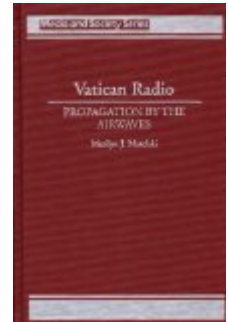


Marilyn J. Matelski. *Vatican Radio: Propagation by the Airwaves.* Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995. xx + 199 pp. \$55, cloth, ISBN 978-0-275-94760-6.



Reviewed by Thimios Zaharopoulos

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Vatican Radio is the world's first international radio service, yet not much is known about it. According to Marilyn Matelski, this book is an attempt to "explore the history of radio HVJ (Vatican Radio) through evolving models of leadership, church doctrine and social change." A careful reading of the book will satisfy the reader's thirst for information about the Vatican, but the reader may not be as pleased by the amount of knowledge gained about Vatican Radio.

Through the first seven chapters, the author discusses the evolution of church doctrine as each new pope put his own stamp on the Catholic Church and Vatican Radio. We learn of the purpose of Vatican Radio, which is, as seen by Pope Pius XI who established it, a means to propagate Catholicism and thus overcome the confines of political, geographical, and ideological limitations placed on the Church of Rome. We follow the Church's internal and external relations through World War II, the Cold War, the liberal and conservative phases of the Vatican, and their impact on Vatican Radio and the Jesuits who run it.

Although the author provides an interesting and systematic view of evolutionary changes in both the expressive and instrumental leadership of the Vatican, references to Vatican Radio are few. Of course there are several passages where the reader can get a descriptive glimpse of Vatican Radio, but usually these are from other sources. The author does have a valid reason for this gap: The Vatican turned down a request for access to the relevant archives. Nevertheless, close to the end of the book, we read about Vatican Radio's daily programming, a pot pourri of "Daily Mass from St. Peter's Basilica, classical, jazz, and pop music, an innovative news/commentary program, and Byzantine-rite, Slavic church services" (p. 144).

Finally, the last chapter (chapter 8) discusses the future of Vatican Radio, which, according to the author, is not at all certain. Here we learn that in the 1990s Vatican Radio not only uses short-wave, but AM and FM frequencies to broadcast to every nation in the world using thirty-four languages, and at a cost of about \$25 million a year.

The book includes six appendices, five of which are excerpts from speeches, and one that offers a chronology of Vatican Radio, one photo, several figures, and a glossary in its 199 pages.

The author states that the evolution of Vatican Radio is "better explained through theories of social change, propaganda usage and evolving models of faith" (p. 20). This desire to contextualize propagation through Vatican Radio often extends fairly far when the reader is provided with theories of Max Weber, references to Carl Jung, and even discussion of characteristics of various media, US broadcast philosophy, differences between AM and FM radio, and so forth.

Generally, this book is a good addition to the literature of radio around the world and of the Catholic culture, of which Vatican Radio is an important example.

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