**MISSIONARY MIGRANTS**

**IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD**

Valencia, 4 May 2013

Dear Confreres

*Deo gratias!*

I am sending this letter from Valencia, Spain, where I’ve come to direct a spiritual retreat of the Orionine Family on the life of our two martyrs, *Fr. Ricardo Gil and Antonio Arrue’* who will be beatified in Tarragona, this coming 13 October. It is my personal act of devotion to our *Spanish martyrs* and to the Spanish Orionines, not being able to be present in Tarragona for their beatification. With the theme *“Christian life, martyrs life’*, I shared in these three days the search for one’s personal choices, so as to preserve and increase the ‘passion’ for the faith and mission of which the 2 Orionine martyrs were admirable examples.

I had with me the paper and points of this Circular letter and thought of the great difference between the cultural context of the Spanish people at the beginning of the 20th Century, in which our two martyrs bore witness, and the context of our own people and the youth of today who frequent the virtual squares and navigate in the sea which is the internet.

There was need then to bring the light of the Gospel and of Christian charity. And there is also need of witnesses and apostles today, upon the streets of the virtual world walked upon daily by millions and billions of persons. I entrust to the intercession of Fr. Riccardo and of the postulant Antonio this letter, asking and offering to the Lord a small amount of their passion for souls necessary in order to navigate in the internet as apostles.

Even I am a migrant in the virtual world created by the modern means of information communication. I know only a few words and enough essential rules in order to communicate and move among the new ways of communication. But the theme is important, very influential in the religious life and in the apostolate.[[1]](#footnote-1) It is a new world in which all of us find ourselves entering and which we need to know the language, its values and the problems in order to be protagonists of humanity, of spirituality and evangelization. We ought to watch it with interest.

Already 50 years ago, the Document of the II Vatican Council *Inter mirifica* (4 December 1963), dedicated to the means of social communication, affirmed that “among the marvellous technical inventions that, above all in our times, human ingenuity, with the help of God, has drawn from the Creator, Mother Church accepts and follows with special care those which more directly regard the spirit of man and which have opened new paths of communications, with great facility, news, ideas and teachings of every type”.

**COMMUNICATION, DIALOGUE, RELATIONSHIPS, COMMUNION**

*Communication* is an instrument of *dialogue*. Dialogue is the basis of *relationship*. Relationship is the core of *communion*. It is enough to recall this process to say that which refers to communication concerns man, concerns our life as religious, in the spiritual, communitarian and apostolic realm. We should therefore seriously interest ourselves about communication. Don’t be surprised then that I am dedicating to this theme a circular letter.

Before embarking upon the new communication phenomenon it is useful to look at the way Jesus communicated; also that of Don Orione.

**Looking at Jesus the communicator**

The Son of God assumed our humanity; the Word was made flesh, a Word living and active. Jesus is both communication and relationship. He is not just someone who says sublime words about God. He is not only someone who brings the message of God. He himself is, in his being, the Word of God, he is the message incarnate. He not only reveals and communicates God. He is at the same time, the communicator, content, means, message, enabler of the communication. In communicating, Jesus brings it about; he announces, hears, dialogues, discusses, is silent. He is attentive and adapts himself to the social milieu and to his questioners.

In thinking about the great changes that have occurred in the manner of communication, it ought to be remembered that in one’s personal life and in that shared, there are already all the elements of the communicative process. In fact all of us are communicators.

Well, in reflecting upon the ability to be communicative with his questioners: *“Jesus Christ, even though his state was divine, did not cling to this equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are”* (Phil 2: 6-7); He became incarnate, sharing the human condition, took on the language of his historical social setting.

“By means of His incarnation, He took on the appearance of those who would receive His message, expressed by His word and by the whole manner of His life. He spoke as one fully immersed in the actual condition of His people” [[2]](#footnote-2)

The communication of Jesus consists in the fact of *a new life fully transparent*. This is the basis of our own capacity and possibility to communicate today: to live a *religious life which is meaningful*. This is realized when we live effectively *religious life* and when we really incarnate our cultural environment so to make it more *understandable*.

**Some ideas from Don Orione**

The communicative outlook of Jesus recalled above, are found also in Don Orione. He was a saint, a true man of God, to a profound level; communicative, both for the *beautiful life* of God, which he lived, and also for his capacity of daily *incarnation* which spurred him on towards *charity* - passion for ‘Souls’, for the good of his neighbour.

In order to avoid personal misunderstandings of religious life, our founder insisted very much on formation: *“We must be saints, but such saints that our holiness does not belong only to the devotion of the faithful, neither that only of the Church, but captivates and bestows upon society such splendour of light, such life of the love of God and of men, that the saints of the Church, but saints of the people and of social wellbeing.[[3]](#footnote-3)*

To be *“saints”* is the essence to be communicated, it is the life, and content. Without content nothing is communicated, to anyone. *“Avoid words: of speakers we have filled our pockets”,[[4]](#footnote-4)* be they those of the pulpit and those thrown at us from the internet.

To be *“saints of the people and of social wellbeing”* is our way in order to communicate. It requires attention as to the audience and even more it implies incarnation, style, popular language, made real. *“Are these new times? Let us go forward conquering them with ardour and an intense spirit of apostolate. Let us not hesitate: let us throw ourselves at new forms, at the new methods of religious social action, with firm faith, but with a magnanimous spirit. All good initiatives should be in modern forms, so as to sow and reap Jesus Christ in society”.[[5]](#footnote-5)*

Having said this, looking at Don Orione, one can then attempt to describe the greatness and creativity of Don Orione “communicator”: he was a vivacious and efficacious writer, a passionate conversationalist, a stirring preacher; he was a convinced user of the means of communication, founded magazines and printing press, spoke on radio, established a press office in 1938, thought of the first popular university, and other major enterprises. About this much has already been written.

We today ought and should live the same apostolic passion communicating it with new and potent means of information.

At the time of Don Orione, the one great means of mass communication was the printing press. *“The printing press is the first means, and ought not to be forgotten about, but spurs us to concern ourselves about it so as to raise it and make it holy”*.[[6]](#footnote-6) This was his attitude.

It was mentioned that he established a “press office” in 1938. *“A press apostolate for the people by me dreamed of for many years, a press apostolate for the little ones, for the humble, for the hordes of farm workers, of workers, the work of the good press for the workers for the salvation of the people. The press is a great force: it is the great orator which speaks by day, by night, which speaks in the city and in the suburbs, even to the forgotten mountains and valleys. Where does the printing press not reach? (…) How much good does the press accomplish, when it is in good hands, when it is placed at the service of God, of Church, of Country! May our Congregation turn its back on such a power? Are we not obliged to concern ourselves with it in order to sow and reap? With the popular press we will bring Christ to the people and the people to Christ”.[[7]](#footnote-7)*

It is an apostle who speaks in this way and not a prompter of novelty and of modern means. We could substitute the “press” with the word “internet” and the text of Don Orione, of 1938, would apply to us in 2013. It shows us the attitude we ought to have before the new and popular[[8]](#footnote-8) instruments of communications of information. In the same letter there is also another very valid and actual criterion: Don Orione calls us to have: *“Firm and sound principles of faith and towards all that pertains to doctrine of the Church, mindful of the rule: unity in all things necessary, liberty where there is doubt, in all things charity! Always precise and clear, flee from affected styles, like those of antiquated times, which are sound, free from staleness”*. It is a clear invitation to update ourselves, to modernize our thoughts and practice.

**WE HAVE ENTERED A NEW ERA**

*Internet* (the net of nets) is the epitome of the new communication. The internet has superseded the limits of space and time. While with the telephone the voice is transmitted, in the internet one establishes a “living” relationship, not physical but *virtual*. The novelty of this new era is the digital convergence: one sole instrument is contemporaneously newspaper, TV, radio, writing machine, library, printer, lathe, scalpel, etc.

The internet is a place, a language, a way of being, and a culture. By means of the net, hundreds of millions of users daily interact using every type of messages, access documents, participate in group transmission, they meet by means of electronic conferences, discuss every type of argument. The internet is becoming ever more a space for personal relationships, for groups, institutions.

A statistic for 2011 from the International Union of Telecommunications says that the internet is used by 13.5% of the population in Africa, by 26.2% in Asia, 61.3% in Europe (in Italy, 41 of its 60 million inhabitants), by 35.6% in the Middle East, by 78.6% in North America, by 39.5% in Latin America and Caribbean, by 67.5% in Oceania and Australia. They are facts that are constantly being revised because the use of the internet is constantly expanding. In the decade 2000-2010 there was an increase of 528.1%.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Young people are the ones mostly caught up in this phenomenon of virtual communication. Adolescents use the internet as much as at home (89%), as at school (77%), be they male (75%) or female (69%), in the urban environment (75%), suburban (73%), or rural (65%).[[10]](#footnote-10) Looking only at Italy, a recent research by *Eurispes*,[[11]](#footnote-11) has revealed that 85.6% of Italian youth have a profile on *Facebook*; that 32.2% use the internet for 1 to 2 hours a day; 37.7% use it for 2 to 4 hours, while 13.3% use it for more than 4 hours a day.

The applications of the ways of information have expanded to include all types of human activity. For example, schools of every type and level, including primary and nursery, use and adapt the use of the means of information. In the rehabilitation of the disabled and in the free time of the elderly it is being used increasingly for its informative possibilities. Novices and clerical students *chat*, *tweet* or speak on the internet ever increasingly. Even in the Congregation, many use the information means every day and for many hours.

The statistics and experience tell us that we are before a new and global phenomenon which is influencing the ways of communication, even relationships. We have entered irreversibly an era of communication and digital culture. It touches at the heart, even life in common, and the purpose of the religious life, creating new possibilities and even new problems and tensions.

**MODELS OF COMMUNICATION**

In order to understand the changes that have occurred with the emergence of the means of information technology it is useful to simply recall the evolution of the models of communication.[[12]](#footnote-12)

*First model*: **communication as a dialogue of presence.**

It is a model of communication *face to face*, the most natural and immediate. In this type of communication, the participants are present in a direct way before one another and share a common space-time environment; the interaction occurs in a context of being present before one another. The communication *face to face* is typically *dialogical*: one or two individuals speak with another (or with others) and the person to whom one turns to can respond (at least in principle), and in this way the dialogue goes forward.

Furthermore, in the communication dialogue of presence, the words can be completed by gestures, facial expressions, variations of tone, etc.

The most important aspect in this model of communication is the ample possibility of exchange and sharing among persons. This model of dialogue has been and is fundamental for the development of all human thought.

Despite affirming the new models of communication, the model of dialogue of presence is fundamental and decisive. The other models seek in some way to replicate it and have always before them these aspects.

*Second model*: **mass communication**

This is realized by means of the book, newspaper, cinema, radio, television, etc. It has developed from the printing press (Gutemburg, 1450) and by the audio-visuals which emerged a century ago (the first film was in 1901). It has played an ever more increasing role, and even today, it is the principal point of reference of communication in society.

In this model, the communication is carried out by means of technology; it is principally done by monologue and dialogue is absent. The relationship is *one → many*. The communication of the masses has greatly influenced contemporary society. It has allowed the overcoming of geographical and cultural frontiers and transformed it into a great market place, influencing ways of thinking and customs.

Mass communication is being produced in ever fewer centres and is being spread in a way both nationally and worldwide, dependent upon the will of their producers and in particular, by economic interests.

*Third model*: **communication of dialogue but without presence**

It is the latest to emerge. It became possible and popular within the last 40 years with the advent of the instruments of communication and digital technology. It has then a very brief history. The emergence of this type of communication is not only in parallel with the two aforementioned ones, but is influencing them and bringing about the restructuring of all forms of communication.

The essential characteristics of this new model of communication is the possibility of a relational dialogue (be it *one* → *many* or *many* → *many*) even without the *physical* presence at the same time and space. It is called *virtual* communication. It is to be noticed that *virtual* communication is less complete than that of presence and less extensive than that of the masses.

C*yberspace* is the social dimension in which is realized this new model of communication, by means of *chats*, *email*, teleconference, discussion groups, social networks, etc. *Cyber culture* or *virtual culture* is the name given to this contemporary culture marked by the use of these new means of information. I am using this term instead of *virtual culture*.[[13]](#footnote-13) “Such culture even before its contents, is born of the fact that there exists new ways of communication with technical and unpublished languages”.[[14]](#footnote-14)

**WE MUST IMMIGRATE INTO THE NEW CULTURE**

Albeit in many different ways, we must *all* enter into the *virtual culture* which offers in an ordinary way new and widely practised possibilities of *virtual relations and virtual social networks.*

In the past, the emigrant or missionary would take a ship or plane and in the county of arrival would find a new culture to assume and in which to situate himself. Today, what is happening is that we are standing still while the world and the culture that surrounds us have changed. We must enter into it, wherever we are, and get acquainted with the new surroundings.

We live in a *virtual culture* and this is not a dream of the future or a science-fiction world. No, it is the present reality. The world is changing with new electronic instruments. It is sufficient to see how a little child of 8 years of age uses these instruments and what an influence they have on his life, that of families and school. More and more we religious in the Congregation are communicating from one part of the world to the other with emails, see each other on Skype, enter into groups on Facebook, Tweet and similar circles.

The internet is not just *house* (structure), it is *home* (relationship surroundings). It is an essential part of personal and social life. The internet is not only *another* something, external to life; rather it is part of the way of life. Not only do we use the internet, but we live in the internet. The distinction between *real* and *virtual* is not sufficient. The distinction is rather between *physical* and *virtual.* Conversations, a visit to a museum, and bank payment or a surgical operation carried out virtually, that is, by means of the internet, are real and have real consequences.

Today, we have arrived at the “*virtual culture”* just as, a thousand years ago they began to live in the literary culture, and centuries ago, the mass culture. Then, many remained illiterate. Also today, many can remain illiterate in the new digital language, but the world is speaking and living in the virtual culture. We are all deeply involved in it.

As religious, we *are in this world.* We are called to be like “salt and yeast of the earth” in it, like “witnesses” and “preachers” of the new life in Christ. By fact and by vocation we are immersed in the modern world which expresses itself with this new *digital* way of being and communicating.

Joana Puntel, a Brazilian Pauline sister and expert in communications, in her talk on “Religious life and the media culture” to the Assembly of the Superiors General last year, said that in the world – and in religious congregations – there are three types of people:

*Digital natives:* those who have been born in the digital culture, those who are aged 25 years and below;

*Digital immigrants:* those who have arrived in the new technologies of communication afterwards, with greater or lesser success;

*Digital illiterate:* those who, for various reasons, have not learnt the new internet languages and *feel* strangers in the new world born of digital communication.

To find ourselves “digital illiterate” or just “digital immigrants” who manage to babble some indispensible word, can cause discomfort, refusal, a sense of discouragement, but can also stimulate curiosity and the will to learn.

**A NEW AREA OF FORMATION**

After realising that we have entered into a world of virtual communication which changes and expands real communication between people, we ask ourselves: *how can we integrate the virtual dimension fruitfully into our relationships? How can we use well the computerised means in our relationships?*

Many are asking superiors to give guidelines and even disciplinary precepts to regulate the use of these means of communication, because of the worrying, obvious and frequent negative consequences: from simply wasting time to types of addiction and dividing of relationships into two parts (*close to those who are distant and distant to those who are close.)[[15]](#footnote-15)* It is clear that one can go off the rails in the field of chastity (using pornography, romantic relationships on the internet...)[[16]](#footnote-16) of poverty (unauthorised expenditure, operating hidden accounts...), and of obedience (under orders from others and not from superiors, lack of interest in the community, alternative virtual communities...)

In the General Council we have discussed several times the need for guidance and the fruit has been the *Note on the use of the Mass Media (Nota sull’uso dei Mass Media)* of the Vicar General, Fr Achille Morabito, with regard to initial and permanent formation.[[17]](#footnote-17)

I remember asking the above-mentioned Sr. Joan Puntel if there was any guideline in existence, or at least any shared outline of disciplinary code of conduct on the use of the computer. She replied that, because of the nature of digital communication, it is practically impossible to make external, common, effective and verifiable disciplinary rules. Rules are indispensable, but they can come only from self-discipline and therefore from personal formation in the use of the new powerful means to make grow and not “smash to pieces” one’s personality.

Dear Confreres, the aim of this Circular Letter is to invite you to get to know and use the means of virtual communication in a positive and not ingenuous way. It is an invitation to reflect on a new learning journey with is new for all of us. May as many as possible organise themselves (and some correct themselves in this matter). Some confreres are proving to be very competent and there are positive experiences of communication.[[18]](#footnote-18)

The popular saying *“tell me whose company you keep and I will tell you who you are”* reminds us how much our relationships are crucial in the formation of our human personality. This is true also in the case of virtual relationships. They influence our formation, our spirituality, our community life and our apostolate.

Benedict XVI faced the theme of the use of *social networks* in his Message *“Truth, proclamation and authenticity of life in the digital era”* for the 45th World Communications Day 2011. The Pope highlighted the positive aspect of this means which is *“the sign of a genuine search for personal meeting with others leading to new forms of interpersonal relationships”.[[19]](#footnote-19)*  Thus, he recognisedin the use of social networks a way of responding to the deep need for communication and for participation even in different places and realities of life. There is an incalculable number of photos, messages, information and documents of every type which, above all, young people share with each other all over the world in spite of the geographic distances. We should always be happy at the existence of new forms of communication. The internet facilitates a great movement of meetings and relationships which can increase the communion of the human family, when financial and commercial motivations are not allowed to dominate.

The Holy Father, in the same message, mentions some human risks in virtual relationships: one can meet badly behaved and dishonest persons on the internet; there is the risk of hiding oneself in a sort of parallel world;[[20]](#footnote-20) one’s conscience and commitment towards one’s “neighbour” can be minimised.

Zygmunt Bauman,[[21]](#footnote-21) a Polish intellectual and great critical observer of modern society, has pointed out some consequences produced in human relationships by excessive participation in virtual relationships. He has pointed out that a virtual relationship allows every person to communicate while still being distant from the other, by continually putting on a mask, without committing oneself, without a true interaction between persons. He states that this “butterfly” attitude of communication ends up by being applied to daily life so that “a social context is valid if it allows the person to be present in a place without be forced, encouraged or led to remove the mask, let himself be himself, express himself, reveal his own feelings and confess his intimate thoughts, dreams and fears”.[[22]](#footnote-22)

In other words, on the internet you can log out with a click and interrupt the link (relationship). So, this attitude can infect relationships in real life: *if I don’t like,* I leave; if *I am tired,* I change. In this way, however, I become weak and alone; there is no progress or human growth. There is no belonging or fidelity. We arrive, says Bauman, at “communication made of pure and simple congeniality which, because of that reason, is not problematic, does not include any effort or genuine orderly watchfulness”.[[23]](#footnote-23)

This happens, for example, when someone communicates very much on the internet or by mobile phone with those who are pleasing to him, and then, at home he does not even greet or says nothing at table. To sum up, there is the real risk that the time given to virtual relationships may satisfy one’s need for relationships, leaving little energy for genuine interpersonal relationships which are more demanding and more humanising.

**TEN GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

This is an attempt to begin an education to life in the virtual world, by means of some practical and realistic guidelines.

1. ***Have a positive attitude towards internet communication.[[24]](#footnote-24)*** Get to know the new means of communication in order to know how to use them well. They are “some of the marvels of the world” - <*inter mirifica> -* which God has made available for us to discover, use, spread the truth, including the truth of our dignity and destiny as his sons and daughters, heirs of his Eternal Kingdom”.[[25]](#footnote-25) It is necessary to be aware of the human problems linked to virtual communication in order to avoid them, or, at least, to get help. It is not enough just to *use* it, but it is necessary to get to know the new virtual world in which we live. To achieve this, it will is useful to participate in formation courses aimed at the personal and apostolic life in the virtual world.

*“Christians must keep in mind the media culture in which they live”* in order to *“bring the message of salvation into the “new culture” which the powerful instruments of communication create and amplify”.[[26]](#footnote-26)* To this end, “a *vast work of formation is needed to assure that the mass media be known and used intelligently and appropriately”.[[27]](#footnote-27)* In fact, “without proper formation, these media run the risk of manipulating and heavily conditioning, rather than serving people”. “*Religious should be educated, therefore, to a disciplined and critical use of the media” –* say our Norms, 76 – *“so as to acquire good knowledge and mature judgement of the realities and needs of the world in which they live and to which they wish to bring Gospel values”.*

1. ***Develop your interior life*** so as not to acquire a weak and superficial identity. The new virtual culture presents a fragmented vision of reality. Reality and truth are immersed in a sea of so many visions and truth which are presented as absolute. Truth is substituted by opinion. Everything and its opposite are offered to us, without distinction, at a click. Values and facts about a person or an institution are juxtaposed with thousands of others, often in contradiction. Alongside the Church’s website there are many sites of churches, religions, sects and “worldly fantasies” (1 Tim. 4:7) and the “artificially invented” (2 Pet.1:16). Relativism can easily be a consequence of this culture and, with it, the weakness of personal identity.

Virtual communication can lead to superficiality. Make time for silence and reflection so that the interior and transcendent dimension of your person can emerge. Virtual communication is immediate and fast. Put in your personal project (apparently) “useless” times for doing and saying things which are useful for contemplation and discernment. Virtual communication offers information and opinions of every type, all on the same level, counting more on the effect of the impression than on reflection and analysis of the reality. To see things clearly always combine virtual knowledge with your personal experience of people and facts.

1. ***Be an explorer, not a wanderer.*** Wandering is a typical attitude that develops in the virtual world. In the internet you navigate, explore, and are always moving from one site to another, from one world to another. It is beautiful but it can become a problem. Wandering in the internet can become a way of life: you pass easily from one experience to another, from one relationship to another, from one group to another. Be an explorer who has his own identity (home, affections and plans) and not a wanderer who has only himself here and now. Wandering leads to indifference, to loneliness, to abuse, to cheating.
2. ***Communicate what you are.*** We communicate, above all, what we are. You can be a great user and expert of virtual communication, but transmit your own narrow-mindedness and meanness or your honesty and good life.

In the internet there are many sites and blogs of the Congregation. In them we are transmitting our style of life and our “loves”. But are we communicating our radical choice for God and for the Lord Jesus? Do we express our communal fraternity, our choice of the poor and the *desamparados,* trust in Divine Providence, hope and the beauty of charity? In the virtual world it is not sufficient to communicate the Gospel and the charism as if they were an ideology, like a mask, a look or an *avatar.[[28]](#footnote-28)*

Our “client appeal”, even on the internet, lies in our witness of “*following Christ more closely”* and *“brining the little ones, the poor, the ordinary people to the Church, the Pope, to unite all in Christ, through works of charity”.* So, being good religious in real life is, from the point of view of communication, much more important that all the websites, radio, television or magazines that we can have, because in fact we communicate what we are. Only if our life witness is genuine, media communication can raise attraction toward the Lord (evangelisation) and towards the Orionine life (vocation).

1. ***Educate your will to what is good.*** The social networks have made open interaction possible, in real time and from distant places, outside the walls of the house of the community and of the institution. In the internet we can go where we want and with whom we want.[[29]](#footnote-29) There is no need to ask permission or even to inform. There is no superior or confrere who asks you “Where are you going?” or “what have you done?” There is no other control except that of your personal responsibility. Therefore, enlighten your reason and educate your will to do good right from the time of initial formation,[[30]](#footnote-30) and then permanently, because in the world of *personal media* you have the possibility of doing anything you wish. Even evil. Even evil you want to commit. We know well that the virtual is not fictitious and unreal but that one’s actions and virtual relationships are humanly and morally relevant.
2. ***Use time well***. We have seen from statistics that the time used on web technology by young people and adults is increasing, and we religious too are using it more. Consequently we need a directive about how we use our time. The recent General Chapter mentions that “the improper use of mobile telephones, computers and TV” are among “the elements that upset and negate fraternal communion” (no.37). Today it is possible to ignore community activities and timetables because you can telephone, chat, and navigate while you’re at table, at work, in bed or…even in Church! It is difficult to give a hard steadfast rule, but it is very important that both personally and as a community proper times are given to allow for order and the planning of one’s project activities. Time is life. In the way we use our time we show who we are and how we live our life.
3. ***Be transparent****.* To be a *person* means to speak of and show forth one’s individual identity as a Christian, a religious and a religious of don Orione. In virtual relationships it is possible to hide and forget one’s personal identity. On the internet and in social networking avoid the false step of cultivating anonymous relationships or being someone else, such as an avatar or masked person. Every contact should show a personal identity and a face. Having a *second life* is sinister and negates and destroys our true personality.

Being a *transparent* person in the virtual world means – and I use the words of Pope Benedict XVI – “*witnessing with one’s digital profile and the way of communicating one’s choices, preferences and judgements are in accord with the gospel even if that is not the explicit topic of the conversation*".[[31]](#footnote-31) We should not be hypocrites or show offs in our sites, blogs, e mails or video conferences even if the aims are good: “ *Let your word be yes, if you mean yes, and no, if you mean no”* (Mt 5,37).

1. ***Look for meaning beyond information****.* There is a lot of wasting time and resources in communication and even more in the cyber world! That which is communicated is often not understood and if it is not understood it does not become fruitful and life- giving reflection. How can we break this chain of unfruitful communication? Fr. Pascual Chavez, Rector Superior of the Salesians, writing in “New frontiers of social communications” put it colourfully, “ *you can’t eat an omelette without first breaking the egg”.[[32]](#footnote-32)* The nutritious richness of an omelette is inside the egg. If you leave it as an egg it will never become anything but rotten. The egg is the symbol of life in the concrete, the real experience. From the shell of communication comes the raw experience of life – the goodness of an omelette – here the internet site, a sermon, a catechism lesson, a document of the General Chapter or a circular letter – always depends on the good experience of where it comes from. We need to break the shell and go to what is inside and explain it. A superficial comment, an opinion is not enough if we want to get to the essence.
2. ***Integrate virtual communication with real and physical contact.*** Certainly the virtual world does not run *parallel* with the real world but it is part of daily reality, and it always will be. It forms part of our existence, but it is not everything. It is a new and powerful opportunity for information and dialogue that can strengthen relationships. [[33]](#footnote-33) But virtual relationships should be integrated with physical and real contact with people and places. [[34]](#footnote-34) Benedict XVI invites us to self-discipline and balance because *"it is important to remember that virtual contact cannot and should not substitute direct human contact with people at all levels of our life"*.[[35]](#footnote-35)

The media become a temptation when they distract us from *daily* relationships because we are too taken up with *virtual* ones. These do not cost us sacrifice but are often simply a pleasure which we can switch off with a click or throw the address in the *bin* or the *spam*. Let us not dedicate more time to *Facebook* or other networks than we do to our own community. We must be careful to avoid malnutrition of relationships and make sure we have a hierarchy of priorities.[[36]](#footnote-36)

1. **“*Throw out the nets”*** (Jn 21, 6)[[37]](#footnote-37)or as don Orione would say about the virtual world, “*Let us make the sign of the cross and throw ourselves into the ocean of the new times*”. The virtual world is a new setting for our life and apostolate, “it concerns us”. No need to demonize it.[[38]](#footnote-38) Of course the problems must be noted, the risks avoided, but with don Orione we must have an attitude of “*apostolic trust*” “*neither presumptuous nor fearful”*,[[39]](#footnote-39) but with “*with rules and broadmindedness”. All good and new initiatives may be in modern clothing as long as they sow and plant Jesus Christ in our era*”.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Pope Benedict XVI, who never even used a typewriter launched himself into the digital world “to introduce into today’s culture this new form of *communication on which our society is based. In the early beginnings of the Church, the apostles and their disciples brought the good news of Jesus to the GrecoRoman world: as at that time, evangelisation, if it was to be fruitful had to take account of the culture and customs of those pagan peoples inorder to touch their hearts and minds, so nowadays proclaiming Christ presupposes a deep understanding of the new technologies in order to use them adequately.*[[41]](#footnote-41)

What can we do as Orionines, personally and as a community in order to be *“beacons of faith and civilisation”*, to communicate the gospel and our Orionine experience in new languages? We will need to guide ourselves in the virtual world in which we live. Every missionary has to learn the language of the place he goes to live in, because it is indispensible for the mission. The use of virtual communication is necessary for the world we live in. Otherwise we would feel ourselves out of place, timid and fearful and in the past. I think we should launch a debate and a formation initiative between Orionine religious and lay people who are using digital technology as a form of apostolate.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Dear confreres, I will conclude inviting you all to be *travelling missionaries in the virtual world* where the word *missionaries* is the nounand *immigrants the* adjective. That is to say that if one is really a missionary he knows how to face the challenge of being an immigrant for the Gospel. Father Marabotto in Poland, Father Zanocchi in Argentina, Father Patarello in Brazil, Father Genovese in Chile, Father Mugnai in the Ivory Coast, Father Piccoli in the Philippines, and many more, are today remembered as great missionaries and they did so much good, even if they didn’t speak perfectly their new language and had difficulties with their new cultures.

That is also the case for us. The principal reason we enter the web and become immigrants in the virtual world must be for missionary zeal and not just an enjoyable hobby, or even worse laziness. Don Orione, one hundred years ago, did not send his religious on a holiday for tourism in Brazil and other countries, but he thrust them into an arduous missionary endeavour. And indeed it was a missionary endeavour, whose fruits remain up to today. Let us remember that the effectiveness of the missionaries is measured by the number of native vocations. So let the effectiveness of us mature religious, *immigrants* in the virtual world, be measured by the missionary passion that we transmit to the virtual *natives*.

I can almost hear and see, after a brief tour of the paths of the web, the words of don Orione from Chaco in Argentina; “ *Here most of the children are natural...there are lots to be baptized ; the corruption of customs is frightening. Here there are Protestants, Jews and merchants rich in lands and who have come seeking wealth, don’t we need a priest for such souls?”[[43]](#footnote-43)*

**CONCLUDING**

The period January – April which has just come to an end was characterised by the happenings on the Chair of St Peter in Rome between Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. How many thoughts and feelings have been expressed! I would like to add just one more: I think we have all now had it confirmed that it is the Lord Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, who guides and brings life to the Church. Now let us be conformed to Pope Francis in thoughts, desires, style and teaching.

For the usual family news I invite you to go to the web page and see *Panorama orionino (Orionine panorama)* [www.donorione.org](http://www.donorione.org) which you can read making use of the instant translator into various languages.

I recommend to your prayers the dear confreres Fr. Edgard De Jesús Florentino and Fr Fioravante Agostini, whom the Lord has called to Himself in these last months and news of whom you will find in the *necrology* section of the most recent publication of the *Acts*.

Two deceased people, who have helped in our houses so much are Sr. Maria Discipula Crucis and Inezia Da Dores Santos, a consecrated member of the OSI (Orionine secular institute) from Ouro Branco (Brazil).

Among relatives we remember the father of Fr. Krzysztof Wojtynia and Fr. Jean Baptiste Komi Dzankani; the mother of Fr. Jerzy Pawlowski, Deacon. Cristiano Castellaro and Bro. Geraldo (Rogelino Oliveira Brito); the brother of Fr. Luciano Degan, Fr. Andrea Scaglia, Fr. Juan Sinforiano Pereira Lopez and Bro. Marcio Alexandre Calais de Jesús, and finally the sister of Mgr. Giovanni D’Ercole.

We entrust to the goodness of the Lord, all our friends, benefactors, deceased ex pupils who have contributed to the Little Work.

Thoughts and prayers also go to our sick and elderly: May Our Blessed Lady and Saint Luigi Orione help them to accept their suffering and problems and offer them to Jesus to participate at last in that joy without end.

Your brother and father in Christ and don Orione,

Father Flavio Peloso, FDP

*Superior General*

1. Slowly all Congregations are beginning to face it. It has been treated by various study groups by the Assembly of Superior Generals [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It is very beautiful what n. 11 says in the Pastoral Instruction *Communion and Progress* which describes Jesus the communicator [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. On the way with Don Orione, p. 325 (Italian edition) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Writings 61: 114 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Writings, 79: 300. “In doing good, if one is not a bit original, if one always remains fixed, one stagnates, becomes mouldy… Originality is a means to do good because it draws attention, it interests others to the initiatives of doing good.” : Words from 17.4.1938. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Letter to Fr. Domenic Sparpaglione of 15.2.1938: Writings 33:19. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Letter to priests called to set up a “Small Press Office” in 22.2.1938: Letters II, p. 527-533. (Italian edition) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibidem, p. 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Communication by digital means is in rapid expansion globally because the instruments are useful, of easy use and economical. We have passed from *mass media* to *personal media*, of small dimensions, of low cost, to large use (notebooks, iPads, cell phones, smart-phones,etc.). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Statistics from 2007 of Pearson Education, Inc. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. National Report *Eurispes* 2011 on *“Young people at risk because of Internet dependence and Social Network”*, Rome 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. To illustrate some essential elements I have found it useful to follow the outline of the conference by Joana Puntel to the Assembly of the Superiors General in May 2012 entitled *“Religious life – in the cultural media”*, and of her books: *Cultura Midiatica e Igreja: uma nova ambiencia (2006); Comunicacao: dialogo dos saberes na cultura midiatica (2011)* [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The *digital culture* or *cyber culture* or *virtual culture* began to emerge in the 1970s, with the spread of micro information and with the rise of the internet. It is above all the culture of the cell phone, of computers, of the net (*internet*), of digital micro-objects which function from the emergence of the process of the digital electronic medium. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter of 24/1.2005, *Rapid Development*, n. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *Cyberdependance* (addiction to the internet) is now a well described and relevant problem statistically. People who are affected have spasmodic desire to spend most of their time on the internet. It is a drug, no different from alcohol or cocaine and, as in the case of those substances makes the individual escape from reality. An exaggerated attachment to the internet brings about psychological disturbances, which can at times result in real psychic disorders. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. In daily life, interpersonal relations always comprise difficulties and even conflicts. On the internet and on social networks, in fact, relationships are organised between similar types of people, selected because of similarity and the difference of character or interpersonal difficulties are “obscured” by distance and anonymity. There is the risk of losing otherness, tension, conflict, and unity and community progress. Similarity in relationship can become intimate and even sexual in nature. A religious and psychologist, Giuseppe Crea, has dedicated an article to *Religious life and sexual addiction on the internet (Vita religiosa e dipendenza sessuale in internet,* “Vita consacrata”, 2004/2, p. 171-182. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. In *Atti e comunicazioni, 62, (2008), p. 327-332.* The *Norms* speak of the means of social communication in nos. 8, 76, 92, 105. The *Itinerario Formativo Orionino* in the chapter *“Formazione umana”,* talks about *“The use of the means of social communication”,* nos. 62-65, p. 72-74 (see also “Formation Plan Programme P. 97 no. 96). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Some websites of the Congregation are well done; [www.donorione.org](http://www.donorione.org) has become a little meeting place where every day more than 1000 people, of whom more than half are confreres, go to get news of the Orionine Family; there are other sites which provide, besides spiritual and pastoral information, offer the opportunity of conversations; the Provincial Vocation Centre of Brazil South offers vocational promotion and accompaniment via internet; many times I have been able to be present at meetings and conventions speaking directly on video or sound from one side to the other of the Orionine world; the Mass and religious programmes are transmitted live from our works of Lindleya (Poland), Claypole and Cordoba (Argentina) to Itapipoca (Brazil) and others too; we have some sites which give professional training *on line;* secretariat meetings are being held via videoconference. There are many services which are already in use. There is a Polish site (not ours) – *pogotowieduchowe* that is, *spiritual emergency –* there appears a map with little green lights giving a link to priests who have telephone lines open and you can call them to tell them your problems and needs. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Benedict XVI’s Message “Truth*, proclamation and Authenticity of life in the digital era”* for the 45th World Communications Day Message, Vatican City, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Concerning this there is the phenomenon of a *second life,* a virtual world which one can enter through a free programme which allows the users, using their own symbolic image *(avatar),* to interact with others. The residents can explore, socialise, meet other residents and carry out group or individual activities, create partnerships, marry, accomplish projects, buy land, build, work and transport themselves into the past and travel across islands and lands which make up the virtual world, and all this can be digitally stored and re-used. There are millions of people linked to and living this *second life*. Cf. The article which appeared in *La Civiltà Cattolica,* written by Antonio Spadaro: *“Second Life”: il desiderio di un’altra vita”,* 2007/III, p. 266-278. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. .Let us consider here the works of Zymund Bauman, *La modernità liquida,* Editori Laterza, Bari, 2009 and *La Società individualizzata,* Il Mulino, Bologna, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Zygmunt Bauman, *La modernità liquida,* Laterza, Bari, 2009, p 105 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Idem, p. 110 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The document of Aparecida, of the 5th General Episcopal Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean (2007) dedicates no. 486 to “*know and value this new culture of communication”* and offers practical guidelines. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter of 24th January 2005, *Rapid development, no. 14.* [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *Rapid Development, nos. 2 & 8* [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *Ibidem, no. 11* [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. An *avatar* is an image which is chosen to symbolise one’s identity in the virtual community, groups, discussions, or online games. The term has become popular because of a very successful film. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. I am thinking of a lively and pleasant scene of 6 novices at Velletri and their Master in the computer room at Villa Borgia. I popped in a few times: each on a computer with headphone and microphone, one speaking in Italian, another in Spanish, another in Rumanian, one in a serious and quiet voice, another joking in a loud voice, another speaking to his family, and another to friends...Different from the recreation time in the playground (of olden times!) I found myself in a world media square. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The only general rule for the Congregation that I feel the need to give is that of leaving the virtual world outside of your bedroom, which is set apart for being by oneself, in silence and in rest. The reasons which have led to prohibiting the television in our own rooms are the same, and today, with even more reason, must lead us to exclude the use of the internet in our rooms. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Benedict XVI, [*“Truth, message and genuiness of life in the digital age”*](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20110124_45th-world-communications-day_it.html)*, cit.* [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. It is from the circular letter *“With the courage of St John Bosco at the frontiers of the new social communication”*  24th June 2005; Acts of the General Council no.390. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Once again please see the the message of Benedict XVI [*“Truth, message and genuiness of life in the digital age”*](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20110124_45th-world-communications-day_it.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. In this sense the reading of Jonah Lynch, *The smell of lemons*. *Technology and human relationships in the facebook era*  Lindau, Torino, 2011. “*What have lemons got to do with technology?”* asks the author. *“A lemon picked from the tree has a rough skin. If you squeeze it a bit aromatic oil comes out and the surface becomes smooth, and then there is that acidy taste which is so good over cutlets or on oysters or in cold drinks or tea! Touch, smell, taste. Three of the five senses cannot be communicated over technology. Three fifths of reality is 60%. This book is an invitation to take not of it*”. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Message [*“Truth, message and genuiness of life in the digital age”*](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20110124_45th-world-communications-day_it.html)*cit.* [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. About this I already wrote in the circular letter [*“The Lord knows who we are”*:](http://www.donorione.org/Public/ContentPage/content.asp?hdnIdContent=4001) Acts and Communications2010, n.233, p.235-248. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Jn 21, 6; the virtual net is a new form of apostolate. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. We can use an example of don Orione’s attitude to the *“era of democracy”* which at the beginning of the 20th century brought with it confusion, refusal and fear even within Catholicism which had the tendency to demonize it as evil. He wrote in 1905: *“Democracy advances with new needs and new dangers. Let us not be afraid of them dear friends, but let us be for the sake of charity people of broad faith and broad in our help if we truly want to be the people of our times: Democracy is moving in, let us embrace it friendly, let us channel it as it flows, let us Christianize it at its source, which is the youth..”* *Sui passi di Don Orione*, p. 213.(In the footsteps of don Orione). Shouldn’t we have a similar attitude in our cyber-virtual world? [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Don Orione expressed this better saying “*I don’t want languid people; small in mind and in heart without any sound, modern, necessary and good initiative, lacking the necessary courage! Let us have confidence not in ourselves but in God, and onward in high spirits with a big heart and great courage!*” See also Sui *passi di Don Orione*, (In the footsteps) the treatment of the characteristics of our apostolic charity: *well prepared culturally, brave and of an enterprising character, creative and ready for action, industrious, intelligent and modern in means and methods.* p.171-179. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. We recognize immediately the stamp of don Orione in these expressions; (*Writings*)*Scritti* 79, 300. Speaking of the use of newspapers and the radio, Don Orione wrote on 21st August 1935, from Buenos Aires: *"Look, you must and you can be very modern without being modernists. And that is how we should be: to value all the modern findings of science to spread the word of God and goodness”,* Writings/*Scritti* 18, 133. Obviously this is not an encouragement for vanity and wasting money in acquiring mod cons. We must always be guided by apostolic motive in what technology we choose. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Message [*“Truth, message and genuiness of life in the digital age”*](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20110124_45th-world-communications-day_it.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Norm 92 reminds us that “*To be apostles we need preparation and continuous up dating in principles and methods”* and *“the wise use of the means of communication can offer great advantages”*. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. *Scritti/Writings* 50, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)