

The relationship between the Church and language in the context of digital media

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Council of Trent

1545-1563

Councils of Trent and Vatican II 1962-1965

- Neither council was aware of the impact of media on the Christian community
- The printing press and the vernacular turned the oral medieval community into separate individuals and separate states
- The digital transformation is reversing the effects of literacy



Printing press versus digital transformation

- The results of the press and the digital transformation are similar:
 - Multiplication of readers
 - Multiplication of opinions
 - Strong-minded people publish their opinions albeit schismatic
 - Schisms create large echo chambers and, eventually, wars
- But they are also different:
 - The press created individuals and private consciousness
 - Reading internalizes consciousness
- The digital transformation externalizes cognitive faculties
 - Algorithms play down the value of language
 - And diminishes individual responsibility
- What humanity is going through today is a massive change of mind

What a mother said about her daughter trying to move images on a fashion magazine

- “For my 1 year old daughter, a magazine is an iPad that does not work.
- It will remain so for her whole life.
- Steve Jobs has coded a part of her operating system”

In that little story, we find the drama of our time



What is an Operating System (OS)?

Anybody who had to move from Macintosh OS to Microsoft Windows knows about the trauma





V.V.I Operating System

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Q. What is operating system? in Detail.

Ans→ Operating System is a Collection of Set of programs, which manages all the resources

 USER

 COMPUTER

How about the whole world moving from alphabetic literacy to digital media?

It's a bit as if everybody began to communicate telepathically without the need to speak



Alphabetic literacy was the common and unique Operating System of all Western cultures

- **Literacy was the basic medium** of learning, science, administration, business, law and religion
- “The invention of the Greek alphabet, as opposed to all previous systems, including the Phoenician, constituted an event in the history of human culture, the importance of which has not as yet been fully grasped. **Its appearance divides all pre-Greek civilisations from those that are post-Greek.**” (Eric A. Havelock)

**It was also responsible for the creation of the Western
private individual**

The invention of the 'person'

- Reading (especially silently) internalizes...
- ...and privatizes consciousness
- The function of the Greek theatrical mask was both to identify the actor's role
- And to project his voice to 15 thousand spectators

Examples of Ancient Greek masks from Louvre Museum



Old Woman Mask
End of IVe siècle B. C.



Peasant Mask
approx. between 300 and 280 B.C.
Material : Terracotta



Bearded Mask
(pornoboskos or procurer)
IIIrd - IIInd century B. C.



Dionysos Mask
Young Man Mask
IIInd - Ist century B. C.



Young Man Mask
(« effeminate soldier » or « blond young man »)
About 150 B.C.

“All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players”

The invention of democracy

- ‘Power to the people’ and early institutionalizations
- Legal innovations from Draco and Lycurgus to Kleisthenes
- Classical physics invented by 5th century BCE scientists
- Invention of documented history, geography, geometry
- Clear distinction between an ‘objective’ reality and a ‘subjective’ opinion or interpretation

The Christian Era could be the crowning achievement of the new mindset

The biggest question for Marshall McLuhan

“Let me point out to you that the Church began when Greek phonetic writing was in its infancy. The Greco-Roman culture was still in its cradle when the Church began to settle. **This was no mere accident of history, but a providential decree.** Yet no one has attempted to study this question in the history of religions. It is taken for granted. It is not even suggested that it might have exceptional significance for the Church. I have looked for information on this subject, but there is almost nothing, a few small articles here and there”.

Quoted in Pierre. Babin (1978), *Autre homme, autre chrétien à l'âge électronique*, Chalet, Paris, p. 36.

The profound social relevance of Christianity

- Not only a matter of faith, but of social order
- In a culture of individuals with opinions and personal projects
- Separating from their family and tribal groups
- Institutional and legal control wasn't sufficient to support and protect democracy

The rise of the Christian Church introduced a strong sense of personal responsibility in the people who were either born or converted into it



A question of responsibility

- Shame: responsibility to the other
(community cultures)
- Guilt: responsibility to the self
(individualist cultures)
- Anguish: responsibility to the whole world
(global culture)





Is Big Data the new Grand Inquisitor?

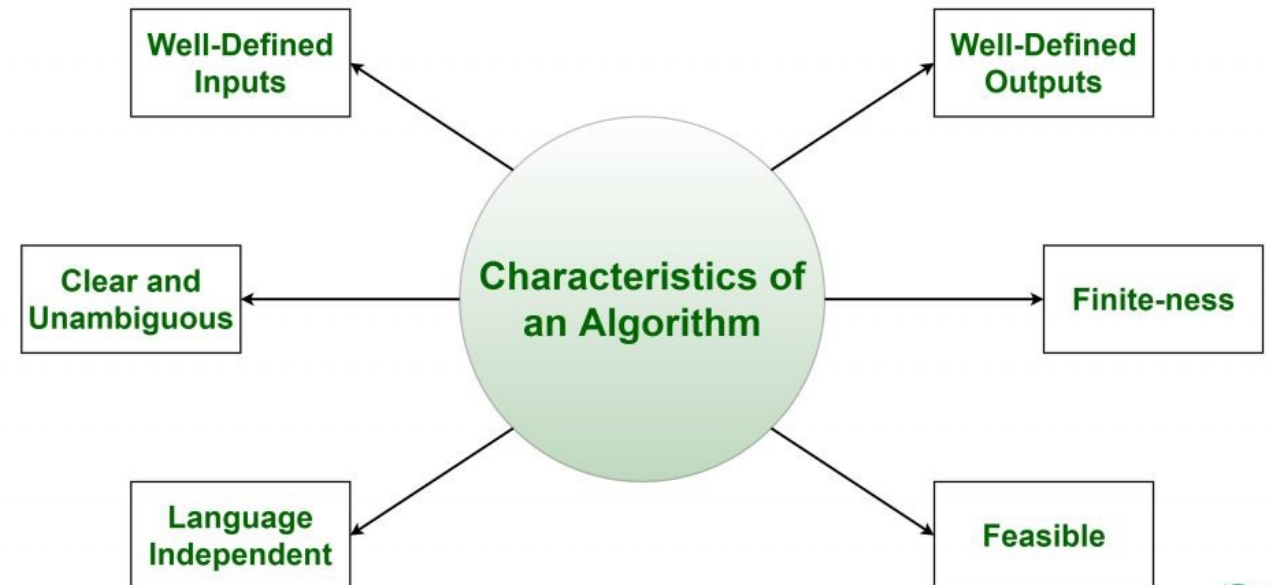
Algorithms are taking
over the role of
reason and the power
of language

Google has **the gift of tongues** translating all the languages of the world without knowing a single one apart from 'machine language'

Algorithms

- An algorithm is a finite set of steps defining the solution of a particular problem.
- Need not to belong one particular language
- Sequence of English statements can also be algorithm
- It is not a computer program
- An algorithm can be expressed in English like language, called pseudocode, in a programming language or in the form of flowchart.

Characteristics of an Algorithm



The digital transformation is reversing the personal and social effects of alphabetic literacy

- Externalization of cognitive faculties
 - Memory
 - Judgment
 - Imagination
- Loss of interiority
 - Weakened resistance to fake news
 - Emotion taking over from reason
- Loss of individual responsibility
 - Loss of self-determination
 - Loss of privacy

Devaluation of language

- You cannot argue against algorithms
- They make decisions for you
- They remove responsibility from human affairs
- They expose people

We are now naked in the street





Ascent of global transparency from Wikileaks to Panama Papers via Edward Snowden, Swissleaks, Paradise Papers, and #Metoo

**"Knowledge is becoming inseparable from the network
and unthinkable without the network enabling it"**
David Weinberger

The changing infrastructure of knowledge is altering the form and nature of knowledge. **Knowledge now lives on the network**, and it has the very form of the network: knowledge is now a property of the network, and the network embraces businesses, governments, museums, institutions, different forms of life, and all the nodes and elements that interact with each other.

(From our Manifesto on Digital Citizenship)



What is the message of the new Operating System for Catholic communicators?

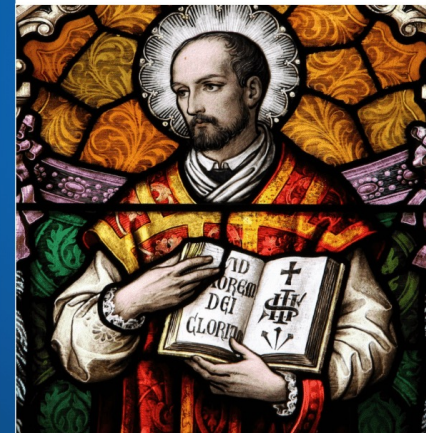
- The **RATIO STUDIORUM** was the most complete and enduring education system for the **PERSON**
- Based on literacy, it had a perfect understanding of the medium and the change of mindset
- Can we adapt our literate heritage to the digital transformation?
- Can we preserve the value of language along with digital algorithms?
- Addressing the spiritual needs of the people and for the planet?

What electronic media bring to the Church
 Support and emphasize its universal message and access
 Bring **the person of the Pope** out in the open for a direct contact with the faithful
 Reach people individually and privately
 Support and dialogue with religious communities
 Make its services and sacraments available at-a-distance

CURA PERSONALIS:
PURPOSE - ETHICS



CURA APOSTOLICA:
ORGANIZATIONS - CAPACITY

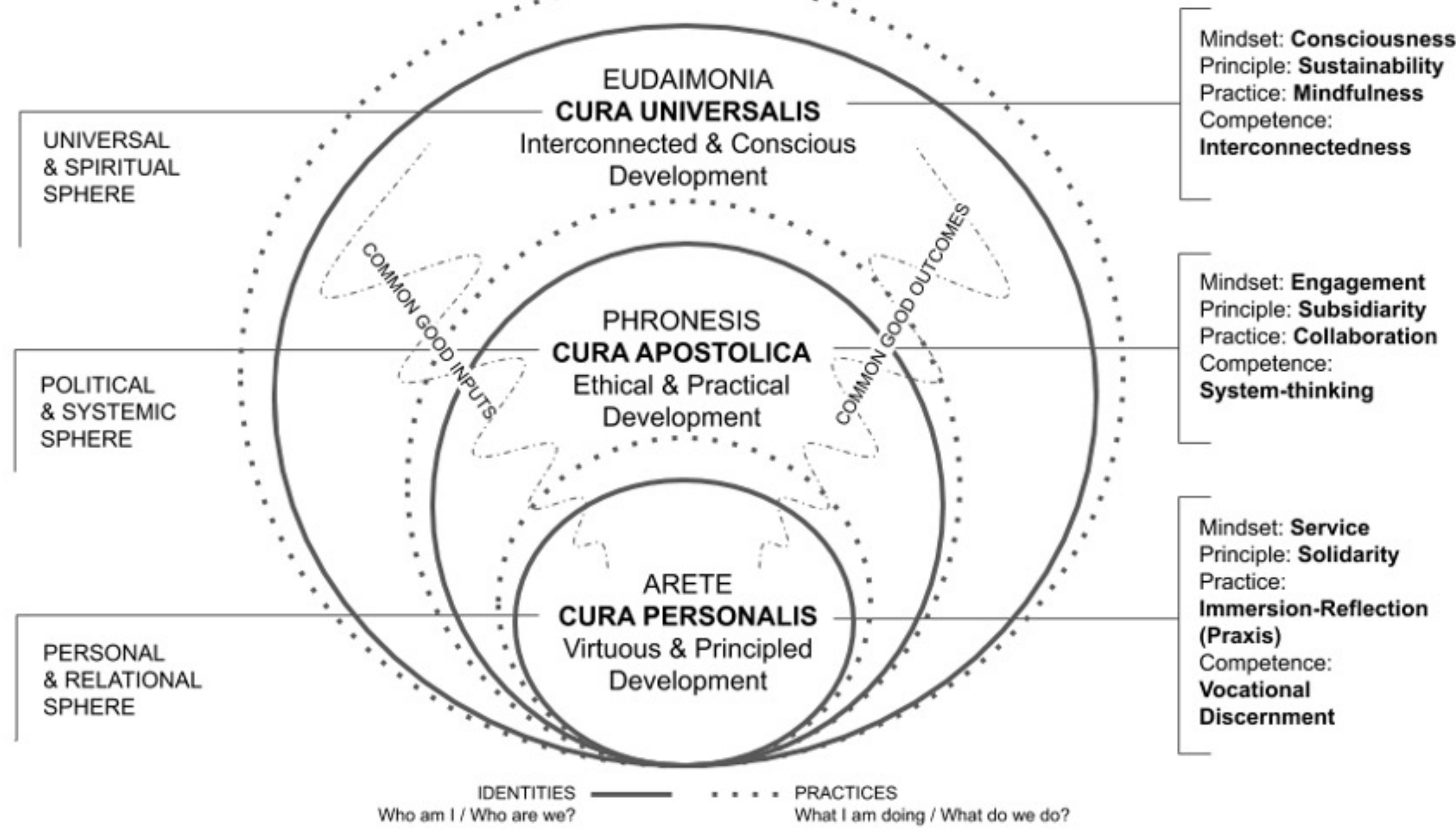


CURA UNIVERSALIS:
WORLD - SYSTEMS



Maybe there is a need for 'Jesuits 2.0'

Or, perhaps, create a new order



...for the defense of language?

- In the beginning was the word
- Language is the backbone of personal value and responsibility
- Only the church can support its role in an algorithmically agnostic world
- It doesn't mean ignoring the network

But it means playing an active role in making people responsible for what they say, write and publish on and offline