

DIFITAL AGE CHALLENGES AND CONSECRATED LIFE

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This article analyzes the challenges that the new digital age presents to human beings and, more specifically, to Consecrated Life. We are already in a new culture, a new way of being and thinking. Giving us mental representations ready to use, the new Media of Social Communication (*MSC*) are shaping our perception of reality and our symbolic understanding of the world¹. For many people the *MSC* are “the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration”², in fact “reality, for many, is what the media recognize as real”³. So we can rightly say that, in social communication, the destiny of man is at stake.

The present study, necessarily short, is focused on the challenges but its underlying vision of the digital Age is clearly positive. In fact, the Church sees the *MSC* as “gifts of God”⁴ and “would feel guilty

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¹ Cfr. H. RHEINGOLD, *La realtà virtuale. I mondi artificiali generati dal computer e il loro potere di trasformare la società*, Baskerville, Bologna 1993, 521-522; F. SCHIRRMACHER, *La libertà ritrovata. Come (continuare a) pensare nell'era digitale*, Codice, Torino 2010.

² JOHN PAUL II, «Encyclical letter *Redemptoris misio*», 7-12-1990, [=RM], n. 37, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, [=AAS], 83 (1991) 249-340.

³ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS [=PCSC], «Pastoral instruction *Aetatis Novae*», [=AN], 22-02-1992, n. 4, in *AAS*, 84 (1992) 447-468; Cfr. CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA, *Educare alla vita buona del Vangelo*, 28-10-2010, n. 51, Elle Di Ci, Leumann 2011.

⁴ PCSC, «Pastoral instruction *Communio et Progressio*», 23-05-1971, n. 2, in *AAS* 63 (1971) 593-656.

before the Lord if she did not utilize them”⁵. The new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are already unavoidably embedded in our daily life. Any attempt to ignore them would be unrealistic and unreasonable. Besides, it is practically impossible to prevent their use, because of their ubiquity and portability. Thus the real dilemma does not consist in deciding whether to use them or not, but rather in using them responsibly, so that they may become a factor of humanization. It is therefore necessary for consecrated brothers and sisters to discern how to inhabit the new digital environment with the most coherent style to their religious life and mission.

After having stated the need for wisely inhabiting the new digital environment, the article analyzes some of its challenges and offers suggestions on how the consecrated can address them. It emphasizes the importance of formation and the need for cultivating a mature and receptive interiority. In the last part, the study focuses on how the consecrated can evangelize and relate to others in the digital space, in order to effectively account for their hope⁶.

1. Space to inhabit

The digital space has already been accepted by about three billion people (40% of the world population)⁷ as an appropriate environment to express the human need of communicating to create community. This space, anthropologically relevant, is “an atmosphere, an environment in which we are immersed, that surrounds us and penetrates us from every side”⁸. Instead of putting barriers, we must discern the best way of inhabiting it, discerning the ideals and values that are at stake.

⁵ PAUL VI, «Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*», [=EN], 8-12-1975, n. 45, in *AAS* 58 (1976) 5-76.

⁶ Cfr. 1Pt 3:15.

⁷ Cfr. Internet: <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>, last visit: 1-03-2015.

⁸ C.M. MARTINI, «Pastoral letter *Il lembo del mantello: per un incontro tra Chiesa e mass media*», Centro Ambrosiano, Milano 1991, 12. [My translation].

SUMMARIES

In the Year of Consecrated Life (2015), this article analyzes the challenges which the new digital age presents to human beings and, more specifically, to the consecrated life. The new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are already unavoidably embedded in our daily life. "Our perception of self, others and the world are influenced by them". It is therefore necessary for consecrated brothers and sisters to inhabit the new digital environment with the style that best fits to their religious life and mission.

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En el Año de la Vida Consagrada (2015), este artículo analiza los desafíos que la nueva cultura digital presenta al desarrollo del ser humano y, más específicamente, a los consagrados. Las nuevas tecnologías de la comunicación forman ya parte ineludible de nuestra vida, y de ellas depende "la percepción de nosotros mismos, de los otros y del mundo". Por tanto, los consagrados tienen que aprender a habitar este nuevo ambiente cultural con el estilo que les caracteriza, para dar razón de su esperanza.

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Nell'Anno della Vita Consacrata (2015), questo articolo studia le sfide che l'era digitale presenta allo sviluppo dell'essere umano e più concretamente ai consacrati. Le nuove tecnologie della comunicazione formano già parte ineludibile della nostra vita e "dall'influsso che esercitano dipende la percezione di noi stessi, degli altri e del mondo". Bisogna quindi che i consacrati imparino ad abitare questo nuovo ambiente con lo stile loro proprio per rendere ragione della loro Speranza.