

CHAPTER 9

THE SMARTPHONE AND THE CATHOLIC PRIEST'S MINISTRY

Peter Eshioke Egielewa

1. Introduction

No doubt, the smartphone has fundamentally changed how people communicate (Bellar et al., 2018). The ubiquity of smartphones and their ancillary uses make it hard to avoid them which is also impacting and changing the way people practice their religion. Smartphone is shaping religious people themselves and changing their behaviour. Many religious adherents are adopting online technologies to make it easier for them to communicate ideas and engage in religious worship (Stokel-Walker, 2017; Kanmani et al., 2017).

This change has affected global citizens around the world and has spared no one irrespective of age, ethnic group or religion. In fact, as of 2021, the global smartphone penetration rate was estimated at 67 per cent of the global population of around 7.4 billion indicating that approximately 5 billion people globally own a smartphone. However, there are an estimated 6.3 billion smartphones in the World (Laricchia, 2023). These data show not only the massive quantity of smartphones people own globally but also the wider implications, positive and

negative, of such ownership. The growing attachment to smartphones, or what some scholars have described as *nomophobia* (Kanmani et al., 2017) is what Rajan (2019) refers to as an intimacy that has become a humanized extension of the modern human.

In the religious sphere, the impact of digital technology cannot be underestimated. In an address during a seminar to mark the 2019 World Communications Day, Most Rev Eamon Martin, the Archbishop of Armagh, Ireland said smartphones and tablets under the nomenclature “screen culture” are having a massive impact on the world and the church and that the church cannot and should not just stand outside the digital world, looking in with disapproval but emphasizing that the Church should recognise that digital technology (propelled exponentially by the smartphone and internet) has become a permanent part of the life and identity of the majority of young people and indeed every global citizen (Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference, 2019).

The new reality, as painted by Archbishop Martin, has led to what some scholars call “digital religion”, “cyber church” or “digital church” (Mallu, 2021; Campbell; 2013; Campbell, 2020). For example, the ‘Youversion’ bible app that was launched in 2008 has been installed more than 260 million times worldwide and people have spent more than 235 billion minutes using the app and have highlighted 636 million Bible verses (Stokel-Walker, 2017). This new reality has implications also for the Catholic Church because smartphones are common sights in the church compounds and on many occasions even inside the church and during liturgical celebrations. Indeed, in a study carried out by Egielewa (2020) on 350 lay members and 51 priests in Edo State, Nigeria findings show that 82% of the lay Catholics and 96% of the priests own at least one smartphone. In addition, 25% of lay faithful and 49% of priests own at least two smartphones. These data show that ownership of smartphones is not only large but also presents new opportunities for priests propelled by the smartphone. Ironically, the

Catholic Church had also anticipated this new reality in her 1965 Vatican II published document titled “*Inter Mirifica*” (the media of social communications) as shall be elucidated shortly.

In this article, it will be argued that smartphones present new opportunities for catholic priests without neglecting the potential dangers as well. The study shall examine smartphone roles in the life and ministry of the catholic priest and make recommendations for better pastoral use in the Catholic Church.

2. The Communicating Church of *Inter Mirifica*

The Catholic Church has long adapted to changes in the world of information and communication technology (ICT) in its spread of the gospel message. She moved from fear, suspicion, and resistance to modern means of communication to the acceptance, adaptation, adoption and even active promotion of the various means of communication (Mahan, 2017; Egielewa, 2018). From the emergence of writing to scrolls and the codex, from the invention of the printing press with its attendant spread of literacy and the eventual birth of electronic media (the radio, the telephone, film, and television) to the contemporary invention and rise of digital media (social media, websites, digital publishing), the Catholic Church’s understanding, use and promotion of means of communication has been gradual but consistent (Communio et Progressio, 1971; Mahan, 2017).

The Vatican II Council, which gathered about 4, 000 Bishops from around the world between 1962 and 1965 to deliberate on the past, present and future of the church in her work in the world, has been described as a turning point and a major milestone in the Church’s understanding and use of the various means of communication. That gathering birthed the landmark document called *Inter Mirifica* (the media of social communications) which has become the compass

through which the church explains its position concerning means of communication (What is Vatican II? n. d).

Inter Mirifica advocated for the prudent use of modern means of communication as long as they serve good purposes and advance the Evangelisation of peoples stating thus that “the Church recognises 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” (Vatican II Council, 1963). The document also cautioned against abuse of these same means stating thus “the Church recognises, too, that men can employ these media contrary to the plan of the Creator and their own loss. Indeed, the Church experiences maternal grief at the harm all too often done to society by their evil use” (Vatican II Council, 1963). In this regard, the document states thus “those who make use of the media of communications, especially the young, should take steps to accustom themselves to moderation and self-control.” Thus, the Church, 60 years ago, while anticipating the newer means of communication (smartphones inclusive) called for “moderation” and “responsibility”, and advocating the beneficial use of the media while being on guard to prevent aspects that are harmful to the Church and its evangelising mission (Murzaku, 2017). “Moderation” in the sense of using them appropriately and proportionately for the good of God and humanity and avoiding the possibility of addiction and “responsibility” in the sense that it lies within human’s power to deploy the tool for his good and the good of others and not to allow it to harm himself or others. More explicitly, *Communio et Progressio* (1971), the pastoral instruction released in 1971 by order of the Vatican II Council buttressing this anticipation of newer means of communication states that the church “looks forward with confidence and even with enthusiasm to whatever the development of communications in a space age may have to offer” cautioning at the same time that these means should propel the church towards “urging all men to use the media to serve both the progress of man and the glory of God”.

In a sense, the church welcomes the performance of some of her core tasks through mediation such as via digital tools, particularly the smartphone in what scholars have described as the theory of mediation.

2. Theory of Mediation

The theory of mediation was propounded by Jesus Martin-Barbero (1993) and deals with the processes of communication that occur through a medium. It involves the relationship between an individual and culture. In effect, it offers a framework for explaining the roles technologies play in human existence and society in general with its central idea dwelling on how technologies help to shape the relations between human beings and the world. The theory of mediation sees technologies as being mediators of humans and society rather than seeing them as material objects as opposed to human subjects, or as mere extensions of human beings. Mediation theory derives from the 'post-phenomenological' approach in the philosophy of technology that was founded by Don Ihde. In this context, mediation is explained in terms of religious experiences in which religious objects in the forms of images, books, sounds, bodily practices, and spaces bridge the distance between immanence and transcendence. This mediation has been amplified in recent times by the invention and use of the Internet (Verbeek, n.d).

3. Digital tools in the Church? What is the place of Smartphones?

Globally, it is becoming unthinkable for people to live without digital tools such as smartphones and computers. Business transactions, education and even religious activities are now propelled by information and communication technology (ICT), particularly the smartphone. For instance, some people follow religious services that are streamed online, and some priests and other religious leaders hold

services, counselling sessions and even prayers online. Some Christians have become converted to a certain religious denomination because of certain sermons they heard online, or religious programmes or services they watched online (Kathambi et al., 2021).

Specifically, with the outbreak of COVID-19 in late 2019 and the consequent lockdown that followed, the world turned online for the continuation of most normal human activities including business, education and even religious affiliations. Most churches, for instance, started to stream Masses and services online using primarily social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Zoom and other web-based internet-enabled tools (Wilson, 2021; Mallu, 2021). In particular, Zoom, a cloud-based video conferencing platform, witnessed exponential patronage by people around the world during the lockdown period with a 500% increase at its peak, moving from 10 million daily participants in 2019 to 350 daily participants in 2020 (Molla, 2020; Aboulezz, 2021). From the religious perspective, a study showed that after the COVID-19 lockdown, 22% of practising Christians and 52% of practising Christian Millennials (those born between 1980 and 2000) preferred digital church and digital religious services (Dimock, 2019; Melore, 2022; Goldman Sachs, 2023). Even after the COVID-19 lockdown protocols were lifted globally, 26% of religious leaders continued using digital and online technologies for online worship and services. Thus, many millennials and young adults developed a preference for the evolving “multisite model” of worshipping which relates to a normal physical church that has a digital or online presence or what has variously been termed as a “cyber church” or “digital religion” (Campbell, 2013; Great Commission University, 2020; Mallu, 2021; Melore, 2022).

The idea of “digital religion” which refers to religion on digital media including all the societal and cultural components of religion with all the elements of a digital society is a reality before the Catholic Church and especially its priests (Mallu, 2021). There is simply no turning back

the hand of the clock. Indeed, studies on the intrusion of smartphones into religion or the so-called “digitisation of religion” have gone through four major phases: Phase one, described as the descriptive phase, has centred on the emerging consciousness of digital religion in which attention was focused on online religious behaviour such as the use of texts and rituals and the formation of online religious communities. It was a phase that saw the migration of religious practices from offline to online, blurring the lines that used to divide them (Brasher, 2004; Campbell, 2013; Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference, 2019). In the second phase, researchers’ attention shifted to the creation of religious typologies such as online religious identity, online religious experiences, and internet-enabled religious movements, which were explored. The third phase attempted to address theoretical questions related to the decline of cyberspace and the rise of the profanation of the internet in which religious adherents struggled to define their identity online without the danger of being perceived as “mundane”, while the fourth phase focused on the daily religious use of digital tools such as the smartphone, whether sacred or profane, with particular attention on religious identity, community, and authority. This study situates itself within the fourth phase, interrogating as it were, how the smartphone has impacted not just Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular but the sub-sect of priests, a community of ordained leaders in the church with administrative authority to govern certain organs of the catholic church under the supervision of a bishop or in the case of consecrated men and women, by a religious superior (Brasher, 2004; Campbell, 2013; Tsuria, 2021).

Uniquely, priests and other pastoral agents in the church use these new digital tools especially the smartphone as natural extensions of their current modes of communication to encourage and inspire their followers, and to convey information about upcoming personal projects (e.g. tours and book releases). These communication opportunities for the church enable the church, through its pastoral agents, to provide information regarding future events that will enable their followers to plan for and follow easily (Mallu, 2021).

Stokel-Walker (2017) opines that the introduction of smartphone apps (mobile applications), for example, is changing the way smartphones are used for religious purposes, positing that the church cannot avoid the use of smartphones and the many relevant apps for Christian worship. With the advent of the computer, one of the first things Christians did was to put the Bible into digital formats and digitised Bibles then made their way into smartphones. To some extent, the “smartphone Bible” is now replacing the “book Bible”. Hawkins (2019) argues from a study conducted in Congo that the smartphone helped pastors particularly to preach the gospel to people on WhatsApp and Facebook and forward the message to their contacts. Through the smartphone, people were able to listen to preaching on the radio and to hear news about Israel, the birthplace of Christianity. Similarly, in some studies, Catholics have been found to overwhelmingly use not only the smartphone (Egielewa, 2020a) but also smartphone applications, including those for social media, for religious purposes (Egielewa, 2020b; Egielewa, 2021).

Meanwhile, some authors (Hoover et al, 2004; Bellar et al., 2018; Egielewa, 2020a) have tried to study the place of the smartphone in the context of their religious use. While several authors (Barna, 2013; Campbell; 2013; Campbell, 2020; Egielewa, 2020b; Tsuria, 2021) have harped on the many advantages of the smartphone, some others (Bellar et al., 2018; Egielewa, 2021) have pointed out the negative implications of the smartphone. In other words, digital tools and smartphones, in particular, can have both “divine” and “profane” roles, divine when it enhances the worship of God and profane when it reduces and undermines the worship of God and even attempts to replace God (Tsuria, 2021). In some studies carried out by Hoover et al (2004) and Barna (2013), 64% of Americans said they searched for religious information online while one in four Christians used an e-reader or other mobile device for reading the Bible. Significant is that 44% of pastors said they used their smartphones to read and study the Bible (Bellar et al., 2018).

4. The Priest and the Smartphone: Opportunities and Dangers

Priests, as religious actors, have engaged the smartphone and used it in several ways to negotiate their relationships, and spiritual activities, both online and offline, intersecting areas of their lives (Campbell & Evolvi, 2019). Hawkins (2019) argues from a study conducted in Congo that the smartphone has both positive and negative impacts.

Hawkins (2019) found that pastors highlight the major positive impacts of the smartphone as providing a platform to preach the gospel. Indeed, the combination of visual and textual elements can help the articulation of religious identities through the creation of aesthetic representations online, particularly on social media. Priests have used digital tools including the smartphone and the internet to express online representations of their beliefs and practices. Priests have also used icons and memes to construct texts and images that usually function as playful ways of communicating various messages, in passing across religious-relevant messages to their audiences. Specifically, memes convey religious-related messages that playfully blend pop culture with religious narratives. However, memes can be helpful or problematic depending on the context of their production. They can reinforce group identity but can also be critical of religious values and meanings if created by an outsider (Campbell & Evolvi, 2019).

Since priests exercise positions of authority in the church, they are also able to transfer that same authority to the digital space in their use of their smartphones, namely that members of the believing community believe them as the authority of religious or church teachings. Priests' use of internet-enabled smartphones confers on them an additional level of authority because the media exerts *de facto* power on its consumers. It is important to note that the internet also makes it possible to subvert priests' authority online. Such a possibility of the subversion of priests' authority online generates two perspectives: (1) the challenge to the traditional authority of priests online in which there are different and alternative views and channels to which their audiences

also have access, and (2) the urge for priests to learn the logic of digital media because the modern generation is irreversibly digital in nature, essence and identity. For the modern priest, therefore, it is a new school. Thus, Campbell (2016) has distinguished three types of religious authorities online: (1) digital professionals, who employ their technological skills to create resources for religious communities; (2) digital spokespersons, who develop the online presence of religious institutions; and (3) digital strategists, who seek to serve their religious communities through online production (Campbell & Evolvi, 2019). Contemporary priests must have a little of all three to be effective, impactful and relevant in the new digital era.

Smartphone use for religious purposes is well described by Heidi Campbell in her book *When Religion Meets Newmedia*, in which the author aptly described the smartphone, particularly at the debut of the iPhone in 2007 as ‘The Jesus Phone’ because of the huge spiritual and religious potential it possessed and still possesses (Hugh, 2019). To demonstrate the importance smartphone took in its deployment for religious purposes, in 2007 a customized Nokia 73 was designed, called the “Buddha phone” and arrived on the streets of Shenzhen in China with all the standard components of a typical smartphone, but in addition also featured a virtual prayer room where Buddha and various Bodhisattva (Buddhist deity who has attained the highest level of enlightenment, but who delays their entry into Paradise in order to help the humanity) could be worshipped while ‘on-the-go’. Once one presses the phone’s ‘jade button’ an animated Buddha emerging from a lotus, the Buddhist symbol of purity, would be activated (Hugh, 2019). In a 2016 study by Tarimo (2016) in the Catholic Diocese of Moshi in Tanzania, 96% of young people use their smartphone to go online compared to only 48% that go online using a computer, showing that clearly that those who do not own a laptop own a smartphone. Similarly, since studies have shown that 22% of practicing Christians and 52% of practicing Christian Millennials are replacing traditional church with digital tools such as podcasts, and streamed sermons online including via their smartphones, it is imperative for priests to use such

digital means to reach such a large audience. To do otherwise is to be unavailable to a large percentage of Christians and younger generations who constitute the future church (Great Commission University, 2020). In other words, there is the ever-growing need for a “cyber church”, a church based on the traditional notions of worshipping God but in means that are also easily accessible by many. Herein lies the important role of the smartphone. During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying shutdown of churches and worship centres, Christians turned online for a sense of worship. Indeed, 91% of Nigerian Worshippers turned to social media platforms to experience worship digitally (Egielewa, 2020b). Similarly, with 80% of priests spending approximately six hours on their smartphones daily, the smartphone has become an inextricable part of the priestly daily routine which ought to be deployed, therefore, to support his priestly ministry (Egielewa, 2020a). Indeed, a study by Egielewa (2020a) shows that priests indeed can deploy smartphones including social media applications for planning and preparing for Masses, for reciting the breviary, for Benediction prayers, for planning and bookmarking society meetings and for personal conversations. In addition, many priests use smartphones for evangelisation and the spread of the Christian faith, for the creation of new religious communities, for the maintenance and strengthening of religious bonds in terms of religious greetings, sharing of religious songs, sermons, preaching, and biblical verses, and in recruiting new converts amongst others (Fandos-Igodo et al., 2018; Alzouma, 2019).

However, smartphones can have their flip side, in that they can distract young people, who are referred to as the “dotcom generation” when they are supposed to be concentrating on church or other religious activities (Hawkins, 2019; Kirkpatrick, 2020). Rajan (2019) opines that smartphones can be utilised to avoid unwanted personal interactions and that many people pretend to use their smartphones to avoid having interpersonal conversations with people. In other words, smartphones can often be used as a means to escape a difficult situation. People are

increasingly psychologically attached to their smartphones in what scholars (Gayomali, 2017; Kanmani et al., 2017; Rajan, 2019) have termed “*nomophobia*”- the fear of being separated from one’s smartphone. The consequences of this are mind-boggling. Contemporary symptoms of *nomophobia* include displays of panic, anxiety, nervousness and desperation when separated from their smartphones, appearing distracted in conversations and from work, and constantly checking phones for notifications. Some cases of *nomophobia* often lead to “vibration syndrome” where one might think his or her smartphone is ringing when it is not. As a result of the potent dangers of *nomophobia*, parents and teachers in Catalonia, Spain in late 2023 entered a pact to delay teenagers from getting their first phones/smartphones until they are 16 years of age (The Daily Digest, 2023).

Many priests see the smartphone as an extension of their body by the way they hold and feel the smartphone even when it is not in use, a kind of unexplained intimacy arising from *nomophobia*. The depth of such intimacy can be seen by the physical proximity to their smartphones. They are never too far from them including when charging, when driving, when in a meeting, when sleeping, when praying for people, when eating, in the toilet, and even during a bath. Thus, for many, the smartphone is the first point of call upon waking up in the morning, a glance at some messages but also some early morning chats, a quick good morning call, chat or SMS, and in some instances before morning prayers, before morning Mass or Benediction. People, including priests, may wake up intermittently at night to check messages on their phones. These may be signs of chronic *nomophobia* (Rajan, 2019). Indeed, the smartphone has come to define people’s identities, their individualism, their lifestyles and social relationships. This is where priests must draw the line between falling for the danger of *nomophobia* (in its chronic form) and engaging the smartphone responsibly for effective priestly ministry.

It is important to understand that digital culture may result in the distortion of existing identities, with people presenting themselves or even others in unrealistic, misleading, and unjust ways. This is particularly so due to the anonymity of some internet profiles, the creation of avatars, the circulation of deceptive pictures, and the misrepresentation of one's or others' identities (Campbell & Evolvi, 2019). In contemporary Christianity, "many Christians are turning to apps and memes, via their smartphones, to express their faith instead of going to physical churches—and this is raising intriguing questions about the future of the world's largest religion." (Stokel-Walker, 2017). After the COVID-19 pandemic, many Christians have expressed a preference for "online Masses and Services" to physical churches. Is the ubiquity of the smartphone and easy access to the Internet the cause for this? Fandos-Igado et al (2018) and Kirkpatrick (2020) have argued that smartphone presents a great opportunity for the church and of course priests. Its use must also be responsible enough not to become a distraction leading us to examine how the smartphone can be deployed for effective priestly ministry and the loopholes to avoid.

5. Smartphones and challenges for the ministry of the priest

Having examined the implications of smartphone use among priests, we can now discuss the current challenges of deploying smartphones for the ministry of priests - positive and negative.

A. Positive Use of the Smartphone

The Smartphone has several positive impacts in the life and ministry of the priests, some of which are discussed below.

i Mass on the go

Many Catholics, via their smartphones, can follow the celebration of Holy Masses celebrated and streamed online, sometimes thousands of miles away. Some priests, who stream their Masses online, via Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube amongst others, have received positive feedback from Catholics and even non-Catholics who followed and were enriched by the religious celebrations, especially the homily. Some of such persons reside in different countries and on different continents.

ii. Readings, Homilies and Liturgy of the hours on the go

In preparing for liturgical celebrations, especially the Mass, many priests are now able to read the readings much in advance right on their smartphones through several apps (applications). Such apps include *Universalis*, *Laudate* and many home-grown apps like the *Catholic Missal for Nigeria*, etc. These apps make the work of the priests easier in terms of preparation, on their smartphone anywhere they are.

Like readings for Mass, many priests consult various repositories for homilies. These serve as inspiration for priests while preparing their homilies for Masses including for celebrations of feasts, memorials and solemnities. These have become possible and accessible through internet-enabled smartphones. Priests do these consultations anytime and anywhere. Some examples of such apps include *my catholic life*, *my parish app*, *Amen app*, *ipieta*, etc.

For the Liturgy of the Hours, many priests consult and pray using the *ibreviary*, *Universalis*, *Laudate*, etc. Many of these religious apps also contain articles that are helpful in understanding Catholic teachings and doctrines. Uniquely, many of the apps can be used by speakers of several languages such as English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, etc.

iii. Parish Information on the go

Apart from the regular paper-based parish bulletins, many parishes have online platforms for passing across information to parishioners in smartphone-based, internet-enabled ways particularly, via Facebook, WhatsApp, and Email amongst others. These are made simpler because the information is created, distributed, and received mainly on the smartphones of parishioners. Some information could include shifts in times of Masses or other para-liturgical celebrations or outright cancellations, changes in venues and times of programmes, meetings, new arrivals of parishioners, wedding reminders, birth and death announcements, etc.

iv. Priest's Research on the go

The smartphone helps the priest in the several types of research he undertakes, whether for religious purposes such as preparing for a talk, workshop, seminar, retreat or even for academic purposes. Many priests, apart from deepening their knowledge from the ubiquity of theological and pastoral resources available online such as new Papal letters, encyclicals, and Vatican documents amongst others, some priests, who engage in secular studies such as in the natural sciences or other branches of scientific studies, use the smartphone, in addition to other ICT tools, to research in development of academic tasks or assignments, learning or discovering new insights, preparation for lectures amongst others. Much of this research can even happen while the priest is mobile (on the go), on a bus or flight. Thus, the smartphone does indeed contribute to the deepening, and widening of the priest's knowledge as well as his acquisition of new knowledge through research.

v. Priest's Organiser

The smartphone has become an organiser for many priests where important events, celebrations, meetings, and appointments are organised. Many priests are reminded of upcoming activities and appointments, the times, and venues such as Masses, Baptism, pastoral meetings, home or hospital visitations, talks to groups, workshops, seminars, etc. Thus, the smartphone serves as a diary, alarm clock, calendar, jotter, and mobile office, all possible on the go, wherever and whenever the priest is. These have been made possible through the smartphone.

B. Negative Use of the Smartphone

The Smartphone can and does have several negative implications in the life and ministry of the priests, some of which are also discussed below.

i. Smartphones at Liturgical and Pastoral Engagements

While the use of smartphones in the preparation for liturgical activities is good and indeed needful and helpful their use at/during liturgical and para-liturgical celebrations such as Masses, Baptisms, Weddings, Benedictions, Confessions, Liturgy of the Holy Hours and other pastoral activities such as pious society meetings, parish pastoral council meetings, etc is an aberration. A study by Egielewa (2020a) found that both priests and lay persons have seen other priests use their smartphones to make calls, chat or send SMS on the altar during the celebration of Holy Mass including during celebrations with large numbers of priests such as Ordinations of Deacons, Priests, and Bishops, Professions of Consecrated Persons, Weddings, Funerals, Priestly and Marriage Anniversaries, etc. Similarly, priests have reported seeing other priests playing games on their smartphones

during such Masses. These constitute a distraction not just to the priest himself but also to other priests and the lay faithful. It scandalises the lay faithful because it communicates the idea that the sole attention of the priest on the altar is not God but ‘others’. No justifiable reason can be adduced for the priests’ use of smartphones during liturgical celebrations.

ii. Smartphones during Office Hours

Office time and hours are opportunities during which priests have conversations with parishioners and non-parishioners alike. Some of such conversations are so intense, private and confidential that the priest requires an atmosphere of silence, listening, and rapt attention for counselling and prayers. The use of smartphones should be avoided at such moments except for calls that may be perceived as ‘urgent’. Priests should avoid the psychological addiction problem of “vibration syndrome” in which a priest fiddles and checks his phone intermittently as if it were ringing when it is not.

iii. Smartphones during Parish Meetings

Meetings are avenues during which priests direct the affairs of the parish such as parish pastoral council, parish finance council, harvest planning committee, etc. These meetings are serious and should be done in an atmosphere of seriousness without the normal clinging of phones and answering calls that could be delayed to some other time. Priests should not allow themselves to start making or receiving calls, chatting or sending an SMS during such meetings. It would be inappropriate for a priest to be presiding at an important parish meeting but at the same time leads distractions at such a meeting by using his smartphone intermittently.

iv. Smartphones during personal consultations/conversations with others

Daily, priests engage in several private consultations/conversations with parishioners for different reasons including personal, official, counselling, prayers, etc. It would be inappropriate for a priest to be involved in such a conversation and at the same time switch his attention between the person in front of him and his smartphone as if the conversation with the other person is not a priority. In such interpersonal conversations, the person in front of the priest should take priority, not the smartphone.

v. Smartphone to record images during liturgical and para-liturgical celebrations

During liturgical and para-liturgical celebrations, there may be the need and indeed it is proper to capture still and motion pictures for archival purposes using the various means that enable this including in some cases high-resolution smartphones. In this case, lay persons should be properly designated to carry out this assignment by the communications unit/department of the parish or Diocese in such a way as not to cause distractions in the liturgy. However, priests cannot and should not double as chief/concelebrants and photographers within the same celebration. It would be an aberration. Nonetheless, priests, who by their apostolate, for example, in the communications department of the Diocese wish to professionally record still and motion pictures at major diocesan events may not concelebrate at that Mass and should not be seated with concelebrating priests on the altar. His proper place, in this circumstance, is in the position designated for cameramen and women and photographers. Unless only the priest alone can perform this role, it is appropriate and even expedient that lay persons, with the right training, collaborate and preferably undertake this task on behalf of the parish or Diocese, while the priest fully exercises his priestly ministry at such celebrations.

Some of these points can be put graphically below.



Figure 1a: An appropriate posture during Mass without the smartphone..



Figure 1b: An appropriate posture during Mass without the smartphone.



Figure 2a: A priest being accompanied by the smartphone for Mass is inappropriate.



Figure 2b: A priest's use of smartphone during Mass is inappropriate.



Figure 2c: A priest's use of smartphone during Mass is inappropriate.

6. Conclusion

The Vatican II Council (1963) while praising the power of the modern means of communication foresaw the dangers that can arise with their misuse and abuse and warned thus:

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.

Therefore, it is important that priests recognise that smartphones are indeed pastorally useful and should indeed be used to enhance their pastoral work. Unfortunately, priests have fallen for the addiction to the smartphone that is consuming younger generations of the Millennials and Generation Z. Priests, as teachers, must evangelise the faithful. To do this, they too must first be evangelised about the proper use of smartphones. Unfortunately, this addiction affects not just younger priests but surprisingly even older priests of 10 years and above.

Priests must again re-appreciate and uphold not just the “sacredness” in and of the sacred liturgy but also the mystery therein. The use of smartphones during liturgical celebrations *desacralises* the celebrations, turns away attention from God to man and scandalises the faithful. Priests must not forget the injunction of St Matthew (18: 6) thus, “but he that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea.” Similarly, St. Paul warns in Romans 14:21 “it is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything to cause your brother to stumble.” Many lay people have expressed shock, despair and weakened faith at priests’ use of smartphones on the altar. Priests need to be mindful of the

admonition of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:32 thus, “do not become a stumbling block, whether to Jews or Greeks or the church of God.”

Finally, priests need to understand that there is time for everything as admonished in Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 thus, “there is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.” Therefore, there is time to celebrate Mass and there is time to be on the altar, there is time to use the smartphone, and there is time not to. The same applies to other areas of the priestly ministry where smartphones have intruded negatively: Office hours, prayers, personal conversation/consultation, etc. These, too, need to be purged from the negative intrusion of smartphone addiction.

7. Recommendations

Based on the foregoing discussion, I would like to recommend as follows:

1. Priests should restrict smartphone storage to homes, offices or their cars when beginning any liturgical or para-liturgical celebration, whether alone or with the faithful, in the community chapel or a parish church, mission station or other ecclesiastical institutions for that matter. I strongly advise that priests should not go with their smartphones to the church, chapel or the sacristy.
2. Priests should keep smartphones away when engaging with parishioners in the office space or outside the office space unless the deployment of the smartphone aids the conversation or consultation.
3. Dioceses should, as a matter of urgency, organise workshops for priests on the proper use of smartphones in the priestly ministry.

This could be cascaded from the National to the Diocesan and Deanery Levels.

4. Catechesis on the proper, prudent and pastoral use of digital tools, especially the smartphone, should indeed become an integral part of seminarians' formation and should be built into their curriculum in the seminary. Care should be taken to intensify efforts to recruit appropriate experts for this task.

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