

Taught by the Spirit.

Reflections on Faith Formation in the Biblical and Digital Cultures.

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Faith is man's personal response to the self-communication of God. Faith involves revealing, seeing, hearing, touching, believing and obeying – a communication event/act par excellence. The act of faith requires the interior help of the Holy Spirit, who turns the heart to God, opens the eyes of mind, and brings faith to completion by His gifts. (Dei Verbum 5, 1). True faith is inspired, sustained and fulfilled - *taught* (Jn 14:26; 1Cor 2:10) - by the Holy Spirit. However, faith is generated, formed and sustained in communication (Rom 10:9).

The best strategy of faith formation is, naturally, God's own strategy of communication, enunciated in the Sacred Scripture. Within this foundational biblical matrix, Church developed and perfected ever new faith formation strategies, responding to the demands of the primary medium of each period. In the predominantly oral-aural first millennium, faith formation happened by means of immersive communication through personal witness, catechetical homilies, oral and visual stories from the Bible, and elaborate liturgical celebrations enriched with prayers, music and rituals in a highly decorated Church. In the second millennium, the spread of literacy - manuscripts and print - led to the development of *informed* faith through systematic treatises and catechism textbooks. Navigating successfully through the oral, literate and audiovisual culture, we are now in the digital culture. What is the shape of faith formation in the digital culture?

The digital revolution, made possible by new information and communication technologies, is the most far-reaching revolution in the history of humanity. The electronic revolution provides mental systems, with implication for spiritual systems as well. Faith itself is challenged and marginalized by the highly material and technically mediated culture distraught with post-humanistic (and post-Christian) itinerary. In this context, a mutual fecundation of the Christian tradition and digital culture is the eventual way of faith formation.

Faith formation in digital culture cannot limit itself to mere adaptation of new tools and techs of the digital media, but must face the challenges and embrace the opportunities. The core competence of faith formation today is, hence, "to balance the material wonders of technology, with the spiritual demands of human nature". This can be done by "bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within." This can be done by releasing the "hidden energy of the Good News" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 4), "affecting and as it were upsetting, ... mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation." (EN 18-19).

The media ecology of the digital culture and that of the world of the Bible have much in common. Revelation-faith is a multi-media, multi-sensorial engagement of God and man in the material (real) universe. For example, revelation is a digital event in the biblical tradition: “God spoke in many and varied ways ... and finally through his own son”, in a man-to-man and friend-to-friend dialogue. The migration of Christian faith from Hebrew to Hellenistic world has filtered out much of the inherent ‘*humanum*’ in favour of the flourishing of reason in a highly cerebral communication system and culture. Digital media has once again made possible to have a more engaging vision of man in cosmos, albeit virtual. Faith formation has the supreme task of effecting a creative fusion of the biblical *real* and the digital *virtual* into a spiritual sensibility, seemingly absent in the post-digital culture, in order to create a holistic vision of man.

This paper is an attempt to uncover and recover some of the core qualities of the Judeo-Christian tradition for understanding and responding creatively to the challenges and opportunities offered by digital culture to Christian faith.
