Digital natives and Digital immigrants

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There is a generational gap between people born into the new digital culture (*digital natives*) and older generations (*digital*

immigrants). An internal document of the Redemptorist Congregation states that their young candidates "have a different kind of experience, another way of conceiving the world, of reflecting, thinking, and working; they use new technologies and new languages. This tension, in many cases, creates two isolated groups"[1].

Digital natives have acquired a new way of expressing themselves and of perceiving reality. When they arrive at consecrated life, they are already accustomed to the use of new technologies and to the communicative dynamics that they generate. The religious community must make an effort to understand how these young people relate to others and face real life.

At their side, digital immigrants are trying to learn the new language, but they will "always retain, to some degree, their 'accent,' that is, their foot in the past" since they did not learn it in childhood. "They speak an outdated language"[2]. In addition, they often have a dualistic view of the online/offline. For them, online communication is virtual, unreal, ephemeral, fallacious. Therefore, it should be avoided as much as possible, in order to facilitate authentic religious life. Here too, an effort is needed to welcome the new digital culture.

The weakening of the principle of authority

According to M. Benasayag and G. Schmit, one of the great educational challenges for Digital immigrants (parents, educators, and teachers) is the weakening of the principle of authority. Young people forget "why" they have to obey, and their educator tries to avoid any conflict. Being aware of having lost the reverential esteem of digital natives, the educator disregards them, leaving them "at their leisure," or trying to convince them using seduction techniques taken from the commercial sphere.

When this strategy does not work, he/she can react badly, falling into authoritarianism and generating serious conflicts. For their part, young people fill the authority vacuum by resorting to media substitutes that push them to take care of their appearance rather than develop their own personality.

Understanding and welcoming digital natives

Digital immigrants must try to understand and welcome digital natives, who often manifest a diverse way of seeing themselves and facing life. According to some authors, the morality of self-denial has been replaced by the morality of self-fulfillment. While the former promoted social virtues and universal values – sincerity, loyalty, sacrifice, responsibility, fidelity to the social group – the new morality focuses on psychological values. Instead of self-control and discipline to subdue one's own

impulses, the new morality assumes that happiness depends on self-realization and on being faithful to oneself.

In this new context, the starting point for parents, educators, and formators must be this desire for self-realization that is rooted in young people. The formator must try to channel it adequately, so that young people may feel moved to make an active and generous contribution in the social environment in which they live: family, education center, society. Rather than insisting on what they should or should not do, the educator shall help them to see the horizon towards which they must move.

Conclusion

Young people may know more about the technical dimensions of communication, but they need models of identification; i.e., people who can help them with their experience and their vision of life. Therefore, it is urgent that parents and educators resume their role of formation and accompaniment, helping digital natives to find meaning and direction amidst the many stimuli and claims that the network-society offers them.

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[1] Redemptorist General Curia, *Revitalizar nuestra vida apostólica: El servicio del liderazgo al estilo de Jesucristo*, promanuscript, Rome 2019, n. 9. Most of these paragraphs are taken from our book: Carbajo-Núñez M., *Everything is Connected. Integral ecology and communication in the Digital Age*, TAU Publishing, Phoenix (AZ) 2021.

[2] Prensky M., «Digital Natives, Digital immigrants,» in *On the Horizon* 9/5 (2001) 1-6. This author was the first to propose the distinction between digital natives and digital immigrants.

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