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Technology and the New Evangelization

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Though not written specifically to address the question of technology in the home, the following article does address the important underlying issues. Applications to the home will be evident through the reviews that follow. We are grateful to the author and to the Knights of Columbus for permission to reproduce the article here.[1] – S.C.

All of Christian life rests on two principle mysteries: the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation. The Trinity is the name we give to the fathomless beauty of communion in God himself, the perfect unity of three Persons who are nevertheless distinct one from another. To participate in this unity is one of the deepest desires a human person has: to live in the depths of love, friendship, and communion, yet without dissolving one's identity in the crowd. We deeply want to be connected to other people, to love and be loved, because we are "image and likeness" of God himself, who is Trinity. It is not hard to see that this desire for communion is at the heart of what has made social networking undergo such explosive growth in the last decade.

In 2009, Benedict XVI said: "Desire for communication and friendship is rooted in our very nature as human beings and cannot be adequately understood as a response to technical innovations. In the light of the biblical message, it should be seen primarily as a reflection of our participation in the communicative and unifying Love of God, who desires to make of all humanity one family."[2]

The other deepest mystery of our faith, the Incarnation, is the bridge that links two worlds which otherwise would have remained apart. In Jesus Christ, God is revealed and made present in our midst. And not only: the flesh itself, that part of the human person which seemed destined only for decay and death, is revealed to be of crucial importance. Not only did God himself take on flesh, but in his resurrection he shows the eternal, transfigured destiny of the human body. Mary already participates in this destiny. So, by the grace of God, may we.

From its very beginnings, Christianity has faced a perennial temptation to underestimate the importance of the body. In past centuries, many crucial dogmatic disputes arose in this regard, and many of the most dangerous heresies have devalued the body. Some philosophies situated

the origin of evil in physical reality, and the Good in an exclusively spiritual realm.

Our Christian tradition, on the other hand, has always affirmed the goodness of all creation. Every generation of Christians has had to re-learn to think of Jesus Christ as "true man and true God," without excessively underlining one part of this expression to the detriment of the other. When we speak of Christ's "body and blood, soul and divinity" present in the Eucharist, we are speaking of this surprising union between apparent opposites, physical and spiritual. In the twenty centuries of the Church's life, much clarity has been brought to these definitions, yet they retain a fundamental mystery which has never been, and never can be exhausted.

Let us move on now to our subject, beginning with a few examples taken from everyday life.

A Few Examples

When I was a boy, my father worked in an insurance agency. He left the house around eight, and returned home at five-thirty. During that time, he made many phone calls, wrote many letters, and met many people. But from five-thirty in the evening until the following morning, he did none of these things. There was a clear distinction between the workplace and the home. Everyone felt it: even if you knew the home phone number of your employee, it was not right to disturb him at home except for a grave emergency.

Twenty years later, my father still worked for an insurance agency. But by now, even on vacation, he had to check his voice mail, respond to work calls on his cell phone, and write emails on his Blackberry. There was no longer a clear distinction between home and work. The causes of this situation are complex. One of them is the very fact that a cell phone is not linked to a specific physical location. This inevitably weakens the perception that you might be "disturbing" the person you are calling. That sense was stronger when the phone number was directly linked to a place: a work call on the home number had better be important.

What was once objectively linked to physical locations is now determined only by our will: we must turn off the phone in order to safeguard the silence of an important conversation, a liturgical celebration, or a meal with friends. And often, even if we have decided to turn off our own phone, those around us have not. A few decades ago, a parishioner would have had to make an exceptionally rude decision to interrupt the Mass during the consecration with a loud noise; today it takes a decision on the part of *all* the parishioners to *avoid* interrupting the Mass with a ringing cell phone.

Let's take a look at another example: online chat. On my Gmail account, I can see when some of my close friends are online. Clicking on their name opens a chat window, which on occasion I use to say hello to people I did not plan on contacting, but whom I simply notice online. Some time ago, I was chatting with a friend who lives in Spain, whom I rarely see. Our conversation went something like this:

Me: "Hey Jack, how are you?"

Jack: "Good, you?"

Me: "Fine. So how's work?"

Jack: "Ok, a bit down cuz of the crisis."

Me: "How bout your girlfriend?"

While the other person is typing a response, the Gmail chat window shows a phrase which

reads “Jack is typing….” That phrase remains visible as long as the other person is actually typing; when he stops, the phrase disappears a short while later. After my last question, by watching that message I could tell that Jack typed something, then stopped, then started typing again, then a long pause, and after about two minutes I received his reply: “Fine.”

What happened in the meantime? Did he start saying something else, change his mind, and then send me a one-liner? Or did he receive a phone call or an email? Or did he go get a drink of water? I’ll never know.

This taught me something about chat. It brings people closer together – I wasn’t planning on talking with my far-away friend, but the chat window made it possible to have a brief contact. At the same time, chat creates a distance which isn’t there in other forms of long-distance communication. For example, on the phone it would have been easier to interpret that long pause. I probably would have been able to make out if things were really “fine” or not between him and his girlfriend. Chat, on the other hand, made that silence completely illegible.

A third example: television. The availability of many channels makes it possible to leap continuously from one world to another (this is true of three or four, let alone with five hundred channels on satellite TV). This experience conditions us to think that the world is not first “given,” but chosen. You want to feel something in particular? Then choose the program that will make you feel relaxed, excited, fearful, joyful, sentimental, and so forth. Or you do not know what you want to feel, so you begin to zap through the channels, stopping for a few seconds on the images that most instinctively attract you.

Television screens have a character that is completely different from every other object. They seem almost magical. They attract our eyes with a power that not even the great masters’ oil paintings can command. What’s more, they are totipotent, they can become any image: on the screen one can watch a comedy, the Pope celebrating the Way of the Cross on Good Friday, or a porn flick. These are three experiences which more naturally would be located in three very different places: the theatre, the church and the brothel, but which can live together in apparent harmony on a living room television screen.

One final word about television will bring us to a first conclusion. In *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman writes “it is implausible to imagine that anyone like our twenty-seventh president, the multi-chinned, three-hundred-pound William Howard Taft, could be put forward as a presidential candidate in today’s world. The shape of a man’s body is largely irrelevant to the shape of his ideas when he is addressing a public in writing or on the radio or, for that matter, in smoke signals. But it is quite relevant on television. The grossness of a three-hundred-pound image, even a talking one, would easily overwhelm any logical or spiritual subtleties conveyed by speech. For on television, discourse is conducted largely through visual imagery, which is to say that television gives us a conversation in images, not words…. You cannot do political philosophy on television. Its form works against the content.”[3]

The three examples we have briefly examined help us to see that, with a small change, Postman’s final phrase, “Its form modifies its content,” could describe all three technologies we have discussed. The cell phone changes our perception of space and privacy; chat obscures the meaning of silence, and changes the kind of things which can and cannot be said clearly; television alters our relationship with the world in many important ways. More generally, we could say that every technology carries with it a change in our approach to and relationship with the world.

Technology is Not Neutral

The changes in our approach to the world brought about through the use of technology are quite important. In particular, much depends on *which* aspects of life are made easier and which ones are made more difficult through a given technology. In my conclusion, I will propose that we ask first of all *what* we wish to do or say through technology, in order to be conscious of the gains and losses incurred through its use. But first, we must tackle a common misconception.

Very frequently, we say or hear others say that technology is neutral, and everything depends on how you use it. The analogy is made to older tools: a knife, it is said, is neither good nor bad, and can be used either to slice bread or to kill a man. I would like to face this question head-on.

First, I need to clarify that in saying that technology is not neutral, I am not saying that it is intrinsically evil. By "neutral" we usually mean – taking things to the extreme – that internet was not invented by the devil. And even if there were a whiff of sulphur involved, it is undeniable that along with the bad, many good things can be found on the internet. Thus, we presume, the only real problem is to use the internet and other technologies well. The problem is that at this point we tend to make an unjustified leap. That is, we tend to think that only the user uses the technology. But this is not true: it is also the technology that "uses" its user. Every tool has an impact on the person using it. In that sense, they are not neutral.

The foregoing examples can be understood more clearly if we briefly mention a recent development in neuroscience called "neuroplasticity." The term indicates the fact that experience modifies the human brain in physically measurable ways, including the growth and death, the strengthening and weakening of dendrites (something like connecting wires) between neurons, and the reprogramming of groups of neurons for new functions. These developments have been discussed in many recent books,[4] to which I refer the interested reader. For our purposes, it is enough to state that the changes which occur in the brain as a result of repeated activity can have substantial consequences.

A personal example which I would like to mention has to do with reading and prayer. At one point in my life as a priest, I spent a lot of time speed-reading textbooks, news web-sites, and educational studies while working on a Master's degree. I became good at multitasking and quickly finding relevant information for the papers I wrote. At the same time, I experienced a growing difficulty in keeping my mind on one thing at a time, in particular when reading complicated theological works and while praying my breviary. My eyes kept jumping down a few lines, looking for key-words, and not following the more leisurely pace of the biblical text. At first, this did not seem to be a serious problem, and I kept pressing ahead. When a friend gave me a copy of Nicolas Carr's *The Shallows*, I realized that my experience was more important than I had first thought. Carr shows in his book that the kind of reading I was doing was literally re-wiring my brain!

Once it was thought the brain reached a substantially fixed form with physical maturity, and it worked more or less like a computer. Carr's book helped me see that the reality is quite different. Neurons continually form new connections between themselves. We were born with some neurological structures, but these structures are profoundly modified by experience. The meaning and importance of this discovery is hard to overestimate.

One of the underlying dynamics is called Hebb's rule, formulated by the Canadian neuro-scientist Donald Hebb in 1949: "Cells that fire together wire together." If two neurons more or less in the same area of the brain are stimulated at the same time by an experience, they can form physical connections between themselves through the growth of new dendrites. More

recently Edward Todd and Michael Merzenich have demonstrated that there are other possible mechanisms. Not only does experience generate neurological structures, strengthening and weakening the links between neurons, but it can also make entire groups of neurons change roles. Thus, for example, stroke victims can recover body movement by "reprogramming" the neurons in an undamaged area, which then substitute for the damaged neurons.[5]

And that isn't all. It is sufficient that an experience be "remembered" in order to strengthen the connections in play. A notable example of this phenomenon regards musical practice. One can practice even by only *thinking* of playing, without actually touching the keyboard of a piano, and really improve. A study done in 1995 by Alvero Pascual-Leone demonstrated that a group of pianists who only imagined playing certain notes registered the same changes in their brains as others who actually played the keyboard![6] When connections are strengthened between neurons, they can become the easiest route of communication. That is how habits are formed, both of action and of thought. All of this has deep implications for our relationship with reality.

We become what we think, what we see, what we read, and what we do. This is not a mystical affirmation; on a neurological level, our experiences never leave us unchanged. They modify us, for better and for worse, creating or strengthening new connections in our brains, weakening or eliminating others, forming us in the image of our actions, thoughts, desires, and tools.

If there is a two-way relationship between a tool and its user, between man and technology, which are the tools we would most like to resemble? Reading the Scripture creates a powerful capacity for reasoning and an attention to subtle detail that man does not naturally have. It can only be acquired by long experience, and by the decision to concentrate on certain types of reading. Meditating the lives of the Saints helps us to form our will and our intelligence to the highest standards. Good moral action creates virtuous habits. In other words, all of the above actions partially rewire our brains in the image of those same actions.

In this brief article, there is not enough space to go any further with this line of reasoning.[7] In the context of this discussion of technology and its influence on the human person, I would however like to continue our reflection by recalling our premise about the Trinity and the Incarnation, and bring to bear some insights generated by the Christian tradition.

Communion and Communication

The desire for communion seems to me to be one point where we should aim our attention. We should first look at the deep reasons which push men and women to constantly search for new means of communication, rather than on the technical methodology, which in any case rapidly changes and which must constantly be re-learned. At the same time, we should reflect critically upon our successes and failures in this search for communion.

In his message for the 2011 International Day of Social Communications, Pope Benedict XVI asked: "Who is my 'neighbor' in this new world? Does the danger exist that we may be less present to those whom we encounter in our everyday life? Is there is a risk of being more distracted because our attention is fragmented and absorbed in a world 'other' than the one in which we live? Do we have time to reflect critically on our choices and to foster human relationships which are truly deep and lasting? It is important always to remember that virtual contact cannot and must not take the place of direct human contact with people at every level of our lives."[8]

In reality he was repeating, in more vibrant language, what *Verbum Domini* says: "Among the

new forms of mass communication, nowadays we need to recognize the increased role of the *internet*, which represents a new forum for making the Gospel heard. Yet we also need to be aware that the virtual world will never be able to replace the real world, and that evangelization will be able to make use of the *virtual world* offered by the new media in order to create meaningful relationships only if it is able to offer the *personal contact* which remains indispensable."[9]

Would confession by telephone, fax, email, or chat be the same thing, with respect to the encounter with divine mercy through the priest present in the confessional? Wouldn't it be much more abstract and cold (besides being invalid)? Can you ask your girlfriend to marry you on skype? It seems to me that virtual communication can be a support to relationships, but it cannot make them grow and mature with the speed, depth, and honesty that only personal, physical communication can guarantee.

The history of the Church is full of fine examples of people like St Paul, who tried to communicate their faith with whatever new forms of communication were available at the time. I am also thinking of the scribes who copied pages and pages of manuscripts, as well as more recent television evangelizers including the American Fulton Sheen, or the incredible energy of the Polish priest Maximilian Kolbe, who founded newspapers and even cities before his death as a martyr in Auschwitz. Finally let us remember the powerful influence of Pope John Paul II or Mother Teresa: they had a luminous and convincing presence even on the television screen. Yet I cannot help but think that these people's actions have born true fruit according to the measure in which they favored interpersonal relationships, in small, local communities.

Another Church document, this one produced by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications in 2002, says: "Virtual reality cannot substitute the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the sacramental reality of the other sacraments and the liturgical celebrations participated in a human community in flesh and blood. On the internet there are no sacraments." In other words, the fundamental problem for Catholics seems not to be so much about conquering the spaces of the web for Christ, but rather to live with Christ and the Church in the sacraments. Those who do so will "Christ-ify" every place in which they live, including the internet.

The Incarnation in the Age of Facebook

I recently received an email from a friend named Anna. She wrote to me of a particularly dramatic day in which she discovered the friendship of a person dear to her. The letter was beautiful, a simple and moving story. Then, a few weeks later I was speaking with a mutual friend about this message, she revealed she too had received the same email. But wasn't it an email sent to *me*? Or was it more like a newspaper article, copied for ease and sent to several people? And then again, why do we tend to feel disappointed when we discover this sort of thing? Why should the letter be less valuable if it were sent to others as well?

The same thing is true for works of art. At Christie's auction house, originals are worth millions, and reproductions, even when they are not distinguishable to the buyer, are worth no more than a few thousand dollars. Also, when an artist makes several copies of a work, like in the case of prints and woodcuts, she numbers them. It is not the same thing to have an original or a copy. It is not the same thing to have a mass-produced poster, or print number 53 out of 100.

What changes in the case of a personal letter? The valuation of the person changes. Anna wrote a message which, in order to save time, she sent to others. But the message was thereby

taken out of the intimate context of a friendship between sender and receiver. Only the text was left, without the complicated web of intention, form, and suggestion which exists only within an unrepeatable personal relationship. One sign of the falseness of this sort of action is the sense of guilt it creates, which can be found in the fact that the sender tends to hide the fact that it was a message sent to several people. Christmas cards are usually signed by hand, even if the rest is pre-printed.

Most of us want to be esteemed more than we deserve. Take facebook profile photos: most don't necessarily reflect what a person really *is*, but rather what he or she would like to *seem*. It is a small and absolutely pardonable vanity, but it unveils a way of being that eats away at friendship, that very communion that we most desire. Through these little insincerities comes a mentality in which appearance is more important than truth, and that is an obstacle to love.

But what does all this have to do with Web 2.0? On blogs or social networks, each person is an emitter of information, and most messages are sent out into the ether to a plurality of receivers. This is something different than a conversation among friends. In an essay-letter written to Facebook (as though it were a person), Adam Briggle faces this problem of mass communication:

"because of the mixed audience potentially viewing these public expressions… I do not feel all that free. In fact, I begin to sympathize with the mass media broadcasting corporations that have to produce content suitable for everyone. In these spaces, I am not playing with my identity or expressing myself so much as trying to purify a neutral self suitable for broadcasting to the viewing mass. It is the art of self-censorship in an attempt to handle the collision of life contexts that normally remain separate. I have seen innocent comments spin out a thread of rancour, because what is best said to one is best said otherwise to another and not at all to a third."[10]

Seen from one's own point of view this may not be very convincing. "All right, virtual communities may not be as strong as real ones, but does it really matter?" It is easier to understand if we look at it from the point of view of the receiver. Even if I write carbon copy messages to save time, I would prefer that my friends write to me as an individual on a private, one-to-one basis. I would like to have our conversation happen with a balanced rhythm between speaking and listening. I would like our friendship to be full of sincere charity. Exactly what I do to others almost without thinking, I wouldn't want to be done to me.

When I go onto an internet forum to try and solve a problem with my computer, I can rapidly access the conflated knowledge of many thousands of people. And I am often able to find a solution quickly, but I tend to reduce these people to mere givers of information, which is something less than persons. On the other hand, I would not like to be treated as a simple giver of information, but as an unrepeatable being. I am not a mere event among events. I am not a mere function among functions, or a drop in the ocean. The concept of *personhood*, of which the Christian West is justly proud, affirms that every man and woman is a whole, an infinite. I am a unique event, and I find in the unrepeatability of the flesh and of local human relationships the necessary base for the strong and lively friendships that I seek.

The Body and Love

In elementary school, we used to pass love notes between students. They were ridiculous for how direct they were. I think I once wrote to a girl: "Would you like to be my girlfriend?", with two boxes to check, "yes" and "no." In high school things were more complicated and I usually did not have the courage to ask the question in person, so I tried on the phone. I was there straining to the outmost to interpret the microseconds of each pause and the tones of the voice,

in order to understand the real intentions of my friend. I remember that certain relationships were in a sense doubled: there was the telephone relationship and the relationship in person during the school day. Rivers of words which we said in the evening did not seem to survive the light of the next day.

When I finally had a girlfriend, I immediately realized that being together was completely different from these interminable telephone conversations. In the first place it was much more difficult to mask my feelings. When I was tired, or tired of sweet words, I could not hide behind some monosyllable pronounced here or there on the phone. I was all of one piece, readable every instant and not only when I came out of my silence. The look in my eyes said more than many words. The caresses I had so deeply desired were a sign of love, but they quickly became empty and we felt the need to find words ever stronger and gestures ever more daring, to say the same emotion. How strange it is, and how clumsy you feel, when you realize that an excess of expression stifles love!

This is significant because it helps us to understand that the language of love, like other languages and other fundamental experiences, is infinitely variable. It requires all the senses and all the expressive registers, even just to approach from afar that which we would like to express. It helps us to intuit that every communication that does not include the physical presence of people, but is presented only with words, images, and sounds mediated through a machine, loses the greater part of its effectiveness, even with the addition of smilies. A word written in a text message does not have the individuality of a word written by hand, which betrays the haste or the care, as well as the personality, of the person writing. The language of love, like the language of religion, needs personal, bodily communication.

We can trust a person, not a message. We can feel a leaping in the heart for someone who is here now with us. We can see his face, evaluate the sincerity of his smile, the purity of his gaze. We can shake his hand and measure his conviction, and his human warmth. In my body I experience the beauty of relationships, of which the physical limits are not a mortal shell, but a permeable boundary that permits communion. Precisely because my hand is not the same as that of the person who is shaking it, it is beautiful that our two hands be united. If there were no boundary, nor could there be the surprise and gratitude that we experience for the nearness of another.

In the flesh there is less confusion. First of all because there is a certain sense of modesty in front of a physical presence, which helps to not rush, to not pretend the fusion of our souls on the first date. And in the meantime, thanks to the continual corporeal messages which arrive through gestures, tone of voice, facial expressions, pauses, and so forth, we get an idea of the other person without having to bring everything out into the forced clarity and typical impoverishment of direct discourse. Tip-toeing around certain themes is not necessarily a lack of love for the truth. It can very well express respect for the freedom and subtlety of certain truths. Some themes are like the cyclamens which can only live under the shadows of the trees in forest. Direct light kills them.

This brings us to ask a surprising question: could it be the case that the very limits imposed by physical reality have a positive meaning? Could it be that the desire to extend those limits, conquering space and time with ever more powerful means of travel and communication, is not always a useful desire?

Limits and the Infinite

As a young seminarian, I once spent a summer together with a hospital chaplain, Fr Vincent. I accompanied him while he visited the sick. One hot July morning, we heard screaming in the

hospital hallway. The voice was coming from an isolation room where a woman named Rachel was dying of cancer. The nurses couldn't do anything to control her pain. On a busy floor with many other patients to care for, they stayed away from the screaming. They were very generous nurses, willing to do anything they could to help, but when there was nothing left to do, they didn't feel comfortable staying with that woman.

Fr Vincent followed the sound. He entered and closed the door. Then he got on his knees and started screaming with her. She screamed, "Oh God!" and he screamed, "Oh God, help her! *Help her!*" He held her hand. At least that way she knew that someone was praying with her. We were there for a long time. At a certain point she changed from "Why, oh why, God? Oh, stop, *stop*!" into "I offer, I offer, I offer it!" In the last moments of her life, despair became hope.

When I see paintings or icons which portray Christ's descent into hell, I think of that moment. Fr Vincent's hand was like Christ's hand, reaching into the dark pit of despair and blasphemy to bring light and hope. In fact, it is not too much to say that his hand *was* Christ's hand bringing about Rachel's salvation. This is the striking reality of Christ's singular love for each person, which he wishes to express through his Body, the Church.

That moment illuminated for me one of the reasons Jesus was willing to entrust his entire Church to the fragile, "inefficient" one-to-one communication he inaugurated with his disciples: nothing else works. No long-distance care would have been sufficient for Rachel. The only possible response to her need, after every medicine had been tried, every palliative care given, was the hand and the voice of a human person in the same room with her. And that was the vehicle for her salvation, for her to learn to believe that God does not abandon us, and to trust that even her suffering itself could find meaning in his Cross.

This is not to say that all the efforts of the doctors and nurses were useless, far from it. They absolutely were useful, just secondary. What was fundamental was the human contact that could only come about in a one-to-one encounter. There was no way to multiply Fr Vincent's effectiveness through advances in communication technology. The only thing good enough for Rachel that July morning was his hand in hers.

This story helps us to see that the question we began with, "how can the Church use new technologies to further her mission?" must be asked as a secondary question. The Church must "sift everything," retaining what is good (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:21), but she must never forget that she had her beginnings in the singular, specific, personal love of Jesus for his disciples. No technical progress can ever make that kind of relationship go out of date.

The same truth is visible in many other areas of Christian life. A married couple must accept many limits in their life together – the limits caused by the personalities of the two spouses, by their social situation, by their children, by illnesses or accidents, and so forth. Yet it is precisely within those limitations that the couple may experience the fulfillment and beauty of their vocation. The alternatives to faithfulness do not lead to happiness. A missionary priest may be rightly full of the desire to carry God's Kingdom to all men and women – but if he does not care for *one* community, his own flock, he will end up dispersed in activity and bear little fruit.

The Church exists because people are wounded. Her goal is not just to proclaim the Good News efficiently, and then move on to do something else, but physically to be the Body of Christ. All of Christian life rests within the experience of the sacraments, the liturgy, the communion of the Church, and the mystery of God's time. Wounds take time to heal, and often a doctor cannot speed up their healing. He must be willing to wait, to consider each person as completely unique, completely worthy of his entire attention. He must not rush from patient to patient, in an attempt to care for greater numbers, to the detriment of the quality of the care

itself. In his just desire to do more good, he must not end up considering his patients simply as problems and not as people.

In a similar way, a missionary must attend to the other, waiting for him to open himself to Christ, and be willing to wait as long as necessary. That puts a rather low limit on the number of people he can care for adequately, but only in accepting this limit is his work truly fruitful. I believe that this is what Christ showed us in his own pedagogical approach, which focused much of its attention on a very small group of men.

It seems reasonable to doubt that new technologies will fundamentally revolutionize human life as a whole and, with it, the new evangelization. Jesus Christ, who "reveals man to himself,"[11] is not an intermediate stage in evolution. He represents the fullness of humanity, the height to which we can aspire through his grace, not a stepping-stone on our way to becoming cyborgs. We should not think, therefore, that technological developments have already brought about, or will bring about in the future, a fundamental change in the structure of the human person.

As I tried to show with the story about the chaplain, what is truly essential often cannot be given and received except in person. And that outstretched hand, Christ present revealing his personal, singular love for me and for you, is the very content of the new evangelization.

In conclusion, we must be careful that our question about how to use new technologies does not supplant the more important question: what are we trying to use them to do?

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[1] Extracted from Fr Jonah Lynch FSCB and Michelle K. Borras, *Technology and the New Evangelization: Criteria for Discernment* (Catholic Information Service, 2012). The original essays are available online at www.kofc.org/un/en/resources/cis/cis419.pdf.

[2] Benedict XVI, Message for the 43rd World Communications Day, May 24, 2009. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/mes...

[3] N. Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (Penguin Books, 1985), p. 7.

[4] Among many others, Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows* (Norton, 2010); Norman Doidge, *The Brain that Changes Itself* (Penguin, 2007); Stanislas Dehaene,*Reading in the Brain* (Penguin, 2009); Maryanne Wolf, *Proust and the Squid* (Harper, 2007).

[5] These exciting discoveries have been recounted in passionate detail by Norman Doidge in his *The Brain that Changes Itself*. The writer, a psychiatrist and researcher at Columbia University in New York, reconstructs the history of the fundamental discoveries in neuroscience by presenting various "case studies" of his personal knowledge. Five years earlier, Jeffrey Schwartz and Sharon Begley told the same story in more technical language in *The Mind and the Brain* (HarperCollins, 2002).

[6] Described in Schwartz and Begley, *The Mind and the Brain*, p. 217.

[7] I dedicate more space to developing these themes in *The Scent of Lemons* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 2012).

[8] Benedict XVI, Message for the 45th World Communications Day, June 5, 2011.

[9] Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, n. 113.

[10] In *Facebook and Philosophy*, ed D.E. Wittkower (Carus Publishing Company, 2010), p. 168.

[11] Cf. Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22.