

Technology at the Service of the Gospel¹

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Abstract

Technology is an essential part in the life of the contemporary people. It pervades almost every field of human activity. Religion is no exception to it. If people misuse technology, it has potential to create immense damage. However, to wish away technology would be naive. The Catholic Church in recent times has consistently advocated prudence in the use of technology. In this paper, we shall examine the role of technology in spreading the values of the gospel. We shall consider the Church documents and opinions of prominent theologians for the purpose of our study.

Introduction

There has been tremendous progress in the field of science and technology. Science and technology have helped in the overall development of the world. Life of contemporary people has become easy, thanks to the various facilities offered by the recent innovations in technologies. However, people can misuse the advances in technology for their selfish motives. Moreover, it can bring harm to many people. Thus, it is very important to know the prudent use of technology. In recent times, the Catholic Church has been supportive of the use of technology for spreading the values of gospel. In this article, we shall examine the role of technology in serving the purpose of spreading the values of the gospel.

The Role of Technology to Spread the Values of the Gospel

Some may think that Catholic Church is a religious organization and therefore has no say in the matters of science or technology. Further, some may also criticize the Catholic Church for being anti-science. However, such criticisms are untenable. Firstly, this is because even though in the past, the Catholic Church took anti-science position in some cases (for example in Galileo's case), it was never anti-science per se. It was back in 1603 that the Catholic Church established the Pontifical Academy for Science to promote and encourage research in the field of science.² Secondly, the Catholic Church is a religious organization but concerns itself with

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² Pontifical Academy of Science. Available at <http://www.casinapioiv.va/content/accademia/en/about/history.html>

every aspect of humanity. Humanity has developed science and technology and therefore the Catholic Church recognizes its importance and potential. The Conciliar document, *Inter Mirifica* explicitly upheld the importance of the use of media in the Church's mission. It also warned about the potential harm media can do, if people do not use it for the common good. The document noted that:

The Church recognizes that these media, if properly utilized, can be of great service to mankind, since they greatly contribute to men's entertainment and instruction as well as to the spread and support of the Kingdom of God. The Church recognizes, too, that men can employ these media contrary to the plan of the Creator and to their own loss. Indeed, the Church experiences maternal grief at the harm all too often done to society by their evil use.³

If the clergy and laity judiciously use technology then it can become a great tool to carry out the work of evangelization. The Conciliar Document *Aetatis Novae* also encouraged the use of media in evangelization and spreading the values of the gospel. It noted that:

Along with traditional means such as witness of life, catechetics, personal contact, popular piety, the liturgy and similar celebrations, the use of media is now essential in evangelization and catechesis.⁴

Preaching and communication are two important components in the work of evangelization. The Church recommends the use of latest technology with prudence in preaching and communication. In the following sections, we shall examine the role of technology in serving the purpose of the gospel especially through preaching and communicating to the people.

1. Preaching

Preaching through word and witness of life is an important part of the Church's mission.⁵ The Church uses the traditional means of spreading the values of Christ but cannot afford to neglect the new means. Technology offers diverse means, which have a great potential to spread effectively the Word of God to many people. Even though technology in itself is neutral, those who use it, especially the clergy and the laity, need to devise means to use it for the good

(accessed July 27, 2015).

³ Conciliar Document *Inter Mirifica* no. 2. Available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19631204_inter-mirifica_en.html (accessed July 22, 2015).

⁴ Conciliar Document *Aetatis Novae*, no. 11. Available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_22021992_aetatis_en.html (accessed July 27, 2015).

⁵ See Conciliar documents *Lumen Gentium*, *Ad Gentes* and *Gaudium et Spes*. See also Kurian Kunnumparam, *Towards a New Humanity* (Mumbai: St. Paul's Publication, 2005), 14–15.

of humanity. The Conciliar document *Inter Mirifica* noted that media could serve as a means of proclamation in the contemporary world.

The Catholic Church, since it was founded by Christ our Lord to bear salvation to all men and thus is obliged to preach the Gospel, considers it one of its duties to announce the Good News of salvation also with the help of the media of social communication and to instruct men in their proper use. It is, therefore, an inherent right of the Church to have at its disposal and to employ any of these media insofar as they are necessary or useful for the instruction of Christians and all its efforts for the welfare of souls. It is the duty of Pastors to instruct and guide the faithful so that they, with the help of these same media, may further the salvation and perfection of themselves and of the entire human family. In addition, the laity especially must strive to instill a human and Christian spirit into these media, so that they may fully measure up to the great expectations of mankind and to God's design.⁶

The Second Vatican Council encouraged the laity to engage themselves in missionary work. As both, the clergy and the laity form the people of God, it becomes incumbent on all to involve themselves in the work of evangelization. The laity, who has expertise in the field of science, technology and media, may use their knowledge to serve the Church's mission. They can be collaborators with the pastors to spread the gospel of Christ. The Conciliar document *Inter Mirifica* encourages the laity to use their expertise for spreading the gospel. It noted that:

The laity, too, who have something to do with the use of these media, should endeavor to bear witness to Christ, first of all by carrying out their individual duties or office expertly and with an apostolic spirit, and, further, by being of direct help in the pastoral activity of the Church-to the best of their ability-through their technical, economic, cultural and artistic talents.⁷

In recent times, internet is available in most of the countries. Even in the remotest villages, people can access to internet via mobile phones. Thus, internet has become a powerful tool of communication. Internet carries immense amount of information. Further, there are no global uniform ethical guidelines concerning the use of internet. Thus, the internet can carry a lot of derogatory information and promote unhealthy actions. The Church being an *expert in humanity* needs to examine the use of internet and urge people to use it as a tool for promoting human dignity and welfare of all. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications in its document, *The Church and Internet* highlighted the advantages of using the internet technology for spreading the gospel message widely, efficiently and promptly. It noted that:

All this applies to the Internet. And even though the world of social communications

⁶ *Inter Mirifica* no. 3.

⁷ *Inter Mirifica* no. 13.

may at times seem at odds with the Christian message, it also offers unique opportunities for proclaiming the saving truth of Christ to the whole human family. Consider... the positive capacities of the Internet to carry religious information and teaching beyond all barriers and frontiers. Such a wide audience would have been beyond the wildest imaginings of those who preached the Gospel before us... Catholics should not be afraid to throw open the doors of social communications to Christ, so that his Good News may be heard from the housetops of the world.⁸

There is lot of negativity about the use of internet for Church activities among some clergy. Such an attitude does not serve the purpose of the gospel. Clergy and laity need to know that the technology is not bad in itself. Those who use it need to make judicious use of the same for the good of the Church. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications in its document, *The Church and Internet* noted that:

Since announcing the Good News to people formed by a media culture requires taking carefully into account the special characteristics of the media themselves, the Church now needs to understand the Internet. This is necessary in order to communicate effectively with people—especially young people—who are steeped in the experience of this new technology, and also in order to use it well. The media offer important benefits and advantages from a religious perspective: They carry news and information about religious events, ideas, and personalities; they serve as vehicles for evangelization and catechesis. Day in and day out, they provide inspiration, encouragement, and opportunities for worship to persons confined to their homes or to institutions.⁹

People well versed with the use of internet technology can help the Church by creating cyber sites and programs for faith formation and education.¹⁰ They can also devise means like live streaming of liturgical activities on the internet to reach out to the elderly, who cannot attend the Church services due to age related illness. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications in its document, *The Church and Internet* noted about the use of internet in Church activities as follows:

The Internet is relevant to many activities and programs of the Church—evangelization, including both re-evangelization and new evangelization and the traditional missionary work *ad gentes*, catechesis and other kinds of education, news and information, apologetics, governance and administration, and some forms of pastoral counseling and spiritual direction. Although the virtual reality of cyberspace cannot substitute for real

⁸ Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *The Church and Internet*, no. 4. Available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20020228_church-internet_en.html (accessed July 27, 2015).

⁹ *The Church and Internet*, no. 5.

¹⁰ See Brian Cochran, *Strategies and Insights for Church Growth* (Pomona: Gospel Worldwide, 2012), 69–70.

interpersonal community, the incarnational reality of the sacraments and the liturgy, or the immediate and direct proclamation of the gospel, it can complement them, attract people to a fuller experience of the life of faith, and enrich the religious lives of users. It also provides the Church with a means for communicating with particular groups—young people and young adults, the elderly and home-bound, persons living in remote areas, the members of other religious bodies—who otherwise may be difficult to reach. A growing number of parishes, dioceses, religious congregations, and Church-related institutions, programs, and organizations of all kinds now make effective use of the Internet for these and other purposes. Creative projects under Church sponsorship exist in some places on the national and regional levels. The Holy See has been active in this area for several years and is continuing to expand and develop its Internet presence. Church-related groups that have not yet taken steps to enter cyberspace are encouraged to look into the possibility of doing so at an early date. We strongly recommend the exchange of ideas and information about the Internet among those with experience in the field and those who are newcomers.¹¹

Christ has given the Church, the permanent mission to proclaim God's Word. The gospel message is valid for all the times. Even though the contemporary people do not have much liking for religious activities, they do have spiritual needs.¹² It is becoming a fashion among the youth to seek *gurus* to satisfy one's spiritual needs. The Church has the obligation to reach out to the people, who are searching for meaning of their existence. God's Word is eternal and powerful. It has ability to enlighten the mind and vision of all. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications in its document, *Ethics in Communication* noted about the importance of using media in proclamation. As the youth search for sites, which can offer them plausible explanations about the origin of the world, cosmos, morality etc, the Church can share its treasure of spiritual wisdom through the medium of the internet. For this purpose, the Church is in great need of people who are well versed in these means of modern technology and have sound knowledge of the Christian faith. Further, people who deal with these sites need to be matured and prudent as they are encountering individuals about whom they may no knowledge. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications in its document, *Ethics in Communication* noted that:

The Church has reasons of her own for being interested in the means of social communication. Viewed in the light of faith, the history of human communication can be seen as a long journey from Babel, site and symbol of communication's collapse, to Pentecost and the gift of tongues, communication restored by the power of the Spirit sent by the Son. Sent forth into the world to announce the good news (see Mt 28: 19-20; Mk 16: 15), the Church has the mission of proclaiming the Gospel until the end of time.

¹¹ *The Church and Internet*, no. 5.

¹² See Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Brief History*, 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 4-5.

Today, she knows, that requires using media.¹³

Modern world is breeding loneliness and alienation among people. Social networks can help people who feel lonely. Even though it is important to talk with someone, it is not always possible for all the people to find someone, who may be willing to listen to them. Moreover, extreme working conditions can act as obstacles for people to interact freely with others. In such cases, social network sites can fill that gap. However, people using social network sites must be aware of the possible pitfalls with it. Adults using such sites must be matured enough to see through the genuineness of the people, with whom they are interacting. Under-age youth and children need to inform their guardians, about their social network friendship circle. This can help in timely detecting and preempting any unhealthy incidents. The Church needs to know about the strength and weakness of social network technology. It can efficiently employ the social network sites to reach out to the people, who have no access to the Church nearby. Pope Benedict XVI noted the following about the use of social network sites.

Social networks, as well as being a means of evangelization, can also be a factor in human development. As an example, in some geographical and cultural contexts where Christians feel isolated, social networks can reinforce their sense of real unity with the worldwide community of believers. The networks facilitate the sharing of spiritual and liturgical resources, helping people to pray with a greater sense of closeness to those who share the same faith. An authentic and interactive engagement with the questions and the doubts of those who are distant from the faith should make us feel the need to nourish, by prayer and reflection, our faith in the presence of God as well as our practical charity: If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal (1 Cor 13: 1). In the digital world there are social networks which offer our contemporaries opportunities for prayer, meditation and sharing the word of God. But these networks can also open the door to other dimensions of faith. Many people are actually discovering, precisely thanks to a contact initially made online, the importance of direct encounters, experiences of community and even pilgrimage, elements which are always important in the journey of faith. In our effort to make the Gospel present in the digital world, we can invite people to come together for prayer or liturgical celebrations in specific places such as Churches and chapels. There should be no lack of coherence or unity in the expression of our faith and witness to the Gospel in whatever reality we are called to live, whether physical or digital. When we are present to others, in any way at all, we are called to make known the love of God to the furthest ends of the earth.¹⁴

¹³ Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Ethics in Communication*, no. 3. Available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20000530_ethics-communications_en.html (accessed on July 27, 2015).

¹⁴ Benedict XVI, Message for 47th World Communications Day, 2013. Available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20130124_47th-world-communications-day.html (accessed on July 30, 2015).

Means of technology like the internet and smart phones can help people to pray and meditate. For instance, there are various websites, which offer online biblical texts along with reading plans and study courses. People can use these facilities at their leisure and thus, deepen their spiritual lives. There are also various websites, which offer Christian meditations along with music. People can access these materials at any time and meditate. Pope Benedict XVI noted the importance of these websites, which offer Christian literature, music and meditations. He noted that:

Attention should be paid to the various types of websites, applications and social networks, which can help people today to find time for reflection and authentic questioning, as well as making space for silence and occasions for prayer, meditation or sharing of the word of God. In concise phrases, often no longer than a verse from the Bible, profound thoughts can be communicated, as long as those taking part in the conversation do not neglect to cultivate their own inner lives.¹⁵

The clergy and laity need to equip themselves to respond adequately to the fast changing technologies and the various moral repercussions it brings. In order to be effective preachers of the Word, the clergy and laity need to speak the language of the contemporary people. They need to involve themselves with the various social network sites, which have healthy discussions about life, religion, spirituality, morality etc. For this, all those involved with the work of proclamation need to acquaint themselves with these technologies. Pope Benedict XVI noted that:

Responding adequately to this challenge amid today's cultural shifts, to which young people are especially sensitive, necessarily involves using new communications technologies. The world of digital communication, with its almost limitless expressive capacity, makes us appreciate all the more Saint Paul's exclamation: Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel (1 Cor 9: 16) The increased availability of the new technologies demands greater responsibility on the part of those called to proclaim the Word, but it also requires them to become become more focused, efficient and compelling in their efforts. Priests stand at the threshold of a new era: as new technologies create deeper forms of relationship across greater distances, they are called to respond pastorally by putting the media ever more effectively at the service of the Word. The spread of multimedia communications and its rich menu of options might make us think it sufficient simply to be present on the Web, or to see it only as a space to be filled. Yet priests can rightly be expected to be present in the world of digital communications as faithful witnesses to the Gospel, exercising their proper role as leaders of communities which increasingly express themselves with the different voices provided by the digital marketplace. Priests are thus

¹⁵ Benedict XVI, Message for 46th World Communications Day, 2012. Available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20120124_46th-world-communications-day.html (accessed on July 28, 2015).

challenged to proclaim the Gospel by employing the latest generation of audiovisual resources (images, videos, animated features, blogs, websites) which, alongside traditional means, can open up broad new vistas for dialogue, evangelization and catechesis. Using new communication technologies, priests can introduce people to the life of the Church and help our contemporaries to discover the face of Christ. They will best achieve this aim if they learn, from the time of their formation, how to use these technologies in a competent and appropriate way, shaped by sound theological insights and reflecting a strong priestly spirituality grounded in constant dialogue with the Lord. Yet priests present in the world of digital communications should be less notable for their media savvy than for their priestly heart, their closeness to Christ. This will not only enliven their pastoral outreach, but also will give a soul to the fabric of communications that makes up the Web.¹⁶

The Church realizes the great potential of modern means of technologies to spread the gospel values. The Church recommends the use of these means of technologies but also urges to be prudent in its use.

2. Communication

Communication is an art.¹⁷ The Church stands to benefit if it can communicate skillfully the message of Christ to the contemporary people. In the present times, the Church has the opportunity to communicate to people who are in distant places. Thus, the Conciliar document *Inter Mirifica* upheld the dynamism of communication skills and recommended that both, the clergy and the laity should respond immediately to the various needs around them. It noted that:

All the children of the Church should join, without delay and with the greatest effort in a common work to make effective use of the media of social communication in various apostolic endeavors, as circumstances and conditions demand. They should anticipate harmful developments, especially in regions where more urgent efforts to advance morality and religion are needed.¹⁸

Church leaders need to introspect continually about the content of the message, which they are communicating. This would help them to guard themselves from any traps, which are counter-gospel. The Conciliar document *Inter Mirifica* noted that all Church leaders should be

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, Message for 44th World Communications Day, 2010. http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20100124_44th-world-communications-day.html (accessed on July 29, 2015).

¹⁷ Namrata Palta, *The Art of Effective Communication* (New Delhi: Lotus Press, 2007), 1–10.

¹⁸ *Inter Mirifica* no. 13.

prudent in their use of the various facilities offered by the modern technologies for communication. It noted that:

For the proper use of these media it is most necessary that all who employ them be acquainted with the norms of morality and conscientiously put them into practice in this area. They must look, then, to the nature of what is communicated, given the special character of each of these media. At the same time they must take into consideration the entire situation or circumstances, namely, the persons, place, time and other conditions under which communication takes place and which can affect or totally change its propriety. Among these circumstances to be considered is the precise manner in which a given medium achieves its effect. For its influence can be so great that men, especially if they are unprepared, can scarcely become aware of it, govern its impact, or, if necessary, reject it.¹⁹

The Church has to promote right to information in the society. One of the best possible ways would be to have transparency in all Church affairs and activities. If the Church takes the lead in providing information without any inhibitions, it can indirectly encourage people to demand transparency in other fields too. Parish priests could use the means of internet, applications etc to let the people know about the Church activities, finances, properties etc. The Conciliar document *Inter Mirifica* noted that:

The first question has to do with information, as it is called, or the search for and reporting of the news. Now clearly this has become most useful and very often necessary for the progress of contemporary society and for achieving closer links among men. The prompt publication of affairs and events provides every individual with a fuller, continuing acquaintance with them, and thus all can contribute more effectively to the common good and more readily promote and advance the welfare of the entire civil society. Therefore, in society men have a right to information, in accord with the circumstances in each case, about matters concerning individuals or the community. The proper exercise of this right demands, however, that the news itself that is communicated should always be true and complete, within the bounds of justice and charity. In addition, the manner in which the news is communicated should be proper and decent. This means that in both the search for news and in reporting it, there must be full respect for the laws of morality and for the legitimate rights and dignity of the individual. For not all knowledge is helpful, but it is charity that edifies.²⁰

The Church has the great task to set an example in being transparent. This would require a lot of openness among the clergy, to share the details about the Church finances, properties, expenditures etc with the people. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications in its

¹⁹ *Inter Mirifica* no. 4.

²⁰ *Inter Mirifica* no. 5.

document, *Ethics in Communication* noted that:

Besides promoting media education, the institutions, agencies, and programs of the Church have other important responsibilities in regard to social communication. First and foremost, the Church's practice of communication should be exemplary, reflecting the highest standards of truthfulness, accountability, sensitivity to human rights, and other relevant principles and norms. Beyond that, the Church's own media should be committed to communicating the fullness of the truth about the meaning of human life and history, especially as it is contained in God's revealed word and expressed by the teaching of the Magisterium. Pastors should encourage use of media to spread the Gospel.²¹

Print media too is a powerful means of communication. The Church needs to establish forums like print media, websites, network sites etc to advocate healthy interaction among Catholics and the society. Such interactions may help Christians to serve the parish actively and work for the common good. The Conciliar document *Inter Mirifica* noted that:

First, a good press should be fostered. To instill a fully Christian spirit into readers, a truly Catholic press should be set up and encouraged. Such a press-whether immediately fostered and directed by ecclesiastical authorities or by Catholic laymen-should be edited with the clear purpose of forming, supporting and advancing public opinion in accord with natural law and Catholic teaching and precepts. It should disseminate and properly explain news concerning the life of the Church. Moreover, the faithful ought to be advised of the necessity both to spread and read the Catholic press to formulate Christian judgments for themselves on all events.²²

Development in means of communication has helped people to relate with others who may be living at distant places. Modern means of communication has become new *aeropagus* for healthy encounter with different opinions and thoughts. There is a great need of people who can share their Christian faith using the various means of latest technologies. Pope Francis has recommended the prudent of technology for communication. He noted that:

The media can help communication when they enable people to share their stories, to stay in contact with distant friends, to thank others or to seek their forgiveness, and to open the door to new encounters. By growing daily in our awareness of the vital importance of encountering others, these new possibilities, we will employ technology wisely, rather than letting ourselves be dominated by it. Here too, parents are the primary educators, but they cannot be left to their own devices. The Christian community is called to help them in teaching children how to live in a media environment in a way consonant with the dignity of the human person and service of the common good. The great

²¹ *Ethics in Communication*, no. 26.

²² *Inter Mirifica* no. 14.

challenge facing us today is to learn once again how to talk to one another, not simply how to generate and consume information. The latter is a tendency which our important and influential modern communications media can encourage. Information is important, but it is not enough. All too often things get simplified, different positions and viewpoints are pitted against one another, and people are invited to take sides, rather than to see things as a whole.²³

The Church can easily reach out to many people using the latest means of media and communications. However, the Church needs to be attentive to those who have no access to these means. As the diffusion of the various means of technology differs among various age groups, educational backgrounds and geo-politico-socio-economical backgrounds, Catholics need to devise ways to reach the category of people, who are weak and vulnerable. The traditional means of communication and social gatherings have important role to play even in the modern world. Catholics should not neglect or overlook at these means. Pope Francis noted that:

The speed with which information is communicated exceeds our capacity for reflection and judgement, and this does not make for more balanced and proper forms of self-expression. The variety of opinions being aired can be seen as helpful, but it also enables people to barricade themselves behind sources of information, which only confirm their own wishes and ideas, or political and economic interests. The world of communications can help us either to expand our knowledge or to lose our bearings. The desire for digital connectivity can have the effect of isolating us from our neighbours, from those closest to us. We should not overlook the fact that those who for whatever reason lack access to social media run the risk of being left behind. While these drawbacks are real, they do not justify rejecting social media; rather, they remind us that communication is ultimately a human rather than technological achievement. What is it, then, that helps us, in the digital environment, to grow in humanity and mutual understanding? We need, for example, to recover a certain sense of deliberateness and calm. This calls for time and the ability to be silent and to listen. We need also to be patient if we want to understand those who are different from us. People only express themselves fully when they are not merely tolerated, but know that they are truly accepted. If we are genuinely attentive in listening to others, we will learn to look at the world with different eyes and come to appreciate the richness of human experience as manifested in different cultures and traditions. We will also learn to appreciate more fully the important values inspired by Christianity, such as the vision of the human person, the nature of marriage and the family, the proper distinction between the religious and political spheres, the principles of solidarity and

²³ Francis, Message for the 49th World Communications Day, 2015. Available at http://m.vatican.va/content/francescomobile/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20150123_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html (accessed on July 30, 2015).

subsidiarity, and many others.²⁴

Social networking sites have helped people located in diverse regions to communicate at the same time. People can exchange information rapidly and can keep in touch with the others. The youth used these social network sites in the recent so-called *revolutions* in Middle-east Asia, Asia and Africa. People especially the youth exchanged information about their activities to counter the tyrannical political establishments in their respective countries. Internet played a great role in bringing people together to dislodge dictatorial regimes within no time. This would have not been possible, had there been no forum to inform in real time about the various happenings. However, on the other hand the rich and the powerful can control the internet and indirectly use it to further their propaganda. The Church needs to be aware of this inherent danger in these latest means of technologies. The Church needs to devise means and strategy to take the help of the technology for spreading the values of Christ and at the same time, inform the people about its misuse. Pope Benedict XVI noted the following about the use of technology in the Church.

In the digital world, transmitting information increasingly means making it known within a social network where knowledge is shared in the context of personal exchanges. The clear distinction between the producer and consumer of information is relativized and communication appears not only as an exchange of data, but also as a form of sharing. This dynamic has contributed to a new appreciation of communication itself, which is seen first of all as dialogue, exchange, solidarity and the creation of positive relations. On the other hand, this is contrasted with the limits typical of digital communication: the one-sidedness of the interaction, the tendency to communicate only some parts of one's interior world, the risk of constructing a false image of oneself, which can become a form of self-indulgence. Young people in particular are experiencing this change in communication, with all the anxieties, challenges and creativity typical of those open with enthusiasm and curiosity to new experiences in life. Their ever greater involvement in the public digital forum, created by the so-called social networks, helps to establish new forms of interpersonal relations, influences self-awareness and therefore inevitably poses questions not only of how to act properly, but also about the authenticity of one's own being. Entering cyberspace can be a sign of an authentic search for personal encounters with others, provided that attention is paid to avoiding dangers such as enclosing oneself in a sort of parallel existence, or excessive exposure to the virtual world. In the search for sharing, for friends, there is the challenge to be authentic and faithful, and not give in to the illusion of constructing an artificial public profile for oneself.²⁵

²⁴ Francis, Message for the 48th World Communications Day, 2014. Available at https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20140124_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html (accessed on July 30, 2015).

²⁵ Benedict XVI, Message for 45th World Communications Day, 2011. Available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20110124_45th-world-communications-day.html

The Catholic Church is a mammoth organization with a big number of well-established institutions, which contribute to people, irrespective of their faith affiliations. These institutions exert a great influence on the society in which they are present. People look upon these places of honor for improving their lives. Thus, the Catholic schools, universities, hospitals and other institutions need to take their purpose of existence seriously and make every effort to invest resources, time and money in the various means of media to spread the Christian message of love, peace and justice. Along with these institutions, the Catholic laity also needs to share their expertise and resources to tap the various means of the latest technology and media to use it for spreading the goospel. The Conciliar document *Inter Mirifica* noted that:

It is quite unbecoming for the Church's children idly to permit the message of salvation to be thwarted or impeded by the technical delays or expenses, however vast, which are encountered by the very nature of these media. Therefore, this sacred Synod advises them of the obligation they have to maintain and assist Catholic newspapers, periodicals and film projects, radio and television programs and stations, whose principal objective is to spread and defend the truth and foster Christian influence in human society. At the same time, the Synod earnestly invites those organizations and individuals who possess financial and technical ability to support these media freely and generously with their resources and their skills, inasmuch as they contribute to genuine culture and the apostolate.²⁶

Technology can be of a great help in imparting Christian education.²⁷ Due to the internet resources, many people have easy access to rich material on the Bible, a number of good biblical commentaries and other Christian literature.²⁸ Until the recent past, people assumed that biblical and theological studies were mainly for the clergy. They had no role in preaching work of the Church and thus, they had no need to study the Bible. However, the Second Vatican Council reversed this understanding. It strongly recommended all, to study and meditate the Scriptures. Internet resources have helped both the clergy and the laity, to take more interest in the rich resources on spirituality and the Bible. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications in its document, *The Church and Internet* noted that:

Internet... offers people direct and immediate access to important religious and spiritual resources—great libraries and museums and places of worship, the teaching documents of the Magisterium, the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church and the religious wisdom of the ages. It has a remarkable capacity to overcome distance and isolation,

(accessed on July 28, 2015).

²⁶ *Inter Mirifica* no. 17.

²⁷ Christian education refers here apart from catechism, all value-centered education based on the teachings of the Bible and the Church.

²⁸ See Reid Hensarling, *The Biblical Gospel: Its Significance and Impact in Spiritual Renewal* (Bloomington: West Bow Press, 2012), 112–114.

bringing people into contact with like-minded persons of good will who join in virtual communities of faith to encourage and support one another. The Church can perform an important service to Catholics and non-Catholics alike by the selection and transmission of useful data in this medium.²⁹

The Church needs to encourage theologates to include courses on the use of media and other latest means of communication.³⁰ Even though these courses do not have any direct relation with theology, they have a great potential to become important tools for all those who are preparing to be priests and future leaders.³¹ The Congregation for Catholic Education in its document, *Guide to the Training of Future Priests Concerning the Instruments of Social Communication* has strongly recommended the faculty of the theologates to include courses on mass media and communication in their curriculum to train the future priests and leaders to use the various means of the latest technology. Administrators of the theologates need to plan in order to include courses on ethics in communication, use of mass media and other means of communications in the curriculum; otherwise, they would be doing a great disservice to their job.³² The Pontifical Council for Social Communications in its document, *The Church and Internet* noted that:

Education and training are another area of opportunity and need. Today everybody needs some form of continuing media education, whether by personal study or participation in an organized program or both. More than just teaching about techniques, media education helps people form standards of good taste and truthful moral judgment, an aspect of conscience formation. Through her schools and formation programs the Church should provide media education of this kind. Education and training regarding the Internet ought to be part of comprehensive programs of media education available to members of the Church. As much as possible, pastoral planning for social communications should make provision for this training in the formation of seminarians, priests, religious, and lay pastoral personnel as well as teachers, parents, and students.³³

Internet has given unrestricted freedom to people to express their views. Forums like blogs, social network sites, chatting sites etc give people the right to post any comments at their will. Freedom of expression is healthy. The state must safeguard it. However, under the garb of freedom of expression, people may indulge in defaming others' beliefs, ideas or way of life. This can hurt the sentiments of an individual or a group. This may also lead to violence

²⁹ *The Church and Internet*, no. 5.

³⁰ See Franz-Josef Eilers, *Communicating in Ministry and Mission: An Introduction to Pastoral and Evangelizing Communication* (Manila: Logos Publications, 2009), 122–123, 143.

³¹ See Paul Soukup, *Media, Culture and Catholicism* (Kansas: Sheed & Ward, 1996), 179–180.

³² See Carlo Maria Martini, *Communicating Christ to the World*, trans. Thomas Licas (Kansas: Sheed & Ward, 1994), 146–156.

³³ *The Church and Internet*, no. 7.

and hatred among people. Therefore, the Church needs to encourage freedom of expression but also, suggest all to use it judiciously. In no way, the Church can allow any of its forums to be arenas of anti-gospel activities. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications in its document, *The Church and Internet* noted that:

Among the specific problems presented by the Internet is the presence of hate sites devoted to defaming and attacking religious and ethnic groups. Some of these target the Catholic Church. Like pornography and violence in the media, Internet hate sites are reflections of the dark side of a human nature marred by sin. And while respect for free expression may require tolerating even voices of hatred up to a point, industry self-regulation—and, where required, intervention by public authority—should establish and enforce reasonable limits to what can be said.³⁴

The Church can use the media and the internet to propagate its message of social equity and peace. The Church has consistently encouraged people to take their social commitment seriously. Even though there may be dangers of misuse of the media and the internet, the Church needs to look at its potential for spreading its message. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications in its document, *The Church and Internet* noted that:

It is important, too, that people at all levels of the Church use the Internet creatively to meet their responsibilities and help fulfill the Church's mission. Hanging back timidly from fear of technology or for some other reason is not acceptable, in view of the very many positive possibilities of the Internet. Methods of facilitating communication and dialogue among her own members can strengthen the bonds of unity between them. Immediate access to information makes it possible for [the Church] to deepen her dialogue with the contemporary world... The Church can more readily inform the world of her beliefs and explain the reasons for her stance on any given issue or event. She can hear more clearly the voice of public opinion, and enter into a continuous discussion with the world around her, thus involving herself more immediately in the common search for solutions to humanity's many pressing problems.³⁵

We need to acknowledge and applaud the positive role of the media and the latest means of technology to spread literacy, awareness about health, diffuse knowledge about sustainable development and transmit news rapidly to masses. The Church needs to accept gratefully the fruits of the advances of science and technology to spread the message of Christ. However, the Church needs to stop the misuse of the various means of media and the internet. The Church stands for the rights of the weakest in the society. In the pursuit for acquiring riches and power, the powerful can tread upon the vulnerable section of the society by controlling the means of media and the internet. People need a lot of courage to challenge these unjust

³⁴ *The Church and Internet*, no. 8.

³⁵ *The Church and Internet*, no. 10.

systems prevalent in the society. The Church needs to support these people. The Church needs to accept that even these people are doing a part of the Church's mission of spreading the values of the gospel. Pope Benedict XVI noted that:

In view of their meteoric technological evolution, the media have acquired extraordinary potential, while raising new and hitherto unimaginable questions and problems. There is no denying the contribution they can make to the diffusion of news, to knowledge of facts and to the dissemination of information: they have played a decisive part, for example, in the spread of literacy and in socialization, as well as the development of democracy and dialogue among peoples. Without their contribution it would truly be difficult to foster and strengthen understanding between nations, to breathe life into peace dialogues around the globe, to guarantee the primary good of access to information, while at the same time ensuring the free circulation of ideas, especially those promoting the ideals of solidarity and social justice. Indeed, the media, taken overall, are not only vehicles for spreading ideas: they can and should also be instruments at the service of a world of greater justice and solidarity. Unfortunately, though, they risk being transformed into systems aimed at subjecting humanity to agendas dictated by the dominant interests of the day. This is what happens when communication is used for ideological purposes or for the aggressive advertising of consumer products. While claiming to represent reality, it can tend to legitimize or impose distorted models of personal, family or social life. Moreover, in order to attract listeners and increase the size of audiences, it does not hesitate at times to have recourse to vulgarity and violence, and to overstep the mark. The media can also present and support models of development, which serve to increase rather than reduce the technological divide between rich and poor countries.³⁶

Conclusion

In the contemporary world, science and technology are developing rapidly. They have helped humanity in many ways. However, there are chances of misusing the various means of technology. The Church recommends the judicious and prudent use of the various means of technology to spread the values of the gospel to the world. Mass media, internet and other means of communications have the potential to become instruments of the gospel, if people use them wisely. The Church needs to formulate strategies to train the clergy and the laity to use these means for the common good and building the Kingdom of God.

³⁶ Benedict XVI, Message for 42nd World Communications Day, 2008. Available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20080124_42nd-world-communications-day.html (accessed on July 31, 2015).