**PART V**

**How to Educate and Evangelize Today in the Digital Habitat**

One of the greatest transformations that has radically changed our way of communicating is the digital era. A true and proper epochal change that influences various aspects of our lives and our daily way of living, such as educating young people, working, traveling.

We need to be aware that accessing the internet and social networks, in order to evangelize in the Catholic sphere, is a very difficult task, that requires a clear vision and an open mind, as evangelizing becomes a challenge nowadays. What, then, could be the right attitude or method of approach to this end?

The Church, through its own history and great wisdom, as the guide and educator of missions, can offer us tangible examples and guidelines to be able to evangelize anywhere, in any context.

I would like to take the text of the Good Shepherd (John 10) as an example, because, in my opinion, we find in Jesus' way of communicating a light and a guide for this reflection we are doing together.

First of all, we need to emphasize that all human communication requires a dynamic that includes language, attitude, processes, and a direct relationship with the person with whom we want to begin a path to an interaction.

In this dynamic, the word "level" is a very important starting point. The level of communication with someone indicates who is the person with whom I want to interact through their culture, their age, their interest, their experience, where they are in their faith journey. Communicating from an understanding of level with others helps us avoid creating a type of communication that instead risks generating confusion and dispersion and the danger of *superposition* (i.e., being able to let a person have what he or she does not want or know).

In fact, to communicate starting from an understanding of the level of the relationship helps us understand what a level of dialogue is with a person, with a group, with a multitude. In each case, it is necessary to understand well the dynamics of first contact, who these people are, what we want, why I am there.

It is interesting to apply this idea of the level of communication by analyzing the method employed by Jesus. In a totally different context and culture than today, He respected precisely this very same process. Jesus speaks individually to people (the woman at the well), to two people, to a small group, to a larger group, to the crowd. Each encounter requires, as we stated earlier, a different procedure to achieve the objectives.

Let us now go a little deeper by examining some human aspects, following this dynamic of levels. One of the principal elements is called trust. It is the nature of the human person to initiate a dialogue with the other person from degrees of trust. Do I trust him or not? Trust permits us to open up and begin the process of sharing true information about my life.

Another aspect is, for example, credibility in the relationship. Who is this person, what is his or her history, his competence, what are his values, what can he or she help me with?

Another factor is the person's experience, in analogy with the truth of things, of the relationship that has been created, what he wants to say, to hear, to share with me. Is all this true?

It is thus clear that this process of relationship across the level is by no means simple. There is no rule to say: it is done like this or not. It is a path, or journey, that we learn through life, through errors, and also through our way of communicating.

We can put this level dynamic into practice in our own way or means of communicating, or in the personal way of relating to a person, in a chat room at one's school, in the Church, on the Internet.

Returning to the way of Jesus the communicator (*The Good Shepherd, John 10:1-30*), let us see the steps of the communicative process of trust.

*14 I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And I have other sheep that are not from this fold: these also I must lead. They will listen to my voice and become one flock, one shepherd. 17 That is why the Father loves me: because I offer my life, to then take it up again. 18*

The statement he makes, *"I am the good shepherd,"* turns out to be very interesting. This is who is talking; this is his identity.

*"I know my sheep."* It means that Jesus knows his interlocutors.

*"They will listen to my voice and become one flock, one shepherd."* The aspect of the voice is of great significance in communication because the voice reveals the inner self of the person, his feelings, emotional states, his character.

*"That is why the Father loves me: because I offer my life...."* Jesus makes a reference to the Father, to authority, the one who is the referent for Jesus. And the very powerful expression that translates the totality of the message is the depth of the relationship and the credibility of the communicator: giving life, dialogue becomes healing.

Clearly, there is a theological poignancy in this passage that we can transfer to the level of how communication works.

What is Jesus' way of creating trust and credibility in communicating with people? We find some verbs in this Good Shepherd passage that are very significant and we can apply them to the process of trust in human communication:

Jesus: "listens," "draws near," "hears," "confirms," "loves," "delivers." His word, His presence, His person, His attitude create a process to ensure the human and spiritual dynamic of communication.

Jesus is very familiar with other types of communication. In this text, He refers to the "communicator" who, as a "hireling, abandons his sheep."

At this point, it is interesting to note that on other occasions this process, with different people or groups, went in opposite directions. Certainly not because Jesus was wrong in his communicative procedure, but because people were truly closed, approaching Jesus only out of ideological interest (the Pharisees, for example).

The experience of life, the credibility of our person, the way we live, the values we propose, are elements that create our credibility to create trust.

Communication through oneself leads to a dynamic and a logic: there is a need for consistency and truthfulness. There are various elements that make up this dynamic. For example: the bearing witness of he who communicates perceptible values that are conveyed, the relationship between what is said and lived, experienced, the relationship between the experience and the message.

Moreover, those who communicate and want to build trust to enter into the dynamism of communication with a person or group need to express through verbal language (words) and nonverbal language (body, facial expression, voice), a consistency between what is said, which is conviction and truth.

Jesus, in a very original way, communicates as the Good Shepherd and the message is very clear: "eternal life." He speaks in whose name? In the name of the Father, who gave Jesus this authority? "This command I have received from my Father." What gives credibility to Jesus' message? Entrusting His life with love. Jesus' way of communication is of great poignancy and consistency from beginning to end.

In the analogy of communication, we have to compare both the person, the communicator, his method, and what he wants to communicate and on whose behalf. In the methodology of communicating through the Internet and social networks, it is important to be clear about this process; otherwise, communication becomes only generic and fragmented information, a technical attitude, which is not conducive to people's growth, generating at times, distrust, criticism, or conflict.

Evangelizing and educating in the digital requires, therefore, a clear understanding of some of these processes and lines of communication.

In the next meeting, we shall talk about proclamation on the Internet and social networks. Is it perhaps possible? In what way?