



# EFFECTIVE INTEGRATION OF NEW TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA FOR EVANGELIZATION

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**Abstract:** The essay entitled, “Effective Integration of New Technology and Social Media for Evangelization” is an attempt point out the how the integration of the new technology and social media can facilitate evangelization. This academic paper discusses the problems and perspectives of the said topic.

Key Words: Technology and Evangelization, Social Media, Integration of Technology in Evangelization

## 1. Introduction

“Go into the world and preach the Gospel to all creation.” (Mk 16:15)

Jesus commissioned his disciples to continue the mission which is entrusted to Him by God the Father and that mission is the salvation of humanity. The economy of salvation reached its zenith with the incarnation of Jesus Christ and it is the salvific intervention of God in the human history. This salvific mission is continued through the apostles in the Church. When Jesus said, “Go into the world and preach the Gospel to all creation.”, he meant that it is the duty of each baptised person to proclaim the Good News that ‘the salvation is already but not yet’ and therefore repent and believe in Jesus Christ. This initial Christo-centric end of evangelization was slowly shifted to ecclesio-centric and then to Soterio-centric. Here my point of discussion is with regard to the effective integration of new technology and social media for evangelization. Here I try to probe that the effective integration of technology and social media is the right means of evangelizing the people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## 2. What is evangelization?

Before get into the topic of discussion directly, it is necessary to know the meaning and purpose of evangelization. Evangelization has got a historical development in its meaning and *modus operandi*. The act of proclamation of Good News was known as evangelization at the time of apostles. Are the apostles

the source of evangelization? There may arise the confusion with regard to the source of ‘mission’ or ‘evangelization’. The source of ‘mission’ or ‘evangelization’ is found in the Triune God. God sends His Son for the salvation of the humanity and the Church continues the proclamation of the Good News. The proclamation of Good News has been done with three approaches as per the changes in the society and they are; a) Christo-centric, b) Ecclesio-centric and c) Soterio-centric. A kind of gradual shift is visible among these approaches. At the time of the apostles, mission was Christo-centric. When there occurred a sudden shift in the approach establishing Christian community also became an integral part of the proclamation of Good News. According to George Kizhakkemury the progressive shift from Christo-centric to ecclesio-centric was the result of the life situations or problems the Church had to face during a particular period of time.<sup>1</sup> At this stage ‘mission’ has been understood in terms of colonization. Therefore, Pope Paul VI replaced the term ‘mission’ with the word ‘evangelization’. This is a post-synodal (after Vatican II) term which provided a better out look to the proclamation of Gospel. So evangelisation primarily means bringing Gospel to those who have not heard of Jesus. But Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* explains the need of re-evangelisation or a new evangelisation to

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<sup>1</sup> G. Kizhakkemury, “Historical Development in the Understanding of Mission”, in *Dimensions of Mission in India*, ed. Joseph Mattom & Sebastian Kim (Bombay: St Pauls, 1995), 19.



bring back the embers of the Church from the reluctance in practising Christian Faith.<sup>2</sup> Here the term ‘new evangelisation’ also means the renewal of the whole process of proclamation of the Gospel in the modern context. According to Richard Rymarz, ‘the new evangelisation is based on the conviction that mission is the responsibility of all the members of the Church.’<sup>3</sup>

In *Ad Gentes*<sup>4</sup> the council fathers point out that the purpose of missionary activity is evangelisation.<sup>5</sup> If then how to evangelise the present community has become a real practical question in evangelization, because 21<sup>st</sup> century is equipped with modern technologies and invasions. Religious beliefs and doctrines of the Catholic Faith are under question. Science infiltrates to the minds of the people by proving the false confidence that science is everything. This change emphasises the need of improvising the method of evangelization. In the following paragraphs I will explain how to transform the way of evangelization by integrating new technology and social media.

### 3. Integration of new technology and social media for evangelization

Pope Benedict XV in the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* (1919) defines evangelization as the proclamation of the eternal salvation brought to mankind by Jesus Christ. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Pope Paul VI (8<sup>th</sup> December 1975) emphasizes the need of evangelizing the culture. He says that there are two types of obstacles for evangelization: a) the resistance from the public and b) the temptation to narrow down missionary activity. Pope proposes ‘dialogue’ as the solution to overcome these issues. But when we consider evangelization in the present context ‘the reluctance to ameliorate the method of evangelization by integrating new technology and social media’ is an added obstacle

which prevents effective dialogue. By realizing this fact now the Church has been making use of the modern technology and social media for evangelization. The proper integration of technology and social media for evangelization is necessary to get into dialogue with the people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Technology is something that helps to reduce the human effort to accomplish a particular task. The present generation is equipped with technology. Therefore, the best way to connect them is making use of the technology and social media. It indicates that the use of social media platform for evangelization has to be up to date. The available social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and so on have to be used properly for the purpose of evangelization.

Social media is nothing but a virtual platform in which people share and discuss personal and common matters. The numbers of users of the social media are millions and therefore the integration of technology and social media will provide a grand opening for the proclamation of Gospel. As I said early now Church has given importance to *New Evangelization* along with the *Evangelization*. Pope Benedict XVI in the introductory message to the *Year of Faith* in 2012 said about the need of deepening faith in God and in 2013 in the message for the ‘World Day of Communication’ he emphasized the vitality of Social Media. He said that social media enable the people to come out of isolation.<sup>6</sup> Now Cardinals, Bishops, Priests, Seminarians, Religious and Laity are using social media for the purpose of communication, building up social relations, conveying messages and so on. Priests can easily connect to the people of God by making use of technology and social media. Now we Catholics are making use of the available online platforms for evangelization. But it is high time to create a common social media platform for Christians for the purpose of evangelization (For example godtube.com, xt3.com.). According to Pope Benedict XVI social media is helpful in proclaiming the richness of Gospel in different forms and therefore it becomes acceptable to the present generation.<sup>7</sup> Therefore the Church must

<sup>2</sup>*Redemptoris Missio*, (7<sup>th</sup> December 1990), 33; AAS LXXX III (1991).

<sup>3</sup>Richard Rymarz, “John Paul II and the New Evangelization; Origins and Meanings”, accessed on 2 May 2017, <[http://www.acu.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/225396/Rymarz\\_evangelization\\_GH.pdf](http://www.acu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/225396/Rymarz_evangelization_GH.pdf)>

<sup>4</sup>The Vatican II Decree on the missionary activity of the Church

<sup>5</sup>AG, 6.

<sup>6</sup>Jan.24,2013/47<sup>th</sup> World Communication Day Message.

<sup>7</sup> Pope Benedict XVI’s World Communication Day Message in 2013.



constantly seek the apt way for proclaiming the revelation of God and the faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup> The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* encourages the use of modern forms of communication as instruments for the new evangelization. Therefore Pope Benedict XVI encourages the people of God as well as the clerics and the religious to witness Jesus Christ by living in the digital world with the heart of a believer.<sup>9</sup> Now let me tell something with regard to integrating ourselves with new technology and social media for evangelization.

### 3.1. Cultivating social media culture

The proper cultivation of social media culture is necessary for evangelization. The Catholic youth as well as the people of God must be taught how to make use of Social Media for building up the Church, the mystical body of Christ. They, especially the youth has to be introduced to the social media. For example, *Jesus Youth*, a Catholic Youth Organization makes use of the modern technology and social media for evangelization. *Jesus Youth* can reach the youth by making use of the technology and social media. Whenever they conduct an evangelization program for youth, they conduct in such a way by making use of all the available possibility of technology and at the same time they witness Jesus Christ through their life too (for more details visit [www.jususyouth.org](http://www.jususyouth.org)). The parish priests and the catechism teachers must aware of the available websites which grand the space for evangelization. You Tube is the largest online place for sharing concepts by using multimedia. Now there are many You Tube channels which aims at evangelization. For example, the You Tube channel *Thomistic Institute* gives lectures on the catholic doctrines. The websites [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu), [www.researchgate.com](http://www.researchgate.com), [www.ensygloge.com](http://www.ensygloge.com) etc. aim at providing free space for sharing research works and academic papers. These types of websites provide an opportunity to dialogue with the scholarly people. Another type of online platform is for online learning. It

is generally called Massive Online Open Courses (MOOC). The websites such as [www.futurelearn.com](http://www.futurelearn.com), [www.udemy.com](http://www.udemy.com), [www.whitehat.com](http://www.whitehat.com) etc. offer MOOC courses. In these types of websites, we can offer online courses too. More than these sites Social Media rules the online world. The website *Vatican News* provides the latest updating with regard to the Church. Therefore, it is necessary to train candidates for ‘digital apostleship’. I will discuss about the need of digital apostleship later. I wanted to convey the need of training students as well as the adults for using the Social Media for evangelization. Pope Benedict XVI exhorts, “It is a duty of the Church to transmit the faith, to communicate the Gospel, so that the Christian truths may be a light in the new cultural transformations and that Christians may be able to account for the hope that is in them.”<sup>10</sup>

### 3.2. Problems and challenges

In the Vatican II document *Inter Mirifica*, the council fathers emphasised the need to instruct the People of God for using technology and social media for the missions of the Church. Later in 1967 when Pope Paul VI addressed the World Communication Day, he warned the people concerning the danger of Social communication. He says, “One cannot ignore the danger and damage which these means, however noble in themselves, can inflict upon individuals and society when they are not employed by humans with a sense of responsibility or with a honest intent and in conformity with the objective moral order.”<sup>11</sup> John Paul II says that social media is a medium and not an end in itself.<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis instructs the people of God that it is important to know how to dialogue and discernment to use modern technologies and social networks in such a way as to reveal a presence that listens, converses and

<sup>10</sup>Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, “*The Year of Faith. Introduction*,” 2012.

<sup>11</sup>Pope Paul VI, Message of *World Communication Day*, 1967

<sup>12</sup>“*The Church approaches this new medium with realism and confidence... it is a means, not an end in itself. The internet can offer magnificent opportunities for evangelization if used with competence and a clear awareness of its strengths and weakness.*” Pope John Paul II, Message 36<sup>th</sup> *World Communication Day*, 2002.

<sup>8</sup>*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, No.52

<sup>9</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Conference of Digital Witness, 2010.



encourages. He urged that the great digital content not only involves technology but also human beings. Therefore, it is the duty of the pastors to guide the People of God with the help of social media to be steady in Faith and thereby they may witness Christ.<sup>13</sup> From these teachings of the heads of the Church it is clear that any technology or social media is not an end in itself whereas it is merely means to reach the end. Therefore, proper training and invigilance from the part of the ecclesiastical authorities are required for handling the social media, because all what are shared in the social media may not be the true teachings of the Catholic Church. Wrong teachings or half-truth may mislead the people.

The social media can be used for inviting people for the sacraments and virtual meetings. But there is a problem is with regard to the sacramental life of the people. Now a kind of Post-Covid Faith Syndrome is found in many of the faithful. Few people have developed a mentality of reluctance towards going to the Church. They cling to virtual sacraments and in search of the possibility of the virtual sacraments. Though Church has made it clear that sacraments in the virtual platform in the Covid pandemic time is to satisfy the spiritual needs of the faithful. Whereas few people come with the virtual space theory for the sacraments. They argue that if the disposition of the heart of the faithful is significant in receiving Christ and if the grace of God transcends the limits of space and time what is the need of going Church. In this way people come with old protestant theories in new forms. Therefore, Church has to direct the people to overcome the same.

#### 4. Conclusion

21<sup>st</sup> Century is the era of 'Digital Apostleship'. Digital apostleship is nothing but proclaiming the Gospel by making use of new media. During the time of the Apostles, the apostles and their disciples used direct evangelization (visiting new communities and proclaiming the Gospel) and indirect evangelization (by

<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, Message to the Pontifical Council on Social Communication, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2015.

means of letters). Now this direct evangelization is updated with virtual evangelization and indirect evangelization with social media. In the first case evangelization takes place in the virtual platform and in the second case evangelization is granted an open space for a continuous dialogue. What is lagging in both these cases is the 'Physical Presence of the Evangelizer'. The people are losing the opportunity to witness Christ in the life of the evangelizer. Therefore, the effective integration of technology and social media shall not deny the presence of human persons. The said integration must lead the people to come together in the name of Jesus, but it is necessary to make sure that authentic content is given to the people. It means that technology and social media has to be integrated for the service of the church. By keeping this in the mind the Church has to plan an integral formation for the seminarians, because they are going to serve the people of God tomorrow. The academic curriculum must be updated with the integration of technology and social media. This type of *techno-theo* integration will enable the future priests to facilitate the integration of technology and social media for continuing the mission entrusted to the Church.

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