the realities of shared online life better than notions of isolated users. By integrating liberation and postcolonial perspectives, they keep questions of power and exclusion central, and thus contribute to broader efforts to decolonize both theology and media studies.

In terms of approach, the book offers a contextual, literaturebased theological construction rather than a report of new empirical fieldwork. The authors work with existing descriptions of online church, case examples and pastoral experience,

weaving these with scriptural and theological sources to build a normative model meant to guide both reflection and practice. Their movement between digital experience, Scripture, tradition and Filipino culture accords with established methods in contextual and practical theology and supports their stated aim of equipping churches and scholars with a usable theological framework.

Their engagement with sources is broad and careful. They converse with foundational work on digital religion and digital liturgy, with liberation and postcolonial thought and with Filipino psychology, while also drawing on Jacoba's earlier dissertation research and Brazal's contributions to the theme of *pakikipagkapwa* and resistance.

Several features stand out as particular strengths. The book offers a clear and substantial model of Cyberchurch that moves past technical "howto" guidance and addresses deeper questions of identity, presence and mission. It foregrounds Filipino and Global South perspectives, thereby widening the scope of digital ecclesiology, which has often been dominated by North Atlantic voices. It consistently keeps migrants and other marginalized groups at the center of discussion, resisting idealized views of digital spaces as automatically equal. It insists that cyberspace can be a genuine context for God's action and ecclesial life, and not merely a secondary or inferior setting.

At the same time, the book has some limitations. Because it does not present original empirical research on particular Cyberchurch communities, its model remains at a theological and conceptual level and invites further testing and refinement in local studies. Readers who are less familiar with philosophy or contextual theology may find parts of the argument demanding. Although the authors identify crucial issues such as the digital divide, economic constraints and the exclusion of people with disabilities, they do not offer detailed policy or pastoral strategies for addressing these; that work will need to be done by others who adopt and adapt the model in specific contexts.

The contribution of the book to theology, missionaries and religious education is substantial. It is one of the clearest attempts so far to understand Cyberchurch as a full ecclesiological model rather than a temporary fix or optional add-on. It complements existing literature on digital religion and worship while adding a distinctive Filipino and Global South voice. For missiological reflection, the book reframes digital mission as accompaniment and *pakikipagkapwa* presence rather than content dissemination or numerical growth, emphasizing solidarity with those who are online, mobile, displaced, or distant from traditional structures. In religious education, it encourages viewing digital platforms as neighborhoods of learning and faith, and it calls educators to design practices that are participatory, networked, and context-sensitive, especially for young people and diaspora communities.

As a doctoral student working on ecclesiology, formation and religious education in the Philippine context, I find myself both affirmed and challenged by this work. It supports the conviction that digital environments are real and significant spaces for church life and pushes me to examine more closely how online practices shape identity, authority and community in the settings I research. The focus on *kapwa* and *pakikipagkapwa* encourages me to center Filipino categories in my own analytical framework rather than relying primarily on Western concepts. It also inspires me to think about advocacy and accessibility in digital ministry, especially for those who are most at risk of being left out.

Overall, *Cyberchurch Neighborhood of Others (Kapwa)* is a timely and important contribution to current thinking about church in digital contexts. It extends key discussions in digital religion and digital liturgy, brings a muchneeded Filipino and Global South perspective to digital ecclesiology, and offers a theological model that can guide future research and practice.

About the Reviewer

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