

“Computers aren’t the thing. They’re the thing that gets us to the thing.”

## Catholicism in the Age of @Pontifex

Good afternoon and thank you to everyone for being here today. I would like to specifically express my thanks to Fr. Antonio Spadaro, whose friendship I have come to cherish in the last 2 years and whose generosity was instrumental in my participation in this gathering. The theme of this year’s conference is one in which I have a particular interest. As a computer science and theology teacher, and independent Apple Developer, I find myself continuously working in two very different, but yet, ultimately, related disciplines. In what follows, I’d like to share a few reflections on digital technology as sign, the consequences of digital technology on the modern Church, and what it means to be “in the world, but not of it” in such a context.

“Computers aren’t the thing. They’re the thing that gets us to the thing.”<sup>1</sup>

The idea of this paper comes from this scene from AMC’s hit series “Halt and Catch Fire”. The series’ protagonist, Joe McMillan is a Steve Jobs-type, passionate entrepreneur who, in a moment of insight, inspires his protégé, Gordon Clark, to work on a revolutionary personal computer. I believe Joe’s line from this scene sums up the points I’d like to develop in this paper.

### I. Digital Technology as Sign

In 1965, the Council fathers at Vatican II reminded the Church of its responsibility to “understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics” in order to communicate the Gospel, intelligibly.<sup>2</sup> One of those dramatic characteristics was later identified by the Council as technology.

Today’s spiritual agitation and the changing conditions of life are part of a broader and deeper revolution. As a result of the latter, intellectual formation is ever increasingly based on the mathematical and natural sciences and on those dealing with man himself, while in the practical order the technology which stems from these sciences takes on mounting importance. This scientific spirit has a new kind of impact on the cultural sphere and on modes of thought. Technology is now transforming the face of the earth...<sup>3</sup>

Technology is the application of problem-solving skills to the material world. It is what enabled our ancestors to evolve and become the dominant species on this planet. Therefore, it is an essential characteristic of being human. Our species would not exist as we are without it.

#### I.A The Trending Techno-Trinity: Three Revolutions, One Device

Since Vatican II, modern Popes have identified the increasing phenomenon of how specifically digital technology is “bringing about fundamental shifts in patterns of communication and human relationships.”<sup>4</sup> In my estimation, these shifts have been occasioned by three primary catalysts; the World Wide Web, the iPhone and similar mobile computers, and social media. Together, these factors have fundamentally changed traditional protocols of personal daily life. All three of these revolutions have changed the way that people communicate, conduct business, learn,

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<sup>1</sup> “Halt and Catch Fire,” Episode 1: “I/O” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQLbi4VXYcA>

<sup>2</sup> “...the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics.” -*Gaudium et Spes*, 4

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, 5

<sup>4</sup> Benedict XVI, Message for 43rd World Communications Day, 2009

and participate in society, and all three of them converge in the modern smartphone<sup>5</sup>: we live through them, with them<sup>6</sup>, and in them.<sup>7</sup>

Mark Movsesian, writing last month in *First Things*, cites *The Education of Henry Adams*, in which Adams claimed that the “overwhelming transcendent power” of Christianity as seen in Medieval images of the Virgin had been replaced by technology, as seen in an electrical engine called the “Dynamo”, displayed at the Paris Exhibition in 1900. Movsesian argues that Adams’ example of the electric engine should be replaced with the smartphone as the modern rival of society-ordering power.

Our culture is being shaped, not by massive industrial machines, but by a portable device so small you can put it in your pocket and take it with you everywhere. The Virgin’s contemporary competition is not the dynamo. It’s the Smartphone....the Smartphone suggests infinity: infinite connectedness and infinite possibility. There is always another email or text, another person whose status we can check, another subject we can look up. (Who won the World Series in 1964? What does *Khaleesi* mean?) There is always another app to download, another site to check for updates, another game to play. The Smartphone promises that there is always something new and interesting out there in virtual space—more interesting, in fact, than the mundane interactions we have in real space. That’s why it’s not uncommon to see groups of people in public places, in which each person is looking at his or her Smartphone and ignoring everyone else, a phenomenon people have taken to calling “being alone, together.” The Smartphone represents the limitless potential for escape. No wonder it seems, in its way, a kind of drug.<sup>8</sup>

### I.B “We’re All Cyborgs Now”

The social sciences are confirming this paradigm shift as well. Amber Case, anthropologist and author of *Designing Calm Technology*, claims that digital technologies are transforming the user experience of being human. In a TED talk in 2011 entitled, “We Are All Cyborgs Now”, she says that the smartphone has made us virtual cyborgs.

I would like to tell you all that you are all actually cyborgs, but not the cyborgs that you think. You’re not RoboCop, and you’re not Terminator, but you’re cyborgs every time you look at a computer screen or use one of your cell phone devices. So what’s a good definition for cyborg? Well, traditional definition is “an organism to which exogenous components have been added for the purpose of adapting to new environments.”...in the beginning -- for thousands and thousands of years, everything has been a physical modification of self. It has helped us to extend our physical selves, go faster, hit things harder, and there’s been a limit on that. But now what we’re looking at is not an extension of the physical self, but an extension of the mental self, and because of that, we’re able to travel faster, communicate differently.<sup>9</sup>

The result is what Lee Rainie and sociologist Barry Wellman, authors of *Networked: The New Social Operating System*, call “networked individualism”, and it is the new normal for most millennials.

<sup>5</sup> Interestingly enough, when Steve Jobs unveiled the iPhone in 2007, he famously claimed Apple was introducing three devices: a touchscreen iPod, a mobile phone, and an Internet communicator, before asking “Are you getting it? These are not three separate devices; this is one device.”

<sup>6</sup> According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, as of January 2014, 83% of all 18-29 year olds owned a smartphone, and 74% of all 30-49 year olds owned a smartphone (note: the “millennial” cut off would be age 34). Based on older figures from 2012, 37% of all 12-17 year olds owned a smartphone, 74% of teenagers have accessed the internet through a smartphone or other mobile device, and 81% of online teenagers use social media of some kind. Of the 95% of the teenagers who are online, 74% of them access the Internet through a mobile device of some type, and 25% of them do so mostly on a smartphone.

<http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheets/mobile-technology-fact-sheet/>

<sup>7</sup> These findings by Pew Research have also been independently confirmed by Cisco Inc. The network systems giant has published the Connected World Technology Report. It surveyed 100 participants from 18 countries between the ages of 18 and 30. Some of the highlights from the survey are: 60% “compulsively” check their smartphones for various updates during the day (social media, texts, emails, etc). 42% claimed that they would feel “anxious” as if a part of them was “missing” without their smartphones (and 62% of those claimed they wished they felt differently). 66% claimed to spend equal or more time with online friends than in person. 90% claim that checking their smartphones was an “important” part of their weekday morning routine.

<http://www.cisco.com/c/dam/en/us/solutions/enterprise/connected-world-technology-report/2012-CCWTR-Chapter1-Global-Results.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/06/the-smartphone-and-the-virgin>

<sup>9</sup> Amber Case, TED Talk, “We’re All Cyborgs Now”, 2011,

[http://www.ted.com/talks/amber\\_case\\_we\\_are\\_all\\_cyborgs\\_now/transcript?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/amber_case_we_are_all_cyborgs_now/transcript?language=en)

These changes in the network operating system have affected individual's behavior and attitudes. Among other things, people now expect to find information on almost every subject quickly. They expect that they are more findable and reachable at many more times and places than in the past—and they assume others are equally as likely to be accessible. They change the way they use their time and allocate their attention. They pack more information and communications exchanges into their days and they are interruptible in their activities more often. Their sense of place, distance, and presence with others is transformed as they participate in more encounters that feature “absent presence” or “present absence.” Their sense of self transforms from a hard unitary shell to a reconfigurable amoeba with situationally changing pseudopods. Their sense of personal efficacy grows as they practice the art of seeking and gaining social, emotional, and economic support using new technologies. Those activities also highlight the extra effort that networking requires.<sup>10</sup>

By any metric, digital technology in general, and the smartphone in particular, has revolutionized the way we think, interact, and live.

## II. The Impact of Digital Technology on the Modern Church

These societal paradigm shifts occasioned by digital technology have had, are having, and will have massive implications for the life of the Church. Fr. Spadaro claims, in his book, *Cybertheology*, that these technologies have massive implications for theology in particular:

The recent digital technologies are no longer tools or devices that exist totally apart from our bodies and minds. The Internet is not an instrument; it is an ambiance that surrounds us. The handheld devices that permit us to be connected at all times are becoming ever lighter and smaller, making life's digital dimensions almost transparent...Not surprisingly, a growing number of studies looks at the ways in which the Internet is changing our everyday lives and, more generally, our relationships with the world and with the people who are close to us. However, if the Internet is changing our ways of living and thinking, does it not also change (and thus is already changing) our way of thinking about and living the faith?<sup>11</sup>

Fr. Spadaro later goes on to identify “cybertheology” as “the intelligence of the faith in the era of the Internet, that is, reflection on the think ability of the faith in the light of the Web's logic.”<sup>12</sup> Digital technology is changing the Church because digital technology is changing the user experience of being human.

### II.A The iHeart Instinct

In general terms, digital (“cyborg”) technologies amplify and augment the most fundamental of human instincts; the desire to transcend ourselves and establish bonds of communion with others. Modern culture is driven by this instinct to project ones “I” through technology<sup>13</sup>. I call this phenomenon the “iHeart Instinct.” This idea is the digital corollary to Fr. Luigi Giussani's concept of the “Religious Sense” or “Heart” in biblical terms. I believe the iHeart Instinct is the first of three major consequences of digital media for the Church and the one which drives the other two.

How does the iHeart Instinct affect the modern Church? I believe there are many ways, but I'll mention just a few that stand out. Texting is probably the most common user activity on a smartphone. According to one estimate, over 350 billion text messages are sent globally via wireless carriers each month.<sup>14</sup> That's a lot of text. If each text message contained only a single character, that would be the equivalent of typing 87,500 complete manuscripts of the entire bible - each month.

The “I” as expressed through text messages directly impacts the essential ecclesial practice of hermeneutics. Please allow me to share a classroom example to illustrate this point: on the first day of school at Seton Hall Prep, every year for the past 3 years, I have started classes with an exercise involving text messaging: I ask the students to compile a list of commonly used abbreviations they use in their texts as well as examples of meaningful syntax.

<sup>10</sup> Lee Raine & Barry Wellman, *Networked: The New Social Operating System*, excerpt, <http://networked.pewinternet.org/2012/10/18/how-to-thrive-in-a-networked-world-book-chapter-excerpt/>

<sup>11</sup> Antonio Spadaro, S.J., *Cybertheology: Thinking Christianity in the Age of the Internet*, vii.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, 16.

<sup>13</sup> As Amber Case further explained in her TED talk, technology allows us to carry “techno-social wormholes” around in our pockets, enabling us to project ourselves instantly through space and time.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.grabstats.com/statmain.aspx?StatID=402>

Then I ask them to explain their meaning and significance. While they are somewhat reluctant to discuss some of their most closely guarded text codes with an adult (especially those that involve parents), they are nonetheless enthusiastic to have a discussion with a teacher about the socio-technical realities of their everyday lives. Here are the results<sup>15</sup>:

Text messages may be interpreted as having a negative intent if:	Text messages may be interpreted as having a positive intent if:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. a one-word answer is followed by a -period (e.g. "fine.")</li> <li>2. a text is written in ALL CAPS (this is not as bad as #1 because the former indicates passive aggressiveness)</li> <li>3. a text contains "K" instead of "Ok" (esp. if combined with #1)</li> <li>4. a text is paragraph length (this may indicate excessive, unsolicited information) – but there are various "species" of this (context dependent)</li> <li>5. the ellipses ("...") typing indicators are followed by nothing or by #1</li> <li>6. if texting patterns change (ex: from "nah" to "no.")</li> <li>7. if the text contains "whatever" and/or "I guess" (context dependent)</li> <li>8. there are excessive (more than 3) "y"s in "hey" (context dependent)</li> <li>9. consistently, there are multiple texts sent before a response is given</li> <li>10. the text contains the statement "We need to talk."</li> <li>11. "read receipts" are enabled and there is a delayed response of over 15 min (context dependent)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. a girl texts first</li> <li>2. the word "hey" only contains at most two additional "y"s</li> <li>3. the text contains emojis (context dependent)</li> <li>4. the text contains questions to keep the conversation going</li> <li>5. the text contains a "good morning" ("good night" can be interpreted negatively as a desire to \ end a conversation)</li> </ol>

Because of their habit of analyzing the syntax, morphology, and punctuation of text messages, young people today have had an unconscious introduction to and training in some of the most basic elements of exegetical research. As a result, students at Catholic schools all over the world have an unprecedented opportunity to use students' daily use of texting technology as a starting point for a larger conversation about the the importance and meaning of theological texts. Just imagine theology students giving the same degree of attention to the biblical text as they evidence in their analysis of daily text messages.

Relatedly, emojis have become a new symbolic way to communicate text messages. They are a digital form of hieroglyphics, the art of communicating through symbols. They are not unlike what stained-glass windows were to Medieval believers. Just earlier this year, the Emoji Bible was released on the iBook Store. And the Bible Emoji Translator website<sup>16</sup> will translate short verses into emoji. In an interview with the NYTimes, the author claimed that

...some parents have even written in to say the more slang-filled, visual version of the Good Book has helped their children read it, especially those with learning disabilities<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> <https://jonathanlace.wordpress.com/2014/06/01/the-hermeneutics-of-texting/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.bibleemoji.com>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/03/business/media/the-word-of-god-now-available-in-emoji.html>

It does not take too much imagination to see the new opportunities that exist for the Church to discuss the role of symbols in communication and explore how this form of might be of service to those who struggle with traditional forms of text-based learning. Think of it as “therapeutic iconography.”

Humans use digital technology to express themselves most clearly in social media. These networks create digital spaces that allow users to engage with their friends and others on a variety of topics. People share their words, emojis, ideas, opinions, photos, and videos on various sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. Pope Francis expresses his “I” via tweets with words of encouragement, teaching, and yes, sometimes prophetic rebuke to sinful acts and structures in the world. Pope Francis’ use of Twitter directly affects the ecclesial practice of the mutual encouragement as well as the discernment of various levels of teaching authority in the Church. The Pope is providing a point of departure for the Church to learn what it means to witness to the gospel on the new “digital continent”<sup>18</sup>.

## II.B Ambient Intimacy

The “I” expressed through social media leads directly to a related consequence of digital technology; Ambient Intimacy (also called “Ambient Awareness”). This term was first created by Leisa Reichelt, Head of Service Design at the Australian Digital Transformation Office, in 2007 to describe the ability “to keep in touch with people with a level of regularity and intimacy that you wouldn’t usually have access to, because time and space conspire to make it impossible.”<sup>19</sup> How does Ambient Intimacy affect the modern Church?

Like many of you, I’m sure, my first interactions with colleagues have been through social media. I first connected with Dr. Daniella Zsupan-Jerome through a #theochat on Twitter. Now that I follow her, I have gained some awareness of what she does throughout the day and what she thinks about various issues or trending news. And now, as Providence would have it, I have the opportunity to encounter her in person. There is an exhortation in the *Didaché* that reads “Seek out daily the faces of the saints, that you may rest in their words.” Ambient Intimacy provides an opportunity for connections to become encounters.<sup>20</sup>

## II.C Community 2.0

The collective properties of millions of users seeking to digitally transcend their physical selves brings about a new form of community, one which unites individual and collective expression; I’ll call it “Community 2.0.” It’s not just that we can say “Did you see what Donald Trump tweeted today?” but we can also say “Donald Trump tweeted and Twitter (collectively) responded.” People are able to communicate over vast distances in an instant and share their concerns, ideas, and opinions with other like-minded users. In doing so, they create virtual communities which often offer support that transcend local deficiencies. And I would point out that there is a biblical precedent for building community over social media: the letters of St. Paul are a great example of how community life can be sustained virtually through media.

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<sup>18</sup> “In the early life of the Church, the great Apostles and their disciples brought the Good News of Jesus to the Greek and Roman world. Just as, at that time, a fruitful evangelization required that careful attention be given to understanding the culture and customs of those pagan peoples so that the truth of the gospel would touch their hearts and minds, so also today, the proclamation of Christ in the world of new technologies requires a profound knowledge of this world if the technologies are to serve our mission adequately. It falls, in particular, to young people, who have an almost spontaneous affinity for the new means of communication, to take on the responsibility for the evangelization of this ‘digital continent’.” - Benedict XVI, “New Technologies, New Relationships”, Message for the 43rd World Communications Day, 2009

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.disambiguity.com/ambient-intimacy/> Since then, social scientists have formally described Ambient Intimacy/Awareness as “awareness of social others, arising from the frequent reception of fragmented personal information, such as status updates and various digital footprints, while browsing social media. ‘Ambient’ emphasizes the idea that the awareness develops peripherally, not through deliberately attending to information, but rather as an artifact of social media activity. Central to this definition is that browsing social media is sufficient for awareness to develop, even in the absence of directed communication.” <sup>19</sup> “Computers in Human Behavior”, 60 (2016) 147-154

<sup>20</sup> “It is not enough to be passersby on the digital highways, simply ‘connected’; connections need to grow into true encounters. We cannot live apart, closed in on ourselves. We need to love and to be loved. We need tenderness...The digital world can be an environment rich in humanity; a network not of wires but of people. The impartiality of media is merely an appearance; only those who go out of themselves in their communication can become a true point of reference for others. Personal engagement is the basis of the trustworthiness of a communicator. Christian witness, thanks to the internet, can thereby reach the peripheries of human existence.” - Francis, “Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter”, Message for the 48th World Communications Day, 2014

How does this new experience of digital community affect the modern Church? Community 2.0 is built on individual expression. This is essential. If that option were absent, social networks would immediately lose their value. Imagine a social network in which the only options to respond were pre-selected.

When we consider the modern experience of the Mass in light of this fact, we see that the lack of any liturgical space for individual expression and contribution in the Eucharistic celebration contrasts with the default expectations for digital community life.

In 1 Cor. 14:26, St. Paul revealed that the early Christians had the opportunity to share with one another in order to help the entire congregation as part of the Sunday liturgy.

So what is to be done, brothers? When you assemble, one has a psalm, another an instruction, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Everything should be done for building up.

Early Christians held both vertical and horizontal dimensions of worship in unity in ways that transcended exclusively communal and static responses. The current implementation of the Mass has no such dimension. The result is a kind of corporate monophysitism, and that may be a significant reason why the Church isn't "scaling" with younger people. Community 2.0 has properties more analogous to the Christological concept of the *communicatio idiomatum*; in our "somatic" identity as the body of Christ, both the individual and collective natures are held in unity without one being absorbed by the other.

In his 2013 talk in the Archdiocese of Boston, Bishop Paul Tighe echoed this realization that in some ways the regular experience of Church isn't optimized for modern understandings of participation in community.

This cultural change in how we think of what it means to participate has huge implications for what it means for the Church to be a community...We also need to learn a new language for the digital continent. Language isn't just about words. Language is primarily about the way we have our conversations. The biggest challenge we face, particularly for my generation in the Church, is that we grew up with the idea of the pulpit – I'm here, I talk, you listen. The microphone let us reach further. The radio took us even further. The TV lets you see us as well as hear us. But we were at the center and you were out there consuming. New media is different. I speak, I talk, I reflect, I say something. If you like it, or disagree enough with it to comment on it, or you have something to add to it, you might share it and that's how it gets out there. For us, there's a whole learning about how we communicate. It's interactive and it's participative...The social media landscape is peer to peer, it's free and it's open...That's not the immediate description of the church at times<sup>21</sup>

In keeping with Vatican II's characterization of the Church as being in constant need of "continual reformation"<sup>22</sup> in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis observed that there are aspects of Church life that actually inhibit evangelization.<sup>23</sup> I believe that the lack of any liturgical space for individual sharing in the ordinary<sup>24</sup> Latin rite is one such unintended hinderance. Perhaps a future reform of the liturgy will realize that individual expression is the foundation of "fully conscious, and active participation" and that the characteristic "both/and" logic of Catholicism is relevant to this question.

### III. Computers Aren't The Thing: In The World, But Not Of It

"Computers aren't the thing; they're the thing that gets us to the thing." The "thing" is our context is the Mystery we call "God". And this quote is my point of departure on the larger question of what it means for Christians to be

<sup>21</sup> Bishop Paul Tighe, Catholic New Media Conference, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROvW6Y1KOWg>

<sup>22</sup> *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 6

<sup>23</sup> "There are ecclesial structures which can hamper efforts at evangelization, yet even good structures are only helpful when there is a life constantly driving, sustaining and assessing them...I dream of a 'missionary option', that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation...Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: 'We have always done it this way'. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities." *Evangelii Gaudium*, 27, 33.

<sup>24</sup> Some ecclesial lay movements, such as the Neocatechumenal Way, have received permission to include "echoes" into their liturgies which offer structured time for personal sharing of weekly faith experiences. This kind of intimate sharing is also a key element of recovery groups like Alcoholics Anonymous. Such an opportunity for personal interaction on an individual level is no doubt a factor in the popularity of both.

“in the world, but not of it”. This issue of the relationship of the Church to secular culture has a long tradition of reflection in the Catholic tradition.

### III.A What has Cupertino to do with Jerusalem?

Before his own defection from the Church, writing in the year A.D. 200, Tertullian of Carthage had famously addressed the relationship of faith to its surrounding culture by asking “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”<sup>25</sup> A more generous response was offered by Origen of Alexandria, writing to his student Gregory Thaumaturgus around the year A.D. 239, who encouraged him to adopt the elements of Greek philosophy that were helpful for studying Christianity, much like the Israelites used the gold from Egypt to build the Tabernacle.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps today, given the competition between the Virgin and the Smartphone, Tertullian would be asking “What has Cupertino to do with Jerusalem?” And perhaps Origen would make the same point in response by encouraging believers to use the conceptual scaffolding of digital technology to aid the life of faith.

In this context, the world-renowned mathematician and programmer, Donald Knuth, once claimed that the study and practice of computer science could benefit theology.

I think people who write programs do have at least a glimmer of extra insight into the nature of God...because creating a program often means that you have to create a small universe.<sup>27</sup>

But apart from writing code and building apps, there are countless other ways tech can assist faith. One very simple way is by providing “open-source” contexts in which the Word can be spoken. In the Gospels, Jesus did this frequently; he used knowledge derived from the technology of his day to illustrate the Kingdom of God. “The Kingdom of God is like a net thrown into the sea...”, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom...”, “No one after lighting a lamp puts it under a basket...”, “Everyone who hears these words of mine is like a wise man who built his house on the rock...”, “The Kingdom of heaven is like yeast mixed with flour...”, etc. These are all examples of 1st century technology. 21st century examples would go a long way to connect with people through a major (if not the primary) social/communication reality of their everyday lives.

The Church is called to continuously sift and performatively discipline digital technology in order to reveal its true nature and direct it to its ultimate *telos*; authentic human development by pursuit of the Transcendent.

### III.B Theologica

This idea was the inspiration for an iPhone app that my students could use in class to help them learn theology. Since smartphones are ubiquitous, pocket-sized computers, students would be able to use this application in class and at home to help them learn vocabulary, study for quizzes, and do research for their exegetical papers. After a lot of help from veteran developers, late nights, and countless iterations of the user interface, the app started to evolve from a simple dictionary into something more robust; “Theologica”, just over a year old, now has an Overview tab that provides summaries for both the sources of theology and various areas of culture as signs of the

<sup>25</sup> “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? what between heretics and Christians? Our instruction comes from “the porch of Solomon,” who had himself taught that “the Lord should be sought in simplicity of heart.” Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition! We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after enjoying the gospel! With our faith, we desire no further belief.” - Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*, VII

<sup>26</sup> “And I would wish that you should take with you on the one hand those parts of the philosophy of the Greeks which are fit, as it were, to serve as general or preparatory studies for Christianity, and on the other hand so much of Geometry and Astronomy as may be helpful for the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. The children of the philosophers speak of geometry and music and grammar and rhetoric and astronomy as being ancillary to philosophy; and in the same way we might speak of philosophy itself as being ancillary to Christianity...It is something of this sort perhaps that is enigmatically indicated in the directions God is represented in the Book of Exodus as giving to the children of Israel. They are directed to beg from their neighbors and from those dwelling in their tents vessels of silver and of gold, and raiment; thus they are to spoil the Egyptians, and to obtain materials for making the things they are told to provide in connection with the worship of God. The Egyptians had not made a proper use of them; but the Hebrews used them, for the wisdom of God was with them, for religious purposes...I have learned by experience and can tell you that there are few who have taken of the useful things of Egypt and come out of it, and have then prepared what is required for the service of God.” - Origen of Alexandria, *Letter to Gregory*

<sup>27</sup> Donald Knuth, *Things A Computer Scientist Rarely Talks About*, 168

times, a Reference tab with a list of curated links, a categorized Dictionary with over 500 of the most commonly used theological terms, a categorized Maps tab with various pins that link to detail views of each site, and an Explorations tab that feature both keynote presentations and interviews with contemporary theologians.

I hope you have been able to understand something of how digital technology is changing the user experience of being human, some of its impact upon the Church, and some ways in which believers can witness their faith in a digital context. We live in a culture that celebrates novelty in technology for its own sake, that idolizes digital technology as “the thing” itself. It is up to us to ensure that technology is always “humanized” in light of the fundamental truths of the Faith so that our witness through it, with it, and in it is always relevant. This was the hope of the Council fathers at Vatican II:

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.<sup>28</sup>

So let us tweet differently, respond to Facebook comments differently, text differently, use apps differently, browse the internet differently, use our smartphones differently because in a Catholic worldview “Computers aren’t the thing; they’re the thing that gets us to the thing.”

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<sup>28</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 62