

SEMINARY FORMATION AND MODERN MEANS OF COMMUNICATION: ISSUES AND POSSIBILITIES

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Abstract

The means of Social Communications in modern times have developed to such an extent as to be able to exert profound influence on every aspect of human endeavour. This development has coincided with a gradual shift in the Church's Hierarchy's overall attitude towards the said means of Social Communications, from one of suspicion and rejection (especially in the early years of the Cinema), to critical understanding and appreciation. This shift in approach invites ongoing critical reflection on how the Church can better understand these providential gifts to man, so as to engender a responsible use of them that will result in better persons, faithful Christians and a more committed, evangelizing Church. The formation of future priests is an important *locus* for the deepening of the Church's appreciation of these means of communication. It is imperative for future priests, a good number of whom are Digital Natives, to develop a keen understanding of the culture of the modern means of communication, and its implication for the Church's mission. Using the extant situation in the Major Seminaries of the Old Lagos Ecclesiastical Province as a case study, this paper attempts to raise issues bordering on the implications of the present state of the means of Social Communications for the human person as a whole. These issues will be correlated with possibilities that can be applied to Seminary formation, so as to highlight some valuable lessons for the Church.

Keywords: Social Communication, Formation, Digital, Seminary

Introduction

In 1986, the Pontifical Council for Catholic Education issued the *Guide to the Training of Future Priests concerning the Means of Social Communication*.

The rationale behind this was...

...so that the preparation of future priests in this regard may be less inadequate and may better meet their needs in the work that awaits them, the Congregation for Catholic Education, having consulted widely with experts in the matter, and especially with the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications, is pleased to offer to seminaries the present "Guide" in the hope that it will help in some way in carrying out their responsibilities. Whatever possible future developments and local diversity of situation there may be, all institutes of priestly formation must today urgently face a common core of fundamental questions concerning the personal conduct of receivers, the pastoral use of the *mass media*, and specialized formation for particular works.¹

This was a landmark document, in so far as its subject matter is concerned. It showed the Church playing her maternal role and appreciating the influence that the means of Social Communications exercise on every aspect of human endeavour, influence which while largely positive, could also be damaging to the fabric of human society. Thus, the *Guide* sets out to ensure that "future priests [are] trained **in the seminary** in the correct use of these instruments. This provision had a threefold purpose, namely, that the seminarians might impose discipline on their own personal use of the media, that they might be able to train the faithful in their turn to exercise similar self-discipline, and that they might learn how to use the media in their apostolate"².

Since 1986 till date, the world has undergone transformation in many ways, not least of which is that fact that we are now witnessing the entrenchment of the digital age, and its implications for the humanity. Unlike what obtained then, which was largely restricted to the Print and Electronic Media, the inception of the World Wide Web (www) in March 1989, coupled with the proliferation of computers in portable forms, radically transformed the means of Social Communication and the ways persons make use of them. The advent of the smartphone as well, has created 'a whole new world' as regards how people communicate.

This 'new world' needs priests, just like other 'worlds' or epochs have always needed priests. These priests need to be prepared and trained in how to effectively serve in this 'world' after the example of the Good Shepherd, Jesus, who has such a relationship with the sheep that He knows them, they know Him, and they listen to His voice and do what He asks them to do (cf John 10:1-21).

This paper argues that in the Spirit of the 1986 *Guide*, we need to update our present approach to the formation of future priests on the means of Social Communication, so that they can function more effectively as pastors post priestly ordination. The paper will have the following sections:

- The Essence of Seminary Formation (according to the Magisterium)
- Communication Formation within Seminary Formation
- Modern Means of Communication – Overview
- Modern Means of Communication – Possibilities for Formation
- Modern Means of Communication – Issues in Formation
- The Baby or the Bath water?

The Essence of Seminary Formation:

The setting up of seminaries for the training of future priests, can be traced to the Council of Trent. In its legislation *De Seminariis*, the Sacred Council "...made it obligatory for every Diocese to erect a seminary for the purpose of educating the local clergy. Whenever possible, this institution was to be built near the cathedral church so that young aspirants to the priesthood might serve a sort of apprenticeship there by participating, each according his rank, in the divine offices presided by the Bishop"³

Before this decree of the Council, seminary formation had always tried to mirror what Jesus did with his disciples, in the three plus years they spent with Him. During this period, they learnt from Him, before being entrusted with the mission to go into the whole world and baptize those who received their teaching about Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20). It was similar to what Paul did with Timothy, and what continued in the early centuries of the Church, leading up to the Patristic era and to the Middle Ages. We observe that there was always some form of training of future clerics, and this training was not cut off entirely from the community where they would serve in the future. There is the opinion that "with the breakdown of feudalism and the rise of universities, this ancient system of clerical formation became either impoverished or generally abandoned. As a result, a large segment of the late medieval and pre-Reformation clergy received inadequate training and were very often ordained for an office they were not sufficiently equipped to exercise"⁴

The Council of Trent therefore, concerned with the laxity in clerical life and the harm that this was causing the Church, used *De Seminariis* to set the motion for a uniform but high standard for priestly formation, imperative on all the Dioceses in the world, so as to

checkmate the possibility of unsuitable and poorly prepared candidates being ordained as priests.

This has remained the essence of seminary formation. In the words of *Optatam Totius*, the Second Vatican Council's decree on Priestly Training, ...major seminaries are necessary for priestly formation. Here the entire training of the students should be oriented to the formation of true shepherds of souls after the model of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher, priest and shepherd. They are therefore to be prepared for the ministry of the word: that they might understand ever more perfectly the revealed word of God; that, meditating on it they might possess it more firmly, and that they might express it in words and in example; for the ministry of worship and of sanctification: that through their prayers and their carrying out of the sacred liturgical celebrations they might perfect the work of salvation through the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments; for the ministry of the parish: that they might know how to make Christ present to men, Him who did not "come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45; cf. John 13:12-17), and that, having become the servants of all, they might win over all the more (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19). Therefore, all the forms of training, spiritual, intellectual, disciplinary, are to be ordered with concerted effort towards this pastoral end, and to attain it all the administrators and teachers are to work zealously and harmoniously together, faithfully obedient to the authority of the bishop.⁵

The *rinovamento* brought about by the Second Vatican council, was keenly felt in the Seminaries. While what obtained prior to the council was not inadequate, the changes the Council advocated in the Liturgy and the Pastoral life of the Church, coupled with the stress on the dignity of the laity, meant that future priests needed to be trained diligently in the demands of the pastoral life. Priests, more than before, are to be immersed in the life of their flock, so that they can better direct them spiritually. Hence, "...those capabilities are to be developed in the students which especially contribute to dialogue with men, such as the ability to listen to others and to open their hearts and minds in the spirit of charity to the various circumstances and needs of men"⁶.

In 1990, we had the 8th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, with the theme 'The Formation of Priests in Circumstances of the Present Day'. The Synod has been described as very pastoral in tone, and directed towards placing stress on priestly formation and the person of the priest himself, before and after ordination⁷. In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation following the Assembly, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, we read;

This same synod also sought to answer a request which was made at the previous synod on the vocation and mission of

the laity in the Church and in the world. Lay people themselves had asked that priests commit themselves to their formation so that they, the laity, could be suitably helped to fulfill their role in the ecclesial mission which is shared by all. Indeed, "the more the lay apostolate develops, the more strongly is perceived the need to have well - formed holy priests... The more the laity's own sense of vocation is deepened, the more what is proper to the priest stands out."⁸

It is instructive therefore, in the light of this expressed desire to redefine or re-emphasize the identity of the priest, to consider what the Synod Fathers considered the essence of Seminary formation. So, after reflecting on the challenges to priestly life, the present state of vocations in the Church, and the Spiritual life of the Priest, the Synod Fathers then reflected on the formation of candidates for the Priesthood.

...In this sense, the "seminary" in its different forms - and analogously the "house" of formation for religious priests - more than a place, a material space, should be a spiritual place, a way of life, an atmosphere that fosters and ensures a process of formation, so that the person who is called to the priesthood by God may become, with the sacrament of orders, a living image of Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the Church. In their final message the Synod Fathers have grasped in a direct and deep way the original and specific meaning of the formation of candidates for the priesthood, when they say that "To live in the seminary, which is a school of the Gospel, means to follow Christ as the apostles did. You are led by Christ into the service of God the Father and of all people, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Thus you become more like Christ the Good Shepherd in order better to serve the Church and the world as a priest."⁹

Suffice it to say that the same Synod Fathers had already outlined what is expected of the Priest. "it is equally certain that the life and ministry of the priest must also "adapt to every era and circumstance of life.... to be as open as possible to light from on high from the Holy Spirit, in order to discover the tendencies of contemporary society, recognize the deepest spiritual needs, determine the most important concrete tasks and the pastoral methods to adopt, and thus respond adequately to human expectations."¹⁰

Other documents that address the theme of Seminary formation, have more or less the same idea.¹¹ Seminary formation is basically a period when candidates who feel called to the serve in the ministerial

priesthood, are accompanied in shaping themselves after the example of their Lord Jesus Christ, so as to be able to serve the people of God, for whom God bestows the gift of priestly vocations in the first instance.

Communication Formation within Seminary Formation

The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* identifies four major pillars of Seminary formation, viz, Spiritual, Human, Intellectual and Pastoral formation. To successfully situate communication formation within these pillars, it will be important to define communications as a reality.

Etymologically, communication is directly from the Latin *communicationem*, which means ‘making common or imparting’. It can also be considered from the past-participle stem of *communicare*, which means ‘to share, divide out, impart, inform, join, unite, participate in’.¹² Lexically, communication refers to “a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs and behaviour”.¹³ In addition, Scholars of communication proffer different definitions of the reality. Popular definitions however tend to all accept the fact that communication has to do with the sharing of meaning through some commonly understood language.

If we accept this understanding of communication, then we will see that it actually cuts across the four pillars of priestly formation of Spiritual, Human, Intellectual and Pastoral formation. For instance, as regards human formation, it has been said that “formation for the priesthood must necessarily provide adequate means to allow for maturation in view of an authentic exercise of the priestly ministry. To this end, the seminarian is called upon to develop his personality, having Christ, the perfect man, as his model and source”¹⁴

For the seminarian to make progress as regards his human formation, communication is essential, as “the use of the media and ease with the digital world are an integral part of the development of the personality of the seminarian, because, using new communication technologies, priests can introduce people to the life of the Church and help our contemporaries to discover the face of Christ”¹⁵

The same is true of Spiritual formation. All the tools of spiritual formation listed in the *Ratio Fundamentalis* depend on communication. Personal union with Christ through prolonged and personal prayer needs a combination of intrapersonal and interpersonal communication to be effective. *Lectio Divina* is based on the printed medium of the Sacred Scriptures, just like the Liturgy of the Hours. The Sacrament of Penance and Spiritual Direction involve dyadic communication, through which the Spiritual Director and the Confessor serve as God’s instruments to get the seminarian to open up with sincerity, trust and

docility. Daily participation in the Eucharist is also a deep communicative experience at different levels.

The fact is that in the real sense, there is no formation without communication, as it underlies everything that goes on in the Seminary. And even when the concept gets restricted to the tools that facilitate it, otherwise known as the means of communication, it still cuts across the four pillars, as these means are always being used in the formation process.

Modern Means of Social Communication: An Overview

Traditionally, the study of communication takes into consideration the different levels at which people communicate. These are;

1. Intrapersonal level, where communication that takes place within a person or carried out by a person that he/she does not intend to share with others.
2. Inter-personal communication, which occurs between two persons, and is also known as dyadic communication.
3. Small group communication, which refers to communication that takes place within a group of persons, with a minimum of three and a maximum of twenty.
4. Public communication, that is, communication between a person and an audience beyond 20 people.
5. Mass communication, which is communication involving a person or an entity and a usually large and undifferentiated number of persons.

Each level of communication has the possibility of making use of a medium to facilitate the communication process. It is such media that are referred to as the means of communication. Another way to define them sees them as “the various methods of sending information between people and places, especially phones, computers, radio, et cetera”¹⁶

Since man became self-aware, and saw the need to reach out to others, he has made use of different techniques to do so. The human voice for instance, is a very important means of communication, and based on this we have language and by extension, writing, as other examples of the older means of communication.

In modern times, and in the light of the available body of knowledge on the different levels of communication, it is difficult to proffer an exhaustive list of the means of communication currently used by persons. However and in no particular order, we can talk of the following; voice, books, newspapers, magazines and periodicals, pagers, computers, word processors, radio, facsimile machines, telephones, smartphones, telegraph, television, and so on¹⁷

While not exhaustive, the means of communications mentioned above cuts across the different great epochs of communication that humanity has experienced, viz, the phase of Primary Orality; the age of Writing; the period of the Press; the age of the Electric Media; and the Digital age.¹⁸ Courses on the History of Human Communications use these epochs to help students situate the development of communications from the earliest men and women till now, acknowledging the fact that innovations in successive epochs tend to build upon the achievements of preceding ones, rather than obliterate them.

Presently, we are in the digital epoch, the beginning of which we can attribute to the invention of the first computer, and the birth of the possibility of representing phenomena in numerical form. In this epoch, we have witnessed the passage from analogue to digital systems in communications; the computerization of the systems of communications and the creation of integral multimedia networks, especially in the case of the internet. We have also experienced the movement of media towards portability, so as to facilitate the accessing of services at any point in space, and the passage of the mass media into *personal media*.¹⁹

It is in this wise that we will consider one of the most significant inventions of the digital age; the smartphone. The dictionary defines the smartphone as “a mobile phone that can be used as a small computer and that connects to the internet”.²⁰ This definition is quite modest. In fact, the typical smartphone has advanced computing capabilities, with which it can access web pages and browse the web using data networks or Wi-Fi support and mobile broadband. It also has the capacity to interact with other devices using Bluetooth and near field communication, such that information can still be passed across in the absence of internet connectivity. The smartphone can view, edit and share different types of documents, since it can run applications that enable such. It can download different types of files, take photos and record videos, offer music playback and view movies, amongst others. It can serve as a radio, language translator, store dictionaries and encyclopedia, compass and magnifying glass and so on.

The smartphone can serve as a calendar, a clock, a directory containing list of contacts, can download, store and read maps for navigational purposes as well as give weather updates. It can assist the user carry out financial transactions, keep accounts and make budgets, track funds and finances, make travel arrangements, monitor heart rate, organize ones activities as well as provide entertainment. It can serve as a library where e-books and downloaded content are stored for further reference. And with the advent of the ‘internet of things’²¹ we now have

users who use their smartphones to secure and operate their homes and appliances.

The smartphone can do all these because it is actually a “modernized personal digital assistant (PDA) with wireless connectivity compact in design with a high-resolution touch screen, multi-touch interface and QWERTY keyboard²². The smartphone is not essential for healthy living, but in this digital age, it enhances and makes life easier.

Modern Means of Communication – Possibilities for Formation:

In his message on the 44th World Communications Day, Pope Benedict XVI said

...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 challenged to proclaim the Gospel by employing the latest generation of audiovisual resources, 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”.²³

We have tried to argue earlier, that communication as a reality, cuts across the four pillars of priestly formation, and the means of communication are already being used in formation. In addition to this, it is a truism that “those who begin the Seminary journey are, for the most part, already naturally adept and immersed in the digital world and its instruments”.²⁴ Indeed practically every student in the three major seminaries of the Old Lagos Ecclesiastical Province for instance, is a digital native²⁵ This is why it has been recommended that

...social networks should be integrated into the daily life of the Seminary community in a particular way (by a use that is vigilant, but also serene and positive). They should be experienced as places that offer new possibilities from the point of view of interpersonal relationships, of encounter with others, of engagement with one's neighbor, of the witness of faith. These may all be viewed from the perspective of formative growth, which cannot fail to take into consideration every place in which relationships are formed and in which we find ourselves living.²⁶

The modern means of communications offer many possibilities for formation. We can consider this especially from two of the pillars of formation which we left out earlier, Intellectual and Pastoral.

Intellectual formation is "aimed at achieving for seminarians a solid competence in Philosophy and Theology, along with a more general educational preparation, enough to allow them to proclaim the Gospel message to the people of our own day in a way that is credible and can be understood..."²⁷

The means of communication will help to open up for the individual seminarian, fonts of knowledge that will be otherwise difficult to access. The presence of electronic libraries in Nigerian Universities and Major Seminaries is testament to the fact there are inadequate materials in the physical libraries of these institutions. This fact has been lamented for a long time, and if truth be told, as it affects universities, so it affects seminaries. The e-library simply makes it possible to gain access to materials otherwise impossible to get.

Going forward, there is the need to progress beyond the idea that the presence of an e-library with a certain number of computers in a Seminary completely fills this need. This is especially true of Seminaries in the Old Lagos Ecclesiastical Province, which each boasts of functional and relatively well equipped e-libraries. But can we say that 30 computers in an e-library are sufficient for over 180 students? Or 50 for 400 students?

One of the ways the Seminaries have employed in getting around this dearth of computers is the use of computers owned by liturgico-cultural groups and other associations by the students, in a designated area. This helps to lessen the burden, but there is still a long way to go, as there remains a significant shortfall in the number of available computers vis-à-vis the population of students.

The academic contemporaries of these young men in formation (undergraduate students in universities) do not have the same challenge. It is either the universities (mostly private universities) insist on each student having a personal computer, to facilitate learning on-line, or the

students are allowed to use their smart phones for the same purposes that the computer does. The fact is that such institutions have made advancements in the digitalization of their processes, and any student without the relevant accessory to function in that environment is as good as being a 'non' student. This is because apart from being cut off from the academic activities of the school, he/she will end up being grossly unprepared for life after the university, in a world where 58.7% of persons (or roughly 3 out of every 5 persons) has access to the internet.²⁸

It is our considered opinion that seminarians in formation should be able to take advantage of the available technologies which add value to their training. A seminarian with a smartphone, can have access to countless materials, books, documents and sources, which may not be in the physical library (and if there, not in sufficient quantity for the time needed for in-depth study), and which while accessible via the e-library, he may also not be able to use it properly due to reasons given above.

He can use his smartphone to prepare and submit assignments, which will be beneficial in three ways; one, it will help lecturers enforce deadlines, through platforms that will be time-limited (thus improving the discipline of the seminarian); two, it will reduce cost and waste to be incurred via printing on paper; and most importantly, it will eliminate plagiarism from the seminary system, as such soft copies can easily be uploaded to anti-plagiarism software for checks and assessments.

In addition, the seminarian who is open to formation will be assisted to develop a healthy reading habit, in consonance with the best traditions of priestly life. This is because, while there appears to be a worldwide decline in the number of persons reading books²⁹, there is an appreciable increase in the number of hours spent online. This is one of the effects of the phase of digitalization that we are in currently, and while no one can predict the future as to whether this trend will be reversed or it will become more entrenched, there is wisdom in preparing the future priest to spend this time online constructively. He can be trained to create virtual reading libraries, and challenged to read works on-line with his smartphone.

As regards Pastoral formation, being schooled in the means of communication helps the seminarian to understand his flock, who are completely immersed in this new world. Increasingly, priests are having to carry out pastoral ministry online. This is the reason why Dioceses, Parishes, Institutions and even certain individuals have webpages/websites, and maintain an online presence, conscious of the implications of web 2.0 for such webpages/websites.

In addition, the presence on social networks and the floating of Blogs, Vlogs, YouTube channels and Podcasts, are efforts made to reach

the people in that space where many of them prefer to be. It is a response to the signs of the times, already articulated by Pope Benedict XVI, when he stated

...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.³⁰

It is while in the seminary that the future priest will learn how to not only use the means of communication in his pastoral ministry, but also how to be a shepherd to his flock, who are fully immersed in this digital environment. This can be seen as a variant of *anticipatory socialization*³¹, whereby the future priest learns how to manage the pastoral challenges that are associated with the digital age, by assuming these roles while in formation, and thus benefits from his experiences.

Modern Means of Communication – Issues in Formation:

It is instructive that in the same section where it is said that "the Church, in virtue of the mandate received from Christ, looks confidently at the possibilities offered by the digital world for evangelization..."³², we also read the following; "it is necessary to pay prudent attention to the inevitable risks that come with frequenting the digital world, including various forms of addiction, which can be addressed with suitable spiritual and psychological supports"³³

There is need for vigilance in the use of the modern means of communication. The digital age and its main facilitator, the internet is neither morally ambivalent nor wholly positive. Indeed, "people in emerging and developing nations say that the increasing use of the internet has been a good influence in the realms of education, personal relationships and the economy. But despite all the benefits of these new technologies, on balance people are more likely to say that the internet is a negative rather than a positive influence on morality..."³⁴

The seminarian in formation is yet to complete his journey of personality integration and configuration to the person of Christ. This means that when he has a smartphone in his possession, it could expose him to some harm, especially in the following ways;

1. Illegal downloading of copyrighted materials: As prevalent as this is, downloading of copyrighted materials without the permission of the owner of the intellectual property is wrong (and in some cases liable to prosecution).
2. Negative Impact on Human Socialization: One of the effects of smartphones and by extension, social networks, is that persons now interact more via such platforms than face-to-face communication. This is impacting negatively on families, religious communities, rectories, offices and so on. There is the danger that with the smartphone in his possession, the Seminarian will also be guilty of this trend.
3. Disorientation on-line: There are virtually no rules in cyberspace, and anyone with the right gadget can post anything online, without the rigour of confirming its veracity. This causes confusion that can affect the Seminarian, should he frequent misleading websites.
4. Pornography: The possession of a smartphone will accentuate the temptation to view pornography on-line.
5. Anti-Social Behaviour: One of the features of social networks is the increase in harassment, threats, hate speech, and similar illegal, immoral or inflammatory behaviour. When the seminarian has a smartphone, he may be more prone to carrying out such actions.
6. Effects of Virtual Reality: Studies have shown that increased exposure to the internet increases the risk of internet addiction disorder³⁵. In addition, the longer the time spent in the virtual world, the less attention that is given to real life issues. These can affect a seminarian in possession of a smartphone.
7. Financial fraud of any sort, et cetera, can be carried out via the smartphone with ease.

These issues can pose real threats to priestly formation, and it is understandable that in order to prevent them, many seminaries in Nigeria, following the directives of their proprietors, enforce an outright ban on the use of personal phones and computers by seminarians in formation *while in the Seminary*. This ban has been in force for quite a few years now. But should the presence of such dangers justify the continuance of this ban, given the possible benefits that are lost in the process?

Conclusion: The Baby or the Bath Water?

As far the means of communications are concerned, it is fair to say that as a Church, we have always displayed an attitude of suspicion, due to fear of its negative effects. It suffices to examine the tone of the first few magisterial documents on the means of communication to appreciate this

point. At the same time, this attitude is not as dominant as it once was, as more study of communications as a reality has helped the cultivation of a corresponding attitude of critical understanding, in order to make the best use of these gifts from God. But *the suspicion is yet to fully go away*, and often exists side by side with efforts to maximize our understanding and use of the means of communication, to the extent of even vitiating initiatives that promote the latter. But we do not need to throw away the baby with the dirty bath water.

We are of the opinion that it is better to return to the inspiration behind the publication of the 1986 *Guide* in this question of the means of communication. The idea of that document was that

...social communications training ... which is specifically pastoral, is to be given to all students without distinction during their philosophy and theology courses. It has three aims:

- a) To train those concerned in the correct use of the instruments of social communication (and in general, of every technique of expression and communication) in their pastoral activities, when the circumstances permit it;
- b) To train them to be masters and guides of others (receivers in general, educators, all those who work in the *mass media*) through instruction, catechesis, preaching, etc., and as consultants, confessors, spiritual directors;
- c) Above all, to get them into a state of mind in which they will be permanently ready to make the necessary adjustments in their pastoral activity, including those demanded by the inculturation of the Christian faith and life in the different particular churches, in a world psychologically and socially conditioned by the *mass media* and even already by telematics and informatics.³⁶

Consequently, it will be better on the short and long run, to expose seminarians in formation to more means of communications rather than less. We are in a situation where the Authorities have to consider providing Seminary Formators with the necessary wherewithal to be able to effectively mentor and journey with their students, as regards proper, responsible use of the means of communication, especially the smartphone. It will not be easy to correct them when they misuse the smartphone or personal computers, if these are not mainstreamed into the regular seminary curriculum. At any rate, that seminarians do not have smartphones in the seminary *does not* mean that they do not have smartphones outside the seminary, which they use during vacation. Is that period not part of their formation for the priesthood?

Similarly, and in the light of what has been said above, there is the need to have experts in Communications Science among the

seminary staff, who will be responsible for teaching communication courses that span through the entire duration of the formation of the future priest. What we now have in the seminaries under consideration in this paper, are seminar courses on aspects of Communications located either at the final year of the formation program, or carried out during inter-semester breaks. These are better than nothing, but still far from the desired point, if the 1986 *Guide* is taken into proper consideration. The presence of such an expert will reasonably guarantee that the Seminarians understand from the outset, how they are to use the means of communications, and transform them from possible distractions to critical aids to their integral formation, and future priestly life.

Additionally, we humbly state that there is a flaw in the reasoning that the ban on smartphone usage in the Seminary helps the candidate avoid the dangers associated with it. It only postpones the proverbial evil day, as instead of making 'low profile' errors, while in formation, with the possibility of correction, we will expose ourselves to the possibility of high profile 'gaffes' being committed by the same person, with the difference being that he is now a priest, and unfortunately, may not be as eager to accept that sort of correction. And as for teaching the lay faithful how best to use the means of communication, it will be a case of *nemo dat quod non habet*³⁷.

Therefore, in the question of Seminary Formation and Modern Means of Communications, the possibilities in permitting full exposure to these communication tools significantly outweigh whatever benefits that would come from shielding those in formation from these tools, in the light of the present digital epoch.

Endnote

¹ Congregation for Catholic Education, (1986) *Guide To The Training Of Future Priests Concerning The Instruments Of Social Communication*, Presentation, accessed from http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_19031986_guide-for-future-priests_en.html (Retrieved March 05, 2020)

² *Ibid*, No 4

³ "Seminary Education ." New Catholic Encyclopedia . (Retrieved March 04, 2020 from Encyclopedia.com)

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ Decree on Priestly Training *Optatam Totius*, (October 28, 1965) in Flannery, A. (ed) (1995). *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Bombay, St. Pauls' No.4

⁶ *Ibid*, N.19

⁷ See http://www.synod.va/content/synod/en/synodal_assemblies/1990-eighth-ordinary-general-assembly--the-formation-of-priests-.html

⁸ John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, (March 15, 1992) No 3. Retrieved March 05, 2020 from www.vatican.va.

⁹ *Ibid*, No. 42

¹⁰ *Ibid*, No. 5

¹¹ For instance, the revised *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, authored by the Congregation for the Clergy, (No. 35) we read "Priests, who are configured to Christ, Head and Shepherd, Servant and Spouse, participate in His one priesthood and saving mission as co-workers with the Bishops. In this way they are visible signs of the merciful love of the Father in the Church and in the world. These characteristics of the person of Christ help us to understand better the ministerial priesthood in the Church. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they inspire and guide the formation of seminarians so that they can be conformed to Christ by their immersion in the mystery of the Trinity"

¹² See <https://www.etymonline.com/word/communication> (Retrieved February 24, 2020).

¹³ Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Communication. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. (Retrieved March 06, 2020, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/communication>)

¹⁴ Congregation for the Clergy (2016) *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, Vatican City, L'Osservatore Romano, No 93.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, No. 97

¹⁶ Cambridge. (n.d.). Communication. In *Dictionary.Cambridge.org*. (Retrieved March 03, 2020 from

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/communication>).

¹⁷ We have deliberately left out the internet or the worldwide web, from this list of the means of communication, because of its unique characteristics. In the words of M. A. Dennis & R. Kahn, the internet is "a system architecture that has revolutionized communications and methods of commerce by allowing various computer networks around the world to interconnect. Sometimes referred to as a "network of networks," ...the Internet provides a capability so powerful and general that it can be used for almost any purpose that depends on information, and it is accessible by every individual who connects to one of its constituent networks". See Britannica.com

¹⁸ For a detailed treatment of these different epochs, see Gronowski, Dariusz (2007) *Teoria Generale Della Comunicazione*, Roma, EDUSC, (Dispense per uso degli studenti) pp 89-126.

¹⁹ Gronowski, *Ibid*, p. 121

²⁰ Cambridge. (n.d.). Smartphone. In *Dictionary.Cambridge.org*. (Retrieved March 04, 2020 from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/communication>).

²¹ The internet of things is a proposed development of the internet in which many everyday objects are embedded with microchips giving them network connectivity, allowing them to send and receive data. See "internet, n.". OED Online. March 2020. Oxford University Press. <https://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/248411> (Retrieved March 06, 2020).

²² Lenovo. *What is a Smartphone*. (Retrieved 2020, Feb 24 from <https://www.lenovo.com/gb/en/faqs/pc-life-faqs/what-is-a-smartphone/>)

²³ Benedict XVI, "The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word" message on the 44th World Day of Communications, 24 January, 2010, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedictxvi/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20100124_44th-world-communications-day.html (Retrieved February 27, 2020) (emphasis mine).

²⁴ Congregation for the Clergy, *ibid*, No. 99

²⁵ *Digital Native* is a term used to describe a person who has grown up in the *digital* age, and is used to digital systems as a result. It is used to contrast Digital Immigrants, who had to acquire familiarity with *digital* systems as an adult.

²⁶ Congregation for the Clergy, *ibid*, No. 100

²⁷ *Ibid*, No. 116

²⁸ According to available statistics, the world population as at December 2019 was estimated at 7,796,615,710, with 4,574,150,134 having access to the internet. <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm> (Retrieved March 02, 2020).

²⁹ This has been the subjects of many academic papers and newspaper articles, but we will just refer the reader to one; Twenge, J. M., Martin, G. N., & Spitzberg, B. H. (2019). Trends in U.S. Adolescents' media use, 1976–2016: The rise of digital media, the decline of TV, and the (near) demise of print. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 8(4), 329–345. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000203>

³⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Ibid*.

³¹ Anticipatory Socialization "involves the informal adoption of norms or behaviour appropriate to a status not yet achieved by the individuals concerned, so providing them with experience of a role they have yet to assume. For example, children may anticipate parenthood by observing their parents as role models, and the careerist may anticipate promotion by emulating the occupational behaviour of his or her superiors". (See "anticipatory socialization." A Dictionary of Sociology. . (Retrieved March 05, 2020 from Encyclopedia.com: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/anticipatory-socialization>)

³² Congregation for the Clergy, *ibid*, No. 98

³³ *Ibid*, No. 99

³⁴ See <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2015/03/19/> (Retrieved March 06, 2020)

³⁵ Internet Addiction Disorder has been defined as "a maladaptive patter of internet use, characterized by psychological dependence, withdrawal symptoms when offline for prolonged periods, loss of control, compulsive behavior, and clinically significant impairment of normal social interactions or distress" (See Internet addiction. (n.d.) *Segen's Medical Dictionary*. (2011). Retrieved March 6 2020 from <https://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Internet+addiction>)

³⁶ Congregation for Catholic Education, *ibid*, No. 30

³⁷ This Latin saying means "You cannot give what you do not have".