TECHNOLOGY IN SCHOOLS OF THEOLOGY

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Abstract

Jesus commissioned His disciples to spread the Gospel to the ends of the Earth (Mathew 28.19). Enormous development in technology has widened the scope for social communications. No school of Theology can afford to ignore the technological development if they want to train their staff and students to do efficiently the mission work. However, the modern means of technology are both boon and bane as they have a potential to spread both good and bad. In spite of the inherent dangers in technological advancements, theological schools need to integrate modern means of technology in the theologates and organize courses on acquiring basic skills in latest means of technology and social communication in their curriculum. In this paper, we shall examine why the schools of Theology need to effectively incorporate the tools offered by technology in their curriculum and how could these tools help the students of Theology especially those training to be pastors, to prudently use these means both for pastoral purposes as well as for personal growth. We shall base our study on the documents of the Church on communication, the views of prominent theologians and experts on this issue.

Keywords: Theologate, technology, communication, Catholic Church

1. Introduction

Science and technology occupy a prime place in the contemporary world. It would be naive to ignore its relevance. It is both boon as well as bane to humanity. The Catholic Church's hierarchy is well aware of this fact. They welcome the prudent use of modern means of technology in the mission work. Thus, it is of paramount importance that schools of Theology should organize courses to impart basic skills and knowledge of modern means of technology and social communication. In this paper, we shall examine the relevance of introducing these courses in schools of Theology. We shall draw insights from relevant Church documents, Magisterium, views of theologians and experts in this field.

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2. Catholic Church's teachings on the use of technology

In the past, the Catholic Church opposed certain scientific discoveries, which were untenable with its viewpoint. In the process, people suspected that the Catholic Church was anti-science. It may be true in some cases that the Catholic Church took an anti-science position. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church through its Pontifical Academy of Science has been supporting the development and progress of Science by funding various scientific projects and researches since 1603 [Pontifical Academy of Science, http://www.casinapioiv.va/content/accademia/en/about/history.html, accessed May 18, 2015]. The Catholic Church has a number of reputed scientists who are priests and laypersons [1]. The Second Vatican Council, which was revolutionary in a number of ways for the Church upheld the importance of Science and technology in the contemporary world. It encouraged the use of the latest means of communication for the good of humanity. It noted in the Decree on the Media of Social Communication *Inter Mirifica* 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 endeavours, as circumstances and conditions demand. They should anticipate harmful developments, especially in regions where more urgent efforts to advance morality and religion are needed. Pastors should hasten, therefore, to fulfil their duty in this respect, one which is intimately linked with their ordinary preaching responsibility. The laity, too, who have something to do with the use of these media, should endeavour 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." [2]

The Council Fathers stressed on the harmonious relation between faith and reason. They attested the importance of blending the various means of the latest technologies in furthering Christian doctrines and teachings. They called upon all Christians to strive for a harmonious balance between religion and Science. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* noted that: "May the faithful, therefore, live in very close union with the other men of their time and may they strive to understand perfectly their way of thinking and judging, as expressed in their culture. Let them blend new sciences and theories and the understanding of the most recent discoveries with Christian morality and the teaching of Christian doctrine, so that their religious culture and morality may keep pace with scientific knowledge and with the constantly progressing technology. Thus they will be able to interpret and evaluate all things in a truly Christian spirit. Let those who teach Theology in seminaries and universities strive to collaborate with men versed in the other sciences through a sharing of their resources and points of view." [3]

The Catholic Church realizes the potential of the modern means of technology. The Church advocates the judicious and prudent use of technology for the good of all [Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si*, no. 102-105, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco _20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html, accessed June 29, 2015]. The Church is also aware of the dangers and pitfalls of relying too much on Science alone. Science and technology are not almighty. They can offer hope to humanity on one hand and bring destruction on the other. For instance, scientists can use atomic and nuclear energy for medicinal purposes in the treatment of cancer. However, they can use the same energy for producing bombs to wipe out cities within no time. Another example is that of the use of embryonic stem cell research. Some scientists accuse the Catholic Church of being anti-science, as the Catholic Church does not approve the embryonic stem cell research. They fail to understand that the Catholic Church is not against stem cell research per se but the use of embryos in research. The Catholic Church maintains that embryos have life and therefore need to be preserved. Modern scientific researches too have shown that human embryos are living and have the potential to form a human person [4]. Further, the Catholic Church encourages and funds researches, which do not use human embryo in stem cell research. Nobel laureate Professor Yamanaka Shinya's discovery of the method to grow stem cells without the use of embryonic cells is truly encouraging [Kyoto University, Institute for Integrated Cell-Material Sciences, http://www.icems.kyoto-u.ac.jp/e/ppl/grp/yamanaka.html, accessed May 18, 2015]. The Catholic Church is pro-life. The Catholic Church gladly accepts any scientific discovery, which upholds the sanctity and progress of humanity.

3. Place of technology in schools of Theology

Administrators of theologates need to decide whether to integrate the various means offered by the contemporary Science and technology in its curriculum [5]. The Catholic Church has stressed on the need of proper education and training in technology and social communication skills to all those who are preparing to be priests, religious or theologians. The Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio* on the means of social communication written by order of the Second Vatican Council states that: "If students for the priesthood and religious in training wish to be part of modern life and also to be at all effective in their apostolate, they should know how the media work upon the fabric of society and the technique of their use. This knowledge should be an integral part of their ordinary education. Indeed without this knowledge an effective apostolate is impossible in a society which is increasingly conditioned by the media. It is also desirable that priests and religious understand how public opinion and popular attitudes come into being so that they can suit both the situation and the people of their time. They can find the media of great help in their effort to announce the Word of God to modern men. Students who show a special gift in the handling of the media should be given higher training." [6]

The *Guide to the Training of Future Priests Concerning Social Communications* (1986) highlighted the necessity of including social communication training to all students of Philosophy and Theology to prepare them to use various means of technology with prudence and in a manner fitting to their vocation. Rapid development in means of communication is changing the way contemporary people relate with each other. The cyber social relations are replacing the traditional ways of socializing of contemporary people. This in turn, has necessitated all those involved with pastoral work, to adapt to the changing patterns in the society to reach out effectively to the people. The *Guide to the Training of Future Priests Concerning Social Communications* noted the following three aims for training all the students of Philosophy and Theology. "The social communications training of the second level, 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) and 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." [http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_ pccs_doc_19031986_guide-for-future-priests_en.html, accessed May 18, 2015]

The Pontifical Council for Social Communication in its pastoral instruction *Aetatis Novae* (1992) strongly advocated including courses on technology and social communication in schools of Theology. The pastoral instruction noted the importance of acquiring basic skills and training in the social communication. Information technology and mass media has a dramatic effect on the contemporary persons. Therefore, in order to serve them, pastoral workers need to know their mindset and prepare themselves. The pastoral instruction *Aetatis Novae* noted that: "Education and training in communications should be an integral part of the formation of pastoral workers and priests. There are several distinct elements and aspects to the education and training which are required. For example, in today's world, so strongly influenced by media, Church personnel require at least a working grasp of the impact which new information technologies and mass media are having upon individuals and society. They must likewise be prepared to minister both to the information rich and to the information poor. They need to know how to invite others into dialogue, avoiding a style of communicating which suggests domination, manipulation, or personal gain. As for those who will be actively engaged in media work for the Church, they need to acquire professional skills in media along with doctrinal and spiritual formation." [7]

The Magisterium of the Church too, has consistently encouraged the study and use of technology in pastoral work. John Paul II in Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999) noted that: "Media education, including the critical evaluation of media output, needs to be an increasing part of the formation of priests, seminarians, religious, catechists, lay professionals, students in Catholic schools and parish communities" [8].

As information and technology are posing a significant influence on the contemporary persons, the prudent and judicious use of the various means of technologies by all pastoral workers is becoming essential. The following points enumerate the reasons for the need of training the pastoral workers and seminarians with skills of modern technology and social communication.

3.1. Proclamation

Proclamation is an integral part of the Church's mission. The semantic gospels end with the great commission of Jesus, commanding His disciples to proclaim the good news to the ends of the Earth and bear witness to His name (Mathew 28.19-20, Mark 16.15-16, Luke 24.47-48). The early Christians faithfully followed the command of the Lord. They travelled to different continents to spread the Gospel of Jesus. They used all the means at their disposal to communicate effectively the message of Jesus. The medieval Christians too used different means like the press to print the Bible and other religious books. In the contemporary world, with the arrival of sophisticated means of communication, Christians all around the world have the need to rework their strategy of proclamation by using the latest means of technology. Almost 35 years ago, Paul VI noted in Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: "The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect" [9]. Christians, especially pastoral workers need not hesitate to use the various means of mass media and other forms of communication to spread the Gospel [10]. The Decree on the Media of Social Communication *Inter Mirifica* noted that: "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" [2, p. 146].

Modern means of communication like the television, internet, radio, smart phones, etc. have the capacity to reach a wider audience at any given time. Unlike in the past, anyone can communicate the message instantaneously. Modern means of communication like internet chat rooms also allow people living at the distant places to interact and communicate in real time. Pastoral workers need to know the proper use of these modern means of communication, to reach out to a larger audience. They can use internet chats, blogs and other forums of online interactive talk to interact with people, who are in quest of the divine or seeking answers to quench their spiritual hunger. They can also reach

out to people who are desperate and have lost hope. Paul VI highlighted the importance of using various means of social communication in proclamation. He noted that: "Our century is characterized by the mass media or means of social communication, and the first proclamation, catechesis or the further deepening of faith cannot do without these means, as we have already emphasized. When they are put at the service of the Gospel, they are capable of increasing almost indefinitely the area in which the Word of God is heard; they enable the Good News to reach millions of people... It is through them that she proclaims from the housetops the message of which she is the depositary. In them she finds a modern and effective version of the pulpit. Thanks to them she succeeds in speaking to the multitudes." [9]

John Paul II noted in his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* that Christians could use the various means of social communication like the press and mass media to share their missionary experiences with others. He noted that: "It is necessary to spread information through missionary publications and audiovisual aids. These play an important role in making known the life of the universal Church and in voicing the experiences of missionaries and of the local churches in which they work." [11]

John Paul II in Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* urged all Christians to integrate the Christian message with the *new culture*, which the modern means of technology and social communication has created in the society. This *new culture* has both positive and negative effects [12]. For instance, on the one hand, use of internet helps rapid diffusion of the message but on the other hand, some people can control, manipulate or misuse internet to spread for their personal gains. Therefore, Christians must be very careful in the use of modern means of communication. If they fail to integrate prudently their message with the *new culture* then all their efforts to use the latest means of technology may go in vain. John Paul II noted that: "It is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is necessary to integrate that message into the new culture created by modern communications. To this end, the Church needs to explore ways of thoroughly integrating the mass media into her pastoral planning and activity, so that by their effective use the Gospel's power can reach out still further to individuals and entire peoples." [8, p. 523]

John Paul II in his message on World Communication Day (2002) pointed to the need of prudent and judicious use of internet. Internet has the potential to become a powerful tool to spread the message of the gospel. However, there are also some drawbacks. John Paul II cautions Christians and pastors on the over-dependence on electronic means of communication. The new means of communication can be manipulated and cause more damage than good. Therefore, it becomes all the more important for young theologians to get themselves well acquainted with the electronic media to know both its benefits and dangers. John Paul II noted the following about internet revolution in the contemporary world. "The fact that through the Internet people multiply their contacts in ways hitherto unthinkable opens up wonderful possibilities for

spreading the Gospel... There is no doubt that the electronic revolution holds out the promise of great positive breakthroughs for the developing world; but there is also the possibility that it will in fact aggravate existing inequalities as the information and communications gap widens. How can we ensure that the information and communications revolution which has the Internet as its prime engine will work in favour of the globalization of human development and solidarity, objectives closely linked to the Church's evangelizing mission?" [John Paul II, World Communication Day, 2002, no. 5, http://w2.vatican.va/ content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_ 20020122_world-communications-day.html, accessed May 20, 2015]

Proclamation is an important part of the Church's mission. All those preparing themselves to be pastoral workers need to prepare themselves to proclaim the message of the gospel in a manner, which is in harmony with the culture of the place. Rapid development in means of technology is creating *new culture* and ways of communication. It would be unwise on the part of those who plan the curriculum in schools of theology to neglect organizing courses to impart basic skills and training to the *formandi* in means of modern social communication [13]. As technology keeps on advancing and changing, it is necessary to reorganize the courses to keep abreast with the recent changes.

3.2. Biblical studies

God communicates to the whole humanity through the means of the Bible. The written word of God has an indispensable place of honour and importance in Christian tradition. Therefore, Christians need to study the texts of the Bible to comprehend the totality of God's message. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* stresses on the need of proper interpretation of the scriptures and states that: "However, since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words" [3, p. 823-824, available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html, accessed May 20, 2015].

The invention of the printing press influenced the way of social communication. The Church used the printing press to circulate bible widely. The contemporary means of technology like biblical software programs containing texts in various languages, exegesis, commentaries, maps, dictionaries facilitates the systematic study of the Bible. In addition, modern means of mass media is useful to transmit the message of the Bible to people all around the world. John Paul II attested the usefulness of mass media in spreading the biblical message in his address to the Conference on Biblical Language and Media on September 28, 1998. He noted that: "When the meeting between divine Revelation and the modern media is conducted with respect for the truth of the biblical message and the correct use of technical means, it bears

abundant good fruits. On the one hand, it means elevating the mass media to one of its noblest tasks, which in some way redeems it from improper and sometimes trivializing uses. On the other, it offers new and extraordinarily effective possibilities for introducing the general public to God's Word communicated for the salvation of all mankind." [John Paul II, Address to the Conference on Biblical Language and Media, no. 2, http://w2.vatican.va/content/ john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1998/september/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19980928_linguagem-biblica.html, accessed May 20, 2015]

All Christians especially those involved in pastoral work can use the modern means of communication to carry out the different activities of the biblical apostolate [5, p. 117-118]. Even in places where the expensive ultra-modern gadgets of communication are out of reach for the poor, economically feasible means of communication like the cellular mobiles and internet have great potential to reach out to a wider audience [14]. Thus, pastoral workers can use these means to reach out to the people in remote parts of the world.

It would be wise on the part of the administrators of the theologates to introduce various means of technology in teaching the Bible and other subjects of Theology. Software of biblical language, parallel biblical texts, dictionaries, compendiums, lexicons, commentaries, etc. can become useful tools for both students and staff of theologate. However, both the students and staff need to be aware of the temptation of *cut, copy, and paste* culture. They must recognize that in spite of the various handy tools, there is no substitute for hard work. One must never forget the ethical use of these tools [15].

3.3. Pastoral communication

Communication is the key to do pastoral work. Pastoral communication begins with prayer and contemplation [16]. In order to communicate the message of the Gospel, a pastoral worker needs to be a strong witness of Jesus. He or she must also learn the art to relate and communicate with the people [7]. A pastoral worker could communicate well with the people if he or she is well aware of their needs. He or she also needs to be well acquainted with the contemporary situation in which, the people are living.

Generally, contemporary people are busy with the humdrum of life. Church doctrines and abstract theological sermons have no great impact over them. However, this does not mean that they have no interest in spiritual things [17]. It is the job of the pastoral worker to reach out to them and offer spiritual services [18]. They must use the language, which is understandable to them. The Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio* on the means of social communication points out the need of training pastoral workers to communicate with the people by prudently using all the means of modern communication. It noted that: "The place of the instruments of social communication in human destiny, the opportunities and the problems that they set before the Christian conscience: all this makes it essential that a way be found for a pastoral approach to this field. Trained and experienced men must be found for this work.

The proper pastoral structures, with all the necessary funding, rights and resources should also be set up. Finally, special organizations should be devoted to the apostolate of each of the media." [6, p. 648]

Theologates could conduct courses on mass media and print media to train the *formandi* to use these tools to communicate with parishioners as well as others [5, p. 175-179]. As future priests, religious and pastoral workers, they must train themselves to diffuse the Church news to the people for greater transparency [5, p. 179; 6, p. 651-652]. Lack of transparency can give birth to various rumours and controversies, which can have a detrimental effect on the functioning of the local parish. Online social interaction websites like Facebook, Twitter, etc. are offering limitless scope for expression. This is good. However, there is also a danger that one can use these tools to spread rumours or paste controversial articles about others. Pastoral workers need to be very prudent while dealing such issues. They should deal with such situations without panic. They need to refrain from any action that could aggravate the matter. They need to learn to accept the situation and be open to offer any clarification if needed [5, p. 203-204].

Further, pastoral workers should also learn to take help from professionals to reach out to the people [5, p. 180]. For instance, if the local parishes offer apps to provide the latest information about the timings of the various activities of the parish then anyone can have quick access to such information. Parishes and institutions having websites need to keep them updated regularly; otherwise, it can depict a very negative image of that parish or institute [5, p. 195]. Thus, integrating modern tools of communication in theologates is becoming important.

3.4. Virtual classrooms of Theology

Renowned universities and organizations around the world have started online courses and virtual classrooms to reach out to all those who may be interested in the subject matter, which they offer. The idea behind to start virtual classrooms is to make knowledge, border free and learning, without limits. Anyone can access the online courses at any time and learn from the comforts of one's home or cafe for no cost or for a reasonable fee [19]. Virtual classrooms have helped many talented students to learn and improve their skills without having the need to travel to those universities or organizations. This way the universities also encourage and promote the best students to train themselves and contribute to the world.

The teachings of the Catholic Church and the Magisterium encourage the use of modern means of social communication. However, there are different opinions regarding the use of virtual classrooms to offer theology courses [20]. John Paul II noted in his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* the importance of using modern means of communication to reach out to the world. He cited the example of Paul in Areopagus, who proclaimed the Gospel in the language and tone, which was understandable to the people of his time. John Paul II calls on all

Christians to learn from Paul while reaching out to the people in the modern world. He noted that: "The first Areopagus of the modern age is the world of communications, which is unifying humanity and turning it into what is known as a global village. The means of social communication have become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behaviour as individuals, families and within society at large." [11, p. 285]

While the traditional means of imparting lectures in classrooms is important, virtual classrooms can open the field of theology to the whole world [21]. Anyone irrespective of his or her status can access the virtual classrooms to learn more about the bible or any other topic in theology. This may encourage people who are busy with work to use their free time to acquaint themselves with modern theological thoughts and opinions. This may in turn encourage healthy debates over theological issues, which deal with life.

4. Conclusions

The rapid development of technology offers the world with new means of social communication. Christians are part of this world and so need to use these instruments for the glory of God. The teachings of the Catholic Church and the Magisterium strongly support the prudent and judicious use of the modern means of communication. Future priests, religious and pastoral workers need to acquaint themselves with the various means of the modern technology. It would be too late, if theologates do not train them during formation years in acquiring basic skills to use modern means of technology and social communications. Thus, courses on technology and social communication have a rightful and important place in theologates.

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