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Ignatian Spiritual Conversation and Digital Communication Culture

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**IGNATIAN SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION AND
DIGITAL COMMUNICATION CULTURE**

A Thesis Submitted to
the faculty of the
Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of
Licentiate in Sacred Theology (STL)

by
Park Soo Young Theodore, S.J.

Berkeley, California

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Committee Signatures

Director: **Rossano Zas-Friz, S.J., S.T.D.**

Date

Reader: **George E. Griener, S.J., Dr Theol.**

Date

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ABSTRACT

Ignatian Spiritual Conversation and Digital Communication Culture

Park Soo Young Theodore, S.J.

This study seeks to consider the lived experiences of those vulnerable in the culture of digital communication, especially to suggest the possibility of healing and recovery through the practical application of Ignatian spiritual conversation in the new horizon affecting religious life. For this purpose, this study explores the practical implication of Ignatian spiritual conversation in culture of digital communication by employing a hermeneutical methodology, the triple operation of the description of the phenomenon, critical analysis, and constructive interpretation.

This study highlights the in-depth understanding and practice of authentic conversation, observing the vulnerability of self-isolation and cognitive bias experienced by networked selves as new subjects created in the digital communication culture and the multifaceted religious phenomenon of networked religion, a new horizon for their spiritual life. Interdisciplinary understanding of psychological counseling, the philosophy of dialogue, and biblical and systematic theology attested to authentic conversation's healing, relational, and sacred dimensions. Ignatian spiritual conversation can be an applicable model of or alternative to those authentic conversations that help overcome the networked self's vulnerability in the micro perspective and has an inner transformative potential through the constructive fusion of networked religion and Ignatian spirituality in the macro view.

This study provides a theoretical foundation for an interdisciplinary understanding of Christian/Ignatian spiritual conversation. More practically, it will be instructive to pastors so that they will be more sensitive to and able to minister to the needs of elderly and generation MZ who are vulnerable due to self-isolation and cognitive bias, exacerbated by COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, this study presents a good map of the new deinstitutionalized and post-authoritarian religious-spiritual situation represented by those who are spiritual but not religious.

Keywords: Digital communication culture, Ignatian spiritual conversation, Networked self, Networked religion, Ignatian Spirituality, Authentic conversation.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- Auto* The Autobiography of St. Ignatius of Loyola. *Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings*. Translated by Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean. London: Penguin Books, 1996.
- Const* The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus. Padberg, John, ed. *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms: A Complete English Translation of the Official Latin Texts*. St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources [IJS], 1996.
- DV* *Dei Verbum*. Second Vatican Council. “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, 18 November, 1965.” In *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975.
- GC* General Congregation of the Society of Jesus. Padberg, John, ed. *Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees of the 31st–35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*. St. Louis: IJS, 2009.
- Letters* The Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola. *Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola*. Translated by William J. Young. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959.
- LG* *Lumen Gentium*. Second Vatican Council. “Dogmatic Constitution on The Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 21 November, 1964.” In *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, 350–426. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975.
- MHSI* Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu (Madrid from 1984, Rome from 1929).
- MonNad* Monumenta Nadal, vols. 13, 15, 21, 27, 90 of MHSI.
- SpEx* The *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. *The Spiritual Exercises*. In *Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings*. Translated by Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean. London: Penguin Books, 1996.

INTRODUCTION

Humanity has entered the middle of the 21st century facing an era of unprecedented newness.¹ This new era is fundamentally based on digital technology, which is simply composed of the numbers “0” and “1.” Ironically, it makes the predictability of the future more difficult and complicated. Above all, the COVID-19 pandemic is now functioning as a catalyst for accelerating this new era. It changed the mode of living in all aspects of cultures of communication. The realm of religion and spirituality is no exception to this change. Due to the pandemic, online Masses have become common, as the Catholic Church canceled in-person parish assemblies under quarantine laws. In such an irreversible digital environment, religion has the task of integrating its spiritual traditions with relevant interpretative flexibility.

In this unprecedented age, people’s experiences and perceptions of digital culture reveal a dichotomy between optimism and skepticism. “Techno-optimists argue that social media can liberate humanity, fire our imaginations, nurture community, expand our intellectual faculties and make us better citizens.”² On the other hand, “techno-skeptics refute that social media tether us with virtual chains, dulls our senses, intensifies our

1. It is being described and unfolded in various ways, such as the “Fourth Industrial Revolution,” “Artificial Intelligence,” “Dataism,” “Post-humanism (Trans-humanism),” “Metaverse,” etc. See the following resources for a global outlook and interpretation of the current digitization of humanity. OECD, *21st Century Technologies: Promises and Perils of a Dynamic Future* (Paris: OECD Publications, 1998), 123–24, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264163539-en>; Klaus Schwab, “The Fourth Industrial Revolution: What It Means and How to Respond,” World Economic Forum, January 14, 2016, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-what-it-means-and-how-to-respond/>; Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (London: Harper, 2018), 428; Inès Gharbi, Yomna Daoud, and Aïda Kammoun, “The Digitalization in the COVID-19 ERA,” *Handbook of Research on Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Threats and Impacts of Pandemics*, 2022, 284–304, <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-8674-7.ch015>.

2. Astra Taylor, *The People’s Platform: Taking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age* (New York: Metropolitan Books), 2014, Cf. Preface. Kindle.

isolation, withers our capacity for reflection, and shapes us to be effective consumers.”³ Nevertheless, one undeniable thing is that digital technology did not bring about utopia or dystopia yet. Instead, individuals and communities in the present digitalization are “morally entangled in social and cultural oppression just like in the past analog era,”⁴ and the oppressed and marginalized still exist in different appearances, which requires that caring for them should be in those modes, not in a rut.

Digital communication culture shifts individual’s identity to “networked self” in one’s social life driven by the technological revolution.⁵ Research on the vulnerability of the “networked self” to the digital environment is continuously being conducted. Manifold researchers and scholars have expressed multifaceted concerns about the various side effects of digital devices on people’s daily use of them and people’s increasing dependency on them. Both Gajewski (2016)⁶ and Michael, et al. (2018)⁷ warn of the risks of “digital dementia” due to the cumulative daily pattern of dependence on digital devices and the avoidance of human interaction from digital educational platforms such as e-learning or flipped learning. Ragu-Nathan, et al. (2008)⁸, Ayyagari, et al.

3. Ibid.

4. Kate Ott, *Christian Ethics for a Digital Society*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield), 2019, 63.

5. Ibid., 44.

6. R. Robert Gajewski, “Pitfalls of E-education: from Multimedia to Digital Dementia,” *Proceedings of the Federated Conference on Computer Science and Information Systems* (February 2016): 913–20, <https://doi.org/10.15439/2016f356>.

7. Michael, et al., “Digital Technologies as Biomarkers, Clinical Outcomes Assessment, and Recruitment Tools in Alzheimer’s Disease Clinical Trials,” *Alzheimer’s and Dementia: Translational Research and Clinical Interventions* 4, no. 1 (2018): 234–42.

8. T. S. Ragu-Nathan et al., “The Consequences of Technostress for End Users in Organizations: Conceptual Development and Empirical Validation,” *Information Systems Research* 19, no. 4 (2008): 417–33, <https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.1070.0165>.

(2011)⁹, Park Jong-pil (2013)¹⁰ highlight “technostress” that causes job dissatisfaction and work-family conflict. Shaffer, et al. (2004)¹¹ found out that “addictive phenomena should be understood as a syndrome with multiple expressions, that are the result of interacting biopsychosocial antecedents, different manifestations, and diverse consequences.”¹² In line with Shaffer’s model, there is considerable interdisciplinary research, such as Wilson, et al. (2010)¹³, Litt and Stock (2011)¹⁴, Moreno (2012)¹⁵, and Kanai, et al.¹⁶, commonly suggesting that there might be an association between Social Networking Service (hereafter SNS) usage and substance use disorders. Social scientist Sherri Turkle warns that digital communication technology, which values only speed, quantity, profit, and efficiency, instrumentalizes human relationships rather than

9. Ramakrishna Ayyagari, Varun Grover, and Russel Purvis “Technostress: Technological Antecedents and Implications,” *MIS Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (2011): 831–58, <https://doi.org/10.2307/41409963>.

10. Jong-pil Park, “Jojikkuseongwondure teknostress hyuongseongkwa younghyangedeahan youngu,” 조직구성원들의 테크노스트레스 형성과 영향에 관한 연구 [A study on the formation and influence of technostress among organizational members] *HankukITservicehakwheji*, 12, no 2 (2013): 55–71.

11. Howard J. Shaffer et al., “Toward a Syndrome Model of Addiction: Multiple Expressions, Common Etiology,” *Harvard Review of Psychiatry* 12, no. 6 (2004): 367–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10673220490905705>.

12. Rodolfo Eduardo Pezoa-Jares, “Internet Addiction: A Review,” *Journal of Addiction Research & Therapy*, 2012, <https://doi.org/10.4172/2155-6105.s6-004>.

13. Kathryn Wilson et al., “Psychological predictors of young adults’ use of social networking sites,” *Cyberpsychol Behav Soc Netw* 13 (2010): 173–77, <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2009.0094>.

14. Dana M. Litt and Michelle L. Stock, “Adolescent Alcohol-Related Risk Cognitions: The Roles of Social Norms and Social Networking Sites.,” *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors* 25, no. 4 (2011): 708–13, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024226>.

15. Megan A. Moreno, “Associations between Displayed Alcohol References on Facebook and Problem Drinking among College Students,” *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 166, no. 2 (January 2012): 157–63, <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpediatrics.2011.180>.

16. R. Kanai et al., “Online Social Network Size Is Reflected in Human Brain Structure,” *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 279, no. 1732 (2011): 1327–34, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2011.1959>.

deepening them, leading to the loss of uninterrupted thought, self-reflection, and just being.¹⁷ Analyzing today's pressing issues like privacy violations, political fragmentation, and addiction to technology surrounded by the digital age as ideological, moral, psychological, and spiritual crises, media communication scholars Healey and Woods criticize all these things as fundamentally based on the moral Catechism of Silicon Valley.¹⁸

Furthermore, a new remarkable phenomenon as “networked religion” emerges in the religious-spiritual realm. In the early 2000s, Christopher Helland attempted a conceptual distinction between online religion and religion online for the first time.¹⁹ Heidi Campbell describes a new phase of online religious practice with the concept of “networked religion” encapsulating how spiritual experience, belief, and practice are lived out online through dynamic interaction shifting between both online and offline.²⁰ Piotr Siuda proposed a new typology as a conceptual framework for mapping digital

17. Ott, 50; Sherri Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 166.

18. Kevin Healey and Robert Woods, *Ethics and Religion in the Age of Social Media: Digital Proverbs for Responsible Citizens* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 25–33. Healey and Woods view the origin of the crisis of digital communication culture, symbolized by Silicon Valley, as a collision between technology and religion. It is a “unique blend of free markets libertarianism and do-it-yourself spirituality,” describing its ideology as “the moral Catechism of Silicon Valley” including a five-point creed: “Information is wisdom,” “Transparency is authenticity,” “Convergence is integrity,” “Processing is judgment,” and “Storage is memory.” The authors pursue a prophetic media critique by disproving those tenets one by one.

19. Christopher Helland, “Online Religion/Religion Online and Virtual Communitas,” in *Religion on the Internet*, ed. Jeffrey K. Hadden, Douglas E. Cowan, (Amsterdam: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2000), 205–24.

20. Heidi A. Campbell, “Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 1 (August 2011): 65, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfr074>.

religion.²¹ Giulia Evolvi predicted that recognizing the mediated presence of digital media and its establishment as a third spatiality could reveal the potential of a new online–offline spiritual life.²²

In the context of these previous studies, I will pay attention to the identity of an individual or group, being faced with the pitfalls of the culture of digital communication from the spiritual-pastoral perspective. Based on the discussion in my previous article, “The Value of Spiritual Conversation in the Digital Age,”²³ here I attempt to further develop this. The previous article was motivated by Pope Francis’ Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, urging us to “find ways to pass from virtual contact to good and healthy communication”²⁴ amid the challenges of the culture of digital communication. In that article, I presented Ignatian spiritual conversation as the model of authentic conversation in digital communication and analyzed its four inner components—listening, speaking, silence and reflecting—and proposed them as remedial alternatives corresponding to the crises of digital communication. However, while urging the use of Ignatian spiritual conversation it had a limitation in that the focus of the application was ambiguous because the range of users, those who would engage in spiritual conversation, was not specified but too broad. In addition, it would have been

21. Piotr Siuda, “Mapping Digital Religion: Exploring the Need for New Typologies,” *Religions* 12, no. 6 (2021): 3, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060373>.

22. Giulia Evolvi, “Religion and the Internet: Digital Religion, (Hyper)Mediated Spaces, and Materiality,” *Zeitschrift Für Religion, Gesellschaft Und Politik*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41682-021-00087-9>.

23. Soo Young Park, “The Value of Spiritual Conversation in the Digital Age,” *Ignaziana: rivista di ricerca teologica* 31(2021): 75–111, accessed December 5, 2021, <http://www.ignaziana.org>.

24. Francis, *Christus Vivit*, Post-Synodal Exhortation to Young People and to the Entire People of God, Vatican Website, March 25, 2019, sec. 90, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html.

better if a contextual investigation into the convergence of meaning arising from the conversation taking place within various disciplines in the humanities. Such an investigation could reveal the contextual nature of offering spiritual conversation as one method of authentic communication.

Therefore, this study would supplement and develop further the challenges identified in the previous investigation through a closer study of the crises in the culture of digital communication and a deeper diagnosis of religious-spiritual needs, focusing on those who are in need of pastoral care, marginalized, and isolated, recognizing its significance as a sign of the times. What status does Christian spiritual tradition, especially that of the Ignatian spiritual conversation, hold in the current culture of digital communication? Is its value valid or anachronistic? If so, in what way? How can it be applied in relevant appropriation? These are the working questions to which this study seeks to respond.

SCOPE AND NATURE

One of the pillars of this study is recognizing and responding to the characteristics, challenges, and crises of digital communication culture represented by the “networked self” and “networked religion.” The focus of this pillar is to observe the social and spiritual phenomena of people, especially the youth and the elderly, who are suffering and marginalized the most in the digital age, and to explore the dimension of pastoral care for them. The other pillar is a reflection on a culture of authentic conversation that discovers, recovers, and grows holistic relationships from a less biased view of the world’s reality. Here, general studies of conversation, including prior philosophical and psychological studies, biblical interpretive research, and Christian

theology are explored to understand what authentic conversation is. Next, the content and meaning of spiritual conversation within the Ignatian tradition will be deeply examined.

As the hermeneutical application between two pillars, this study focuses on the correlation between spiritual conversation and the various modes of communication through both the micro and macroscope. From a microscopic view, I will focus on the inner transformation among the conversation participants within the dynamic interaction of the internal components of Ignatian spiritual conversation. From a macroscopic view, I will interpret the potential of how the present religious and spiritual horizons and the tradition and wisdom of Ignatian spiritual conversation can be harmonized and constructively fused. Therefore, it neither suggests that spiritual conversation is the only alternative nor that the long-standing traditional discourse of spiritual conversation should be adapted and applied directly to a particular digital platform without any modification. Instead, the critical question pursued by this study is how the conventional and creative approach of spiritual conversation and its essential internal components can overcome the crisis of the culture of digital communication.

THESIS STATEMENT

This study argues that Ignatian spiritual conversation in the digital communication culture has significant value as a pastoral tool to care for the vulnerabilities of networked selves, especially the youth and the elderly, promoting inner transformation in the new phenomenon of networked religion.

METHODOLOGY

Sandra Schneiders, IHM has emphasized that “the primary aim of the discipline of spirituality is to understand the phenomena of the Christian life as experience,”²⁵ and she proposes a hermeneutical approach to it. This methodology is a useful instrument for interpreting the signs of the times to critically understand the phenomena of human life as an experience and engage in a constructive level as transformative action.

The particular object of study in this research about the experience of Christian life is the “spiritual conversation” in the digital communication culture. To interpret this phenomenon, it is necessary to articulate and make explicit a hermeneutical strategy that includes a triple operation: (1) description of the phenomenon, (2) critical analysis, and (3) constructive interpretation. “As the hermeneutical circle revolves, the three phases will mutually condition and re-condition each other.”²⁶

As a step of description of the phenomenon, Chapter I investigates the characteristics of the digital communication culture and the networked self, its core agent, and diagnoses an unprecedented representative crisis. It will then search with an interdisciplinary approach for people’s changing perceptions and needs regarding religious and spiritual issues in the digital age based on religious-sociological quantitative surveys.

As a step of critical analysis, Chapter II involves a survey of literature on the general concept and theory of authentic conversation, discovering philosophical and

25. Sandra Schneiders, “A Hermeneutical Approach to the Study of Christian Spirituality” (1994), in Elizabeth A. Dreyer, Mark S. Burrows, *Minding the Spirit, The Study of Christian Spirituality*, Baltimore–London: John Hopkins University Press, 2005, 56.

26. Ibid.

psychological grounds for extending the discussion to the realm of religious and spiritual conversation so as to explore the biblical and theological resources more systematically.

As a step of constructive interpretation and a proposal, Chapter III explores Ignatian spiritual conversation, tracing its development within Jesuit sources, and attempts a hermeneutical appropriation of Ignatian spiritual conversation in digital communication to cultivate the value of healthy digital literacy through its praxis and to realize the ultimate vision of inner transformation.

SIGNIFICANCE

This study expects the following effects and significance within two realms of the academic study of spirituality: On the one hand, in a practical realm, this study introduces the legacy of Ignatian spiritual conversation as a pastoral tool for “networked selves,” particularly youth and the elderly who are vulnerable and marginalized in the crises of digital communication. Through the hermeneutical application of Ignatian spiritual conversation, people may enjoy a healthier and more authentic culture of communication by being interested in spiritual values. This study may provide seeds for the ecology of faith through cultivating a sound digital literacy, promoting human dignity, facilitating spiritual sharing in mutual respect, and exercising individual and communal conversion and discernment in the ministries of the Church that serve youth and the elderly.

On the other hand, in a theoretical realm, this study may lay an in-depth foundation for an interdisciplinary understanding of Christian/Ignatian spiritual conversation by exploring anthropology, psychology, philosophy, biblical theology, and systematic theology. In addition, this study may have significance because it is the first to

raise Ignatian spiritual conversation as a discussion topic for spirituality in the digital age, particularly its transformative potential in the context of “networked religion.”

CHAPTER I

DISCERNING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

“Where are you?” (Gn 3:9)²⁷ It was the first question that God asked humanity after they ate the forbidden fruit in the Eden Garden. When the question was asked, the humans were hiding. Instead of a context of sin and judgment, can we see this question from God as the beginning of God’s invitation from darkness to light? If this is so, might we, people living in the world of digital technology, be able to ask ourselves where we are and where we are going? What have we opened our eyes to, and from whom are we hiding?

From an anthropological point of view, all technologies have been a double-edged sword, placed in tension between humanity and inhumanity. Technology opened the eyes of humanity because it has evolved to improve people’s lives and satisfy their needs for survival and prosperity. But concomitantly, the history of technology for humanity sits alongside the history of inhumanity. People and groups have also been excluded from the benefits of technology. They are victims of the intentional or unintentional abuse of technology and the attempts to hide their vulnerable voices and their cries of pain. In today’s world, digital technology has also formed a new communication structure for humanity. It is practiced and reproduced through the culture of human interaction. Humanity has opened its eyes to an unprecedented new self, that is, the networked self.

27. Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible, revised edition* © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Humans, the embodied individuals, experience digital technology as not limited to just the object of experience because the relationship between technology and self is mutually constituting. We experience this in our daily lives by altering, expanding, or limiting our existing abilities.²⁸ Concurrently, technology mediates our embodied perception of reality.²⁹ We steadily experience and internalize digital technologies as constructing and defining the world around us. Digital network technology has generated an emergence of the networked self. The networked self as configuring subject is the individual who creates flexible and fluid groups, societies, and organizations composed of complex networks.³⁰ The individual as a networked self is no longer just an arithmetical unit of a certain group or society but a dynamic autonomous subject influencing the compositional principles of macroeconomics, politics, and culture. Now, the networked self is a newly emerging reality in the digital age.

Although the networked self becomes the essential concept to explain the causes and current status of the culture of digital communication, this new concept vaguely encompasses the complex and conflicting values of “the self” and “the network.” “The self” refers to the core source of individuality and diversity, whereas “the network” refers to the collective structure of gathering and connection. This newly emerged subject, as a complex mix of these contradictory concepts, further obscures and complicates predictions across political, economic, and socio-cultural phenomena. As such, the networked self goes beyond the ideological system of social class theory and the

28. Julie E. Cohen, *Configuring the Networked Self: Law, Code, and the Play of Everyday Practice* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2012), 46.

29. Ibid.

30. Zizi Papacharissi, *A Networked Self: Identity, Community and Culture on Social Network Sites* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 304–5.

liberation of individuals in the past analog era. The networked self is a concrete, empirical, and historical reality in the social reality requiring a new understanding of the communication between the individual and the community, the private and public sphere, and culture, politics and the market.

This networked self was created and facilitated by triple revolutions within the technology of digital communication.³¹ Firstly, the revolution of social networks, which affords more diversity in relationships and social worlds as well as bridges to reach these worlds and maneuverability to move among them; secondly, the internet revolution that gives power of communication and information-gathering capacities; thirdly, the mobile revolution, with highly mobile accessibility, which provides the possibility of a continuous presence and pervasive awareness of others beyond physical and spatial boundaries. In particular, SNS provides a platform for individuals' self-presentation and information sharing, thereby providing a more dynamic, exciting, and complex information exchange than the previous one-way flow of information.³² This whole process caused a re-evaluation of the information exchanged. Consequently, a person's view of self has shifted from what they think of themselves to how they perceive others thinking of them. Even when logged off, one still sees oneself through the layers of how others see in online communities.

31. Harrison Rainie and Barry Wellman, *Networked: the New Social Operating System* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press Ltd, 2014), 11–12.

32. Danah Boyd summarizes the distinctive features of the SNS platform in its combination that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system." Boyd & Ellison, "Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13, no. 1 (2007): 11.

In this way, the networked self, which configures and is configured by digital technology, recognizes itself and expands its identity through communication with others. Within this context, this chapter will describe the phenomenal vulnerability³³ of the networked self and explore the new existential thirst and requests for religious and spiritual spheres in the digital age.

1. THE VULNERABILITIES IN THE NETWORKED SELF

The networked self in the culture of digital communication can be roughly divided into two levels, connection-oriented and information-oriented, according to the practical application of the media technology platforms. Facebook and WhatsApp mainly represent the former, and the latter is represented by YouTube and Twitter.³⁴ The networked selves, the subjects of digital communication culture, are experiencing both in a crossover of these levels. Some people use these media platforms to fully adjust and use them for their benefits without much difficulty while fully demonstrating their autonomous subjectivity by using digital technology. For example, they can cultivate work efficiency with Skype, transcend the space and time constraints of real-time education with Zoom, and enjoy the comfort of family gatherings with FaceTime. From a

33. This refers to people and communities at risk of or experiencing systematic and persistent exclusion from resources, opportunities, and rights the rest of society has. It includes vulnerability in both extraordinary humanitarian crises and everyday individual life. Libby Young and Ivana Jurko, "The Future of Vulnerability: Humanity in the Digital Age," *Humanitech*, February 1, 2021, <https://apo.org.au/node/311045>.

34. This simple distinction cannot be regarded as an essential criterion in that it does not permanently show the changing aspects of the living digital ecosystem. The recent explosive use by Generation MZ of TikTok or Shorts video disproves this with the emergence of a new area of connection through a creative way of diffusing information.

psychological point of view, many of these people are “hands-on,” reasonable “doers,” with stable inner balance and high-stress tolerance.³⁵

However, as in the analog era, in the present society of digitalization, vulnerable and marginalized people exist and even grow in number in the area of communication. Many people complain of mixed discomforts, anxiety, and even pains rather than comfortably adapting to the digital communication environment. Some miss the comfort of the freedoms of real-life and genuine dialogue with friendly handshakes and caring hugs. Others are thirsty for the inner wisdom of a deeper dimension and the experiential knowledge learned through physicality in real time-space rather than virtual space. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which most communication is restricted to online, this shadow of the digital communication culture is expressed more publicly and distinctly by the voice of the vulnerable.³⁶ This was predicted more than ten years ago since the mid-2000s, when Web 2.0-based³⁷ digital communication platforms had begun to spread in earnest, and the pandemic has played a decisive role as a catalyst. In this regard, this section will attempt to describe two representative vulnerabilities: (1) self-

35. Elena Bezzubova, “Digital Depersonalization in the Time of Social Isolation,” *Psychology Today*, May 14, 2020, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/the-search-self/202005/digital-depersonalization-in-the-time-social-isolation>.

36. “We were already in crisis before the coronavirus hit. People were dying from alcohol, drugs, and suicide, were lonely and isolated, and this was before we asked them to isolate even more. Most people recover from the coronavirus in weeks; our health care and social service systems were failing these people before it ever became overwhelmed by a virus.” Benjamin F. Miller, “Mental Illness is Epidemic within the Coronavirus Pandemic,” *USA Today*, April 8, 2020, accessed February 6, 2022, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2020/04/08/mental-health-our-epidemic-within-coronavirus-pandemic-column/2939511001/>.

37. Web 2.0 is a way to understand and shape the Internet as many people’s cooperative, collaborative work. It, therefore, gives high priority to participation, it exploits the users’ collective intelligence, supports non-experts in creating and shaping Wikis, Blog, and Podcasts, etc., it produces user-generated content and provides time both a consumer and a producer. Claudia Paganini, “Understanding God in the Web 2.0,” in *Religion in the Age of Digitalization: From New Media to Spiritual Machines*, eds. Giulia Isetti et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), 26.

isolation and (2) the cognitive bias experienced by the networked self. This classification is not merely a theoretical or conceptual categorization but a description based on the appeal of vulnerable people and the existential suffering in their lived experience.³⁸

1.1. Self-Isolation in Connection-oriented Networked Self

Mark Zuckerberg, the Facebook founder, proudly advocates his business as a social network that connects people, builds community, and brings the world closer together.³⁹ This argument was his defense in the April 2018 hearing of the U.S. Senate Judiciary and Commerce Committees, which were investigating voter manipulation through leakage user's data. This scene dramatically exposed a contradictory tension between the constructive vision of SNS platform business and the destructive force against public benefit.

The tension between the ideal and reality of connection-oriented platforms is reflected in the actual life of the youth, the most active users of the platform, generation MZ. Jonah and Kate et al. investigated adolescents' contrasting perspectives regarding SNS use in forming relationships among themselves.⁴⁰ This study vividly testifies that adolescents, who have used smartphones since they were newborns, directly experienced digital communication technology without value judgment. Adolescents' views on SNS

38. Since vulnerability results from complex processes, it isn't easy to standardize on a single global standard. Discussion should start at a point of localization that requires regular reconsideration in the context of occurrence with qualitative and quantitative insight. Young and Jurko, "Future of Vulnerability", 8.

39. Transcript courtesy of Bloomberg Government, "Transcript of Mark Zuckerberg's Senate hearing," *The Washington Post*, April 10, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/04/10/transcript-of-mark-zuckerbergs-senate-hearing/>.

40. Jonah R. Rimer and Kate C. Tilleczek, "Digital Media, Youth, and Social Relationships," in *Youth in the Digital Age: Paradox, Promise, Predicament*, ed. By Kate C. Tilleczek and Valerie M. Campbell (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 113–27.

in their own living world can be analyzed into three sets of tension between positivity and negativity: (1) easy reach⁴¹ or difficult distance⁴², (2) forging connections⁴³ or changing relationships⁴⁴, and (3) enhanced⁴⁵ or suffering sociality⁴⁶. The former in each set—easy reach, forging connections, and enhanced sociality—implies that “young people experienced and perceived multiple positive elements to digital media, including social organization; better communication; transcending place; belonging and support; a novel, ongoing, or rekindled connections; and improved relationships and social lives.”⁴⁷ On the other hand, the latter of each set—difficult distance, changing relationships, and suffering sociality—indicates concerns and difficulties: anonymity, exclusion, striving for

41. “Ease of communication and availability; better and wider communication; the ability to keep in touch, often with people living elsewhere; transcending geography; the assistance that digital media provided when scheduling and making plans to socialize.” *Ibid.*, 114–15.

42. “Being struggled and anxiety when digital media was not available; feeling pressure to keep up with updates and to respond to messages; privacy protection issues; ubiquitousness effectively limited participants’ choice to engage social contact.” *Ibid.*, 115–17.

43. “New advantages and possibilities revolved around developing and continuing relationships; foster friendships with people met offline, facilitated relationships for three participants in particular was reconnecting with friends and family; helped reconnect with childhood friends, also invoking geographical reach.” *Ibid.*, 118–119.

44. “No longer spending time outdoors or being active with friends, in essence, sociality moved indoors; how digital media use resulted in less face-to-face interaction.” *Ibid.*, 119.

45. “Digital media made them more social and interactive; how digital media had a positive effect on their social lives; improved social lives were through the ability to stay updated; allowed them to share good news; facilitating more genuine and supportive relationships.” *Ibid.*, 120–21.

46. “Their close relationships failing or being negatively affected by technology use; due to so much interaction happening online, they or others were lacking social skills; the idea of a digital cloak and the ability to hide behind it. Key to this was anonymity and meanness that can arise from it; the impacts of online anonymity; the notion of a digital cloak and text communication, online, one can act differently to how one really feels, how tone, emotions, and intentions can be misinterpreted online, leading to arguments; textual interaction was missing sensory and social cues normally found in offline communication.” *Ibid.*, 121–24.

47. *Ibid.*, 126.

attention, stress and anxiety, exposure, scrutiny and judgment, misinterpretation, less face-to-face interaction, and suffering relationships and social lives.⁴⁸

While the above study is a report from a synchronic point of view on the experiences and feelings of adolescents themselves, from a more diachronic perspective, looking at the changes and flow of communication culture between the past analog era and the present digital era, we can observe that they converge on the vulnerability of self-isolation. This shows the irony that an overly connection-oriented network leads to disconnection. Here self-isolation encompasses both isolation from others and alienation from oneself.

Firstly, the former, isolation from others, is related to the attachment to technology of non-face-to-face communication. Generation MZ enjoys freedom from strict conventional formality. Phubbing, an act of talking to other people but with your eyes on your phone, becomes habitual in young people's daily conversation. They prefer texting and posting much more than the phone. This is because the phone needs an immediate response in real-time, but the texting and posting is editable, and this makes it possible for people to edit the best answer. They are so accustomed to the relaxation coming from this practice that they even become afraid of face-to-face communication.⁴⁹ Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated face-to-face avoidance of every generation. Compared to analog face-to-face conversation, however, there is a decrease in common courtesy toward the other emotional expressions become extreme, and the irresponsibility of the message and the attitude of a bystander toward others becomes

48. Ibid.

49. Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 143.

reinforced. This dramatically undermines the credibility of communication. Although in face-to-face situations one can see in real-time even if not understanding, in non-face-to-face digital communication, the message recipient can arbitrarily choose to control the response time. The message bearers may become anxious about whether their intentions were well-delivered, or whether they are being rejected or ignored. When they encounter face-to-face situations with others unexpectedly, people might be easily embarrassed and even afraid. Media psychologist Clifford Nass shows that those who use SNS the most have difficulty reading others' emotions, including their own, but face-to-face conversation leads to greater self-esteem and an improved ability to deal with others.⁵⁰ Face-to-face conversations, especially eye-to-eye conversations, are essential for the development of empathy.⁵¹

Also, excessive avoidance of face-to-face communication leads to conflict avoidance.⁵² Connection-oriented networked selves can move in and out of interactions

50. Clifford Nass, "Is Facebook Stunting Your Child's Growth?" *Pacific Standard*, April 23, 2012, <http://www.psmag.com/culture/is-facebook-stunting-your-childs-growth-40577>, quoted in Turkle, 25.

51. Daniel Siegel, cited in Mark Matousek, "The Meeting Eyes of Love: How Empathy Is Born in Us," *Psychology Today*, April 8, 2011, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/ethical-wisdom/201104/the-meeting-eyes-love-how-empathy-is-born-in-us/>.

52. About 45 percent of US adults said the religious issue conversations cause tension and controversy or turn political. On the other hand, 31 percent said they are not interested in religious dialogue simply because they do not belong to any religion or think religious expressions themselves are tacky or outdated. These figures show that the main reason for communication avoidance is the burden and fear of conflict and disagreement caused by conversation and communication, rather than indifference to the communicative message itself. Barna Group, *Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age: How Christians' Approach to Sharing Their Faith Has Changed in 25 Years* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2018), 53. The research was carried out through active collaboration between the Barna Group and Lutheran Hour Ministries in line with "the methodologies of both an in-depth survey (qualitative), which performed an exploratory, open-ended, online survey conducted among 102 Christians to understand more about their spiritual conversations as well as online interactions. This survey was conducted between April 20 and May 15, 2017. and nationally representative survey (quantitative), which includes the primary source of data in the survey of 1,714 U.S. adults, comprised of an over-sample of 535 Millennials and 689 Practicing Christians, conducted online June 22–July 13, 2017; Respondents were recruited from a national consumer panel, and minimal weighting was applied to ensure representation of certain demographic factors, such as

freely, especially from ideas and situations in which they feel uncomfortable. If the easiest solution to dissonance is to avoid problems that produce it, then the potential for unrealistic socialization is high.⁵³ Networked selves believe that emotional and irrational aspects can be minimized by texting rather than real-time communication when conflict arises. However, arguing through texting reduces the relationship itself and reduces the possibility of empathy. In a relationship we value, we often realize how much a person loves and cares for us even if their expression tells us that they are about to get mad at us.⁵⁴ In the past, people made efforts to coordinate and resolve the differences among dialogue participants.⁵⁵ In real-life communities, conflicts and disagreements could be opportunities for recognizing how others are different and to coordinate the matter among dialogue participants, thereby strengthening the solidarity of deeper community. Yet non-face-to-face communication technology makes it easier to disconnect or log out with one push of a button, even in shutting an opponent down by blocking them. Social skills and virtues, such as tolerance, patience, and conflict alleviation and resolution explicitly decreased in virtual communities so that the ability to reconcile also suffers.⁵⁶

age, gender, ethnicity and region. The sample error for this data is plus or minus 2.2% at the 95% confidence level for the total sample. A subgroup of participants had either: ‘shared my views on faith or religion in the last 5 years’ or ‘someone has shared their views on faith or religion with me in the last 5 years.’”

53. Thomas Wells Brignall and Thomas Van Valey, “The Impact of Internet Communications on Social Interaction,” *Sociological Spectrum* 25, no. 3 (2005): 345, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02732170590925882>.

54. Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 131.

55. Seong-dae Cho, “Hyundaisahoiwa Ingangwangyeui Wegee” 현대사회와 인간관계의 위기 [Modern Society and the Crisis of Human Relationship], *Hanguookingangwangyehakbo* 5. no. 1 (October 2000): 127.

56. Seong-chul Park, “Digital Media Sidaeeui Ingan Communication Yiron” 디지털 미디어 시대의 인간 커뮤니케이션 이론 [Human Communication Theory in the Digital Media Age], *Dokohhak* 38 (December 2018): 134.

Eventually, all that remains are connections with groups that are homogeneous with similar opinions. The resulting irony is uniformity rather than diversity among networked selves. Therefore, the opportunity and space for synchronized face-to-face conversations should be expanded for generation MZ, who are vulnerable in their self-isolation, so that they can find their way to authentic conversation with empathy through more honest and genuine sharing of self with others.

Secondly, the latter form of self-alienation, is related to an emergence of a new perception of sociality. Although it is like the past in that humans are relational animals, connection-oriented network platforms have drastically shifted this feature. In the analog time of the past, the sense of belonging in human networks could be explicitly divided between vertical-bureaucratic institutions and smaller private groups with intensive intimacy. Yet, in the digital age, connection-oriented selves turn into entities that freely and flexibly participate and withdraw in various networking platforms according to their interests and zeal, rather than being fixed to any particular group. Similar to the position of youth as stated above, the new concept of friendship and intimacy promoted the formation of a more proactive and autonomous network of relationships. Thus, today's generation MZ's intimacy is defined not by how long any content information is exchangeable but by how often and how easily it can be recognized and confirmed to be interconnected with others.⁵⁷

This new perception has led to too much immersion in and dependence upon social media. This would seem to disprove common sense in that whatever is more easily formed can also be easily dismantled. In shallow and unsympathetic communication, so-

57. Ibid.

called soulless words prevail, and this reduces emotional ties. Of course, it is not totally fair to devalue the generation MZ's friendship unilaterally by the past criteria of the analogue generation. Nevertheless, relationships that lack genuine conversation in the depth of one's interiority lead to loneliness and anxiety among generation MZ. The American Psychological Association (APA) reported that generation MZ has the highest average stress level and the lowest level of mental health. For fifty-five percent of them, the use of social media on smartphones has created new problems, namely fear of missing out (FOMO) and Problematic Smartphone Use (PSU).⁵⁸ The anxiety of friendship in the culture of digital communication is leading to smartphone addiction and abuse. Psychologist Melissa G. Hunt strongly suggests that limiting social media use to approximately 30 minutes per day may lead to significant improvement in the well-being of youth.⁵⁹ It is an illusion to think that always being connected is going to make one less lonely.⁶⁰ If one is not able to be alone, one will be lonelier.⁶¹ Developmental psychology and neuroscience testify that a stable sense of self can be formed only in times of solitude, that is, when one is alone with one's thoughts without responding to external stimuli.⁶² Therefore, generation MZ should be given more opportunities to escape from

58. Kevin Adrian and Riana Sahrani, "Relationship Between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Problematic Smartphone Use (PSU) in Generation Z with Stress as a Moderator," *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 570 (2021): 964.

59. Melissa G. Hunt et al., "No More FOMO: Limiting Social Media Decreases Loneliness and Depression," *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 37, no. 10 (2018): 763.

60. Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 23.

61. Donald W. Winnicott, "The Capacity to Be Alone," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 39, no. 5 (September–October 1958): 416–20, quoted in Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 23.

62. Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 61.

the compulsion of smartphones, and to develop the capability of being in solitude and silence and self-reflection in stillness.

The connection-oriented networked self brings about extraordinary changes and challenges in the culture of communication. These variable phenomena invite us to reflect beyond the investigation of the temporary social matters and call for humanitarian and even more religious and spiritual care for the vulnerable, particularly youth, those who are absolutely susceptible to self-isolation under SNS platforms.

1.2. Cognitive Bias in Information-oriented Networked Self

Digital technologies have also spawned an information-oriented networked self by providing unprecedented opportunities to access and analyze the vastly overflowing and rapidly growing information ecosystem. Google CEO Eric Schmidt said, “Between the dawn of humanity and 2003, roughly 5 Exabytes of information were created. We generate that amount every two days now.... So, there is a data explosion. And the data explosion is overwhelming all of us.”⁶³

Yet the problem is that the human brain has a limited capacity to process information. The brain can only process a limited amount of information, and too many stimuli can lead to information overload. Our brains use a variety of tricks to avoid being overwhelmed. Cognitive bias⁶⁴ is one of the brain’s self-protection mechanisms. Cognitive biases are the mental shortcuts that take us away from rationality and our best

63. An Exabyte is roughly a million gigabytes. Megan Garber, “The Future is Mobile, and Other Thoughts from Google CEO Eric Schmidt’s Speech at ASNE,” *NiemanLab*, April 12, 2010, <https://www.niemanlab.org/2010/04/the-future-is-mobile-and-other-thoughts-from-google-ceo-eric-schmidts-speech-at-asne/>.

64. There are more than 180 cognitive biases which affect how we process information. Jeff Desjardins, “24 Cognitive Biases That Are Warping Your Perception of Reality,” *Visual Capitalist*, November 26, 2021, <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/24-cognitive-biases-warping-reality/>.

judgment in making decisions and best judgment to aid our decisions.⁶⁵ When confronted with information that contradicts our beliefs, our brains turn off their reasoning abilities and initiate emotional defenses.⁶⁶

Corresponding to the defense mechanism of the human brain, the artificial intelligence (AI) algorithm⁶⁷ has applied and developed personalization technology in both social media platforms and search engines. It is designed to select only the content that is most attractive and relevant to each individual user. Also, push technology within personalization technology accelerates ubiquitous conversational relationships between humans and machines, eliciting and managing human emotional responses and needs such as happiness, laughter, anxiety, frustration, stress, and surprise.⁶⁸ The information-oriented networked self is increasingly quantified by the way data is read. This has made people not merely information recipients but also data diffusers of a vast information ecosystem.

Dark shadows in the AI algorithm systems have already become evident in the political, social, and cultural sphere to render many people vulnerable to data manipulation by enhancing the user's cognitive biases so extensively as to advance an era of post-truth. For instance, personalization technology with detailed advertising tools or

65. Yael Levey, "Cognitive Biases in Digital: Why Users are Irrational and How to Design for it (Part 1)," *I AM NOT MY PIXELS*, July 5, 2017, <https://www.iamnotmypixels.com/cognitive-biases-in-digital-why-users-are-irrational-and-how-to-design-for-it-part-1/>.

66. Alan C. Miller, "Confronting Confirmation Bias: Giving Truth a Fighting Chance in the Information Age," *Social Education* 80 no. 5 (2016): 276.

67. Algorithm can be defined as "a process or set of rules to be followed in calculations or other problem-solving operations, especially by a computer. "Algorithm Bias," Florida State University Libraries, accessed February 10, 2022, <https://guides.lib.fsu.edu/c.php?g=1060571&p=7710163>

68. Ott, 59.

propagandizing disinformation in filter bubbles⁶⁹ easily exploits the information-oriented networked self's various algorithmic biases⁷⁰ such as confirmation bias, negativity bias, homogeneity bias,⁷¹ popularity bias⁷², etc. Since these biases are manipulated by social robots,⁷³ their scale and speed are beyond controllable limits. Among the numerous cognitive biases of the human brain, the biases that people should pay attention to are confirmation bias and negativity bias. This is because these biases impede the perception of substantive truth in critical issues and the sound development of society more than any other bias and cause the production and spread of fake news, anti-intellectualism, and polarization and division in society.⁷⁴

69. The term “filter bubble” refers to the results of the algorithms that dictate what we encounter online and display more contents according to the user’s click tendency. “How Filter Bubbles Distort Reality: Everything You Need to Know,” FS, accessed February 10, 2022, <https://fs.blog/filter-bubbles/>.

70. “Algorithmic bias describes systematic and repeatable errors in a computer system that create unfair outcomes, such as privileging one arbitrary group of users over others. Also, occurs when an algorithm produces results that are systemically prejudiced due to erroneous assumptions in the machine learning process.” “Algorithm Bias,” Florida State University Libraries.

71. Homogeneity bias indicates by exposing only uniform information, where individuals see members of other groups as being relatively less varied than members of their own group. Dimitar Nikolov et al., “Measuring Online Social Bubbles,” *PeerJ Computer Science* 1 (February 2015), <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj-cs.38>.

72. Popularity bias means to judge content only by the number of clicks regardless of the quality of information. Giovanni Luca Ciampaglia et al., “How Algorithmic Popularity Bias Hinders or Promotes Quality,” *Scientific Reports* 8, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-018-34203-2>.

73. Social bots refer to computer programs automated accounts impersonating humans. Most social bots, like Twitter’s Big Ben, are harmless. “However, some conceal their real nature and are used for malicious intents, such as boosting disinformation or falsely creating the appearance of a grassroots movement, also called astroturfing.” Giovanni Luca Ciampaglia and Filippo Menczer, “Misinformation and biases infect social media, both intentionally and accidentally,” *The Conversation*, January 10, 2019, <https://theconversation.com/misinformation-and-biases-infect-social-media-both-intentionally-and-accidentally-97148>.

74. June-man Kang points out five cognitive biases that affect today’s anti-intellectualism, of which confirmation bias and negativity bias seem to be linked to the uncritical acceptance of digital media in an information-oriented network. June-man Kang, “Whe Daejoongun Banjisungjuue Meryodoinunga?” 왜 대중은 반지성주의에 매료되는가? [Why the Public Is Captivated by Anti-intellectualism?], *The Journal of Political Science & Communication* 22, no. 1 (February 2019): 44–47.

Firstly, confirmation bias tends to accept information consistent with one's beliefs and ignores information inconsistent with one's beliefs. The latter is also called disconfirmation bias. It makes it is easy to find information that fits one's beliefs, while evidence in the real world is complicated and unclear. For example, YouTube's main screen is personalized according to users' search and viewing records. During political election seasons, information between biased people is primarily seen. Given that access to information other than the user's interest is limited, previously-formed opinions are likely to be corroborated and reinforced. Therefore, the better the digital information-oriented network's personalization service, the more biased the information provided to those with the bias, likely strengthening their confirmation bias. Closed and exclusive phenomena such as political incitement based on false information, distortion about vaccines and medical information, security information, etc. can be easily found.

As a matter of fact, no one can be entirely free from confirmation bias. Because every human being seeks a basis that confirms one's own beliefs, we try to justify our own beliefs. However, if someone continues to respond to the rational counterargument or criticism with confirmation bias, that could be problematic. While collecting information to support one's confirmed belief, one might not realize that one has already manipulated the information. This confirmation bias appears strongly in areas primarily dominated by emotions (religion, politics, feminism) and becomes stronger when "the sunk cost effect"⁷⁵ appears. Therefore, it is crucial to encourage self-reflection and communication potential so as not to fall into uncritical confirmation bias.

75. "In economics and business decision-making, a sunk cost (also known as retrospective cost) is a cost that has already been incurred and cannot be recovered. Sunk costs are contrasted with prospective costs, which are future costs that may be avoided if action is taken. In other words, a sunk cost is a sum paid in the past that is no longer relevant to decisions about the future. Even though economists argue that

Secondly, “negativity bias” is the phenomenon of processing information with more emphasis on negative information than positive information. This means that negative things have a more significant effect than positive ones. According to the principles of discourse in the information-oriented network, which is that “bad things are more important than good,” a degenerative phenomenon replaces communication—which should be bilateral—with a unilateral tendency to “enemy-making.” It also meets the politicized public’s demand to secure their identity through opposition to the people and groups they fear or detest.

According to evolutionary psychologists, negativity bias results from evolution⁷⁶ developed to make wise decisions in high-risk situations, and a desire to survive longer. Furthermore, negativity causes more significant activations in the brain than positivity as a mechanism to better protect us. People give more credibility to negative news than positive news; even if it is fake news.⁷⁷ No matter the evolutionary justification, an indiscreet bias of information distortion, exaggeration, and manipulation promotes and amplifies a culture of hatred and division. Such distortions will undoubtedly bring a vicious social circle, trigger an information-vulnerable class, and in the end, will not be conducive to the survival of the universal human race.

sunk costs are no longer relevant to future rational decision-making, in everyday life, people often take previous expenditures in situations, such as repairing a car or house, into their future decisions regarding those properties.” “Wikipedia: Sunk cost,” Wikipedia Foundation, last modified March 28, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunk_cost.

76. “Evidence from many domains of human psychology suggest that negative events are evaluated as having more powerful effects than positive events of objectively equal magnitude, a phenomenon termed negativity bias.” John Lazarus, “Negativity bias: An Evolutionary Hypothesis and an Empirical Programme,” *Learning and Motivation* 75, (August 2021): 2. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lmot.2021.101731>.

77. In effect, falsehoods spread faster than truths on social media. Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral, “The Spread of True and False News Online,” *Science* 359, no. 6380 (September 2018): 1146, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559>.

Although the information-oriented networked self encompasses all people living under the influence of digital technologies, its vulnerability to cognitive biases is particularly prominent in the older generation. The digital divide, unequal and limited access to technology, increases the vulnerability of the elderly to the culture of digital communication,⁷⁸ which in turn leads to bias in information perception and judgment due to the lack of digital literacy, “the ability a person has to perform, effectively, tasks in digital environments—including the ability to read and interpret media to reproduce data and images through digital manipulation, and evaluate and apply new knowledge in digital environments.”⁷⁹ The older generation’s vulnerability to cognitive bias is exacerbated by disinformation, so-called fake-news. In the case of Twitter, a survey revealed that users over 65 saw the most political fake news in their feeds during the 2016 U.S. election, twice as many as young people. Eighty percent of fake news sharer were users over the age of fifty.⁸⁰ When it comes to news sharing on Facebook, there were seven times more users over sixty-five who shared the fake news domain than younger users.⁸¹ As a consumer of fake news, and as a diffuser of false information, it is easy for the older generation to lead themselves into social isolation beyond simply gaps in information.

78. Young and Jurko, 14.

79. Ana Loureiro and Maria Barbas, “Active Ageing—Enhancing Digital Literacies in Elderly Citizens,” *Lecture Notes in Computer Science* (2014): 451, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-07485-6_44.

80. Nir. Grinberg et al., “Fake news on Twitter During the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election,” *Science* 363 (2019): 374, doi:10.1126/science.aau2706.

81. Andrew Guess, Jonathan Nagler, and Joshua Tucker, “Less than You Think: Prevalence and Predictors of Fake News Dissemination on Facebook,” *Science Advances* 5, no. 1 (April 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aau4586>.

Nadia M. Brashier et al.⁸² analyzed the factors that make the elderly vulnerable to fake news with the complex of three variables : cognitive deficits, social change, and digital illiteracy. Firstly, the older people get, the more they experience cognitive deficits, in which episodic memory and abstract reasoning abilities gradually decline beginning around the age of 30.⁸³ Daoqun Ding et al. researched the fact that aging reinforces belief biases and found that older adults were easily influenced by prior knowledge and experiences as cognitive ability and cognitive motivation weakened.⁸⁴

Secondly, in terms of social change, the reason older people are vulnerable to fake news is not that they feel lonely, but because they are overconfident in the accuracy of information of social partners—friends and followers—around them.⁸⁵ Interpersonal trust even with unfamiliar others increases with age.⁸⁶ So older people are also more exposed to fake news by following questionable pages and bots that look like real accounts.⁸⁷ Also, the older people’s social consciousness, which had been established since analogue era, caused abstaining from using digital services, which reduced the

82. Nadia M. Brashier and Daniel L. Schacter, “Aging in an Era of Fake News,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 29, no. 3 (June 2020): 316, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721420915872>.

83. Timothy A. Salthouse, “When does age-related cognitive decline begin?” *Neurobiology of Aging*, 30 (2009): 500, doi:10.1016/j.neurobiolaging.2008.09.023.

84. The experiment proved that, compared to young people, reasoning ability was weaker in situations that were contrary to their beliefs and their reasoning ability increased in situations that were consistent with their beliefs compared to young people. Daoqun Ding et al., “Belief Bias Effect in Older Adults: Roles of Working Memory and Need for Cognition,” *Front Psychol* 10 (Jan 23, 2019): 7. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02940. PMID: 32038362; PMCID: PMC6990430.

85. Brashier, 318.

86. Michael J. Poulin and Claudia M. Haase, “Growing to Trust: Evidence that Trust Increases and Sustains Well-being across the Life Span.” *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 6 (2015): 618–19, doi:10.1177/1948550615574301.

87. Brashier, 319.

opportunities for cultivating digital literacy and made them more vulnerable to fake news. For example, they may develop resistance to digital technology because they prefer not only direct social contracts but also because online shopping takes business away from local merchants or because they are concerned about job problems for employees at banks and post offices.⁸⁸

Thirdly, regarding digital illiteracy, the elderly are one of the most vulnerable groups in the digital divide⁸⁹ and have the least opportunities to cultivate digital literacy. Older people face numerous practical difficulties in using digital technology, such as distinguishing manipulated images accompanying fake news articles, between advertising and editorial content, and between various internet hoaxes and fraud.⁹⁰ Moreover, the public health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic is also an information crisis for the elderly. Today, digital information is the most likely way to gain the critical knowledge and resources during long-term quarantines. The elderly are relatively deprived of what the young and healthy generation does in contacting doctors through a variety of health-related websites and emotionally connecting with their loved ones by real-time video phone platforms and following the rapidly changing quarantine news through news

88. "Why Some Older People are Rejecting Digital Technologies," *Science Daily*, March 12, 2018, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/03/180312091715.htm>.

89. Carol C McDonough, "The Effect of Ageism on the Digital Divide Among Older Adults," *Journal of Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine* (February 2016), doi:10.24966/GGM-8662/100008; In the case of Korean society, according to the survey on the digital divide in the four major information-vulnerable classes (the elderly, the disabled, the farmers and fishermen, and the low-income class) in 2020, the digital literacy level of the elderly was the lowest at 68.6%. Assuming that the level of the general public is 100, in descending order, the farmers and fishermen (77.3%), the disabled (81.3%), and the low-income class (95.1%). Korea National Information Society Agency, "2020 Digital Jeongbo Gyeockcha Siltae Josa," 디지털 정보 격차 실태 조사 [The Report on the Digital Divide] Ministry of Science and ICT (December 2020), 19–20.

90. Brashier, 320.

feeds.⁹¹ The elderly, who need the most physical and emotional care, are marginalized from health services due to the digital divide, leading to a miserable situation and to concern for even their survival.

In summary, the information-oriented networked self created by AI algorithm technology, which mimics human cognition and information processing, performs the function of a data diffuser that transcends individual human capabilities within a huge information ecosystem. At the same time, however, the technology significantly induces cognitive biases in people, especially among the people most vulnerable to the digital divide, where fake news reinforces confirmation and negativity bias, driving the vicious cycle of digital illiteracy and the transition to a post-truth society.

2. THE DRIFT TOWARD NETWORKED RELIGION

We are experiencing that digital communication technology has freed us from space and time constraints in our daily lives. Changes in the realm of religion and spirituality are no exception. In the early 2000s, when digital communication technology began to spread, some scholars discussed the “cyberspace” that transcends offline spatiality without limit. The ubiquity of technology was expected to bring the new possibility of experiencing glorified bodies within the exuberant freedom that transcends the limits of mortal flesh,⁹² and audaciously dreamed a spiritual leap to realize

91. Karen Fingerman, “The Digital Generation Gap: A health Crisis Can Quickly Turn into an Information Crisis for Older People”, *Psychology Today*, March 6, 2020, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-bonds-across-the-lifespan/202003/the-digital-generation-gap>.

92. Margaret Wertheim, “Is Cyberspace a Spiritual Space?” September 1, 1999, https://www.cybersociology.com/files/7_wertheim.htmlcited, quoted in David Perrin, *Studying Christian Spirituality*, New York: Routledge, 2007), 312.

immortality, transcendence, and resurrection.⁹³ At the early stage, the discourse of cyber spirituality did not limit to the evangelical dimension of conforming to fixed frameworks in philosophy, theology, and spirituality or delivering doctrine or influence within the existing religious institutional system. Instead, it asked how the potential of digital technologies is affecting fundamental and ultimate questions of human life.⁹⁴

Now, however, twenty years have passed. The technology of digital communication has become a reality in our religious lives. In looking at the differences between being offline and online, we are now able to diagnose how digital communication has affected spiritual progress and developmental alternatives. We can be more realistic than imagining a surreal cyberspace that describes the internet as a space that is separate from physical reality and invites practices unrelated to the offline world.⁹⁵

Heidi Campbell describes online religious practice as a concept of “networked religion,” which encapsulates how religious experience, belief, and practice are lived out online through dynamic social relations and interaction shifting between both online and offline.⁹⁶ This networked religion has revolutionized the concept and perception of community, identity, and the authority of traditional religion within the strong interconnection between online and offline contexts. It has induced a self-directed form

93. Ibid., 313.

94. Ibid., 314.

95. Evolvi, “Religion and the Internet.” sec.2.

96. Campbell proposed five traits of “networked religion”: networked community, storied identities, shifting authority, convergent practice, and a multisite reality. Heidi A. Campbell, “Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80 (March 2012): 65, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41348770>.

of spiritual engagement and highly individualized and hybridized forms of practice and modes of knowing through the convergence of multiple online ritual practices.⁹⁷

Whereas the previous section pointed out that technologies experienced by the networked self within the social dimension of life include human vulnerabilities, this section describes new challenges experienced by networked religion within the spiritual dimension of life. From a pastoral perspective of caring for the vulnerable, it will examine how people practically sense and respond to changes in their religious and spiritual needs and values within the culture of digital communication.

2.1. Mapping Networked Religion

Amid religious fluidity where diffuse digital data saturate religious information, it is not unusual to see that many religious websites that once enjoyed high levels of participation nevertheless suddenly disappear soon in a few months. The complex intersecting of these fluid religious web platforms makes it more challenging to objectify networked religions and to observe them consistently. Thus, it is worthwhile to establish an integral criterion for analyzing networked religions.

Piotr Siuda attempted to map networked religions, distinguishing four types: They are (1) religion online, (2) online religion, (3) traditional religion and (4) innovative religion.⁹⁸ In the early 2000s, Helland already suggested naming religion on the Internet as “(1) religion online” and “(2) online religion” based on two extremes.⁹⁹ The former mainly indicates the established religious groups that use the Internet to enhance their

97. *Ibid.*, 84.

98. Siuda, 3.

99. Helland, 214–20.

activities. On the other hand, the latter, “online religion” means the not-so-formal communities that are highly interactive and participatory mostly, or exclusively, online. This distinction is significant in that it emphasizes the existence of religious groups occupying both online and offline spaces and that digital technology distinguishes a new type of practice that is essentially different from existing religions. But as the more complicated and multidimensional Web 2.0 emerged, Siuda added two more types considering the more dynamic nature of the networked religion: (3) traditional and (4) innovative based on the source of authority that legitimizes online discourses.

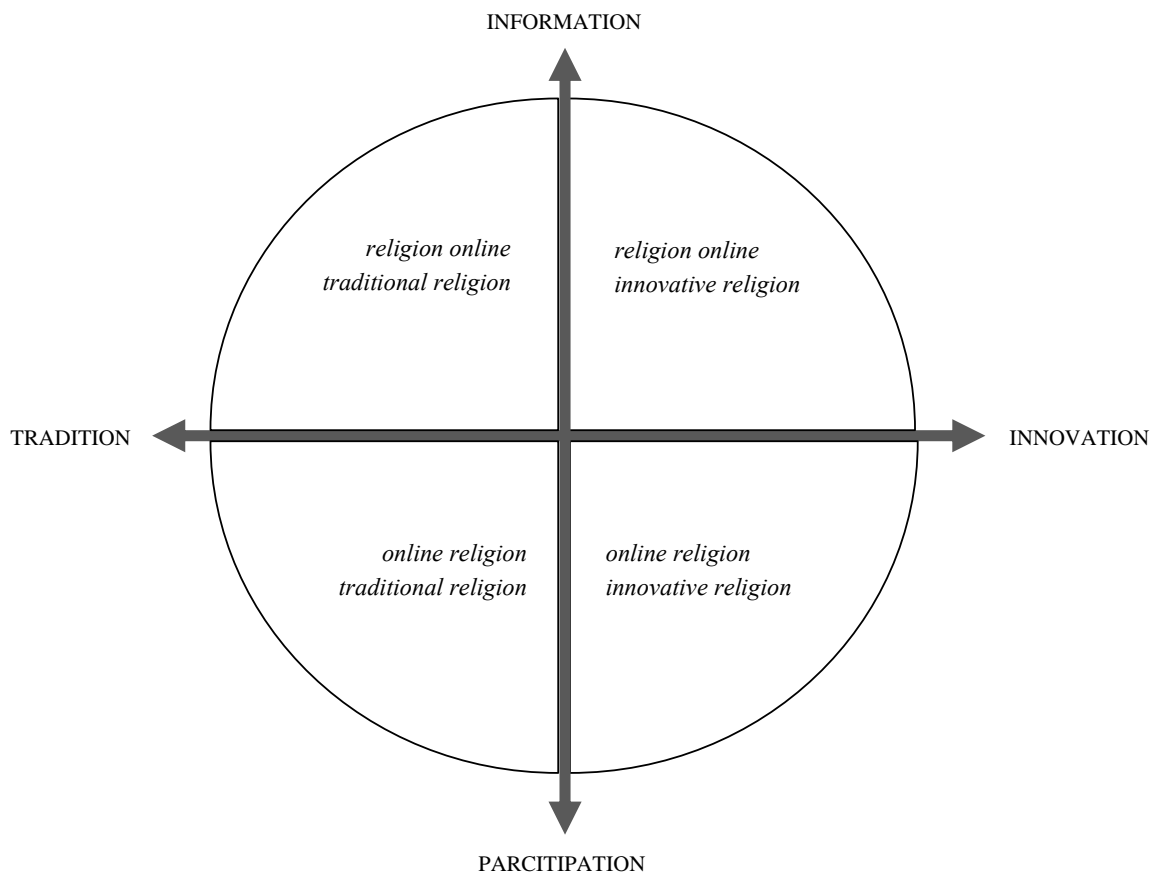


Figure 1. The Map of Online Religious Spaces by Piotr Siuda

Through the above map, one can compare and analyze the characteristics of specific websites or digital platforms related to religion and spirituality at a glance and more easily determine their status. According to the map above, Siuda compares and analyzes various networked religion platforms and provides examples of each representative type. Rather than focusing on the specific examples presented by this map, this section focuses on the four reference points of this mapping for understanding the phenomena of networked religion. The reference points are information and participation, and tradition and innovation.

2.2. New Challenges to Networked Religion within the Spiritual Dimension of Life

The phrase “I am spiritual but not religious” (even referred to by the acronym SBNR) is a widespread phenomenon in the postmodern context.¹⁰⁰ It primarily advocates that humans ought to seek their true divine nature, which cannot be found in absorbed matters of the ego, such as status, career or having a hedonistic lifestyle.¹⁰¹ The term SBNR took off in the early 2000s, when online dating first became popular to express oneself charmingly as, “I am not some kind of cold-hearted atheist, but I’m not some kind of moralizing, prudish person, either. I’m nice, friendly, and spiritual—but not religious.”¹⁰² The phenomenon of SBNR clearly shows people’s interests shifted from institutional religion to private and internal learning and practice toward the spiritual side

100. Bruce H. Lescher, “Spirituality in the English-Speaking World since Vatican II: An Overview,” in *Mysterion: Rivista di Ricerca in Teologia Spirituale* 8, no. 2 (2015): 150.

101. Jessica van der Schalk, “Can technology enhance spirituality?” accessed February 15, 2022, <https://freedomlab.org/can-technology-enhance-spirituality/>.

102. Caroline Kitchener, “What It Means To Be Spiritual But Not Religious: One in Five Americans Reject Organized Religion, but Maintain Some Kind of Faith,” *The Atlantic*, January 11, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/membership/archive/2018/01/what-it-means-to-be-spiritual-but-not-religious/550337/>.

of life. At the same time, there is an ambiguous perception about the distinctiveness of various religions, believing that there is truth in all religions, and any single religion should not have a monopoly on ultimate reality.¹⁰³ A key driver of this movement lies in disenchantment and resistance to the hierarchical authoritarianism of existing institutional religions and a bias that institutional religion inevitably degenerates into tussles over power, ego and money.¹⁰⁴

The evolution of digital information technology further fueled people's interest in deinstitutionalized spiritual engagement. It made traditional religions challenging to adapt to the online environment. The ritual practice inherent in institutional religions became blurred and differentiated online. Hierarchical and esoteric information, which have been exclusively owned and controlled by the existing traditional religions, became accessible indiscriminately to the mass of people through the practice of blending ritual and spiritual sources.¹⁰⁵ This frequently resulted in the uncritical diffusion and interpretation of religious materials without orthodox religious authority, and a fusion with religious syncretism such as New Age spirituality.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the massive influence of a handful of monopolistic internet companies in the online world, such as data-driven advertising with AI algorithms based on the metrics of social networks, has spurred the emergence of new religious groups and views representing the post-truth and

103. Barna group, "Meet the 'Spiritual but Not Religious'," April 6, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/meet-spiritual-not-religious>.

104. John Blake, "Are there dangers in being 'spiritual but not religious'?" *CNN*, June 9, 2010, <http://www.cnn.com/2010/LIVING/personal/06/03/spiritual.but.not.religious/index.html>.

105. Rafael Shoji and Regina Matsue, "Digital Spirituality as Paradigm Shift? Religious Change during the COVID-19 Epidemics in Brazil," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2020, 4, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3650566>.

106. *Ibid.*

post-doctrinal world. In this situation, traditional institutional religions have significantly lost their monopoly of authority defined by their unique interpretations and religious practices.¹⁰⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the crisis of institutional religion. Interest in spiritual practices has relatively increased amid the pandemic, while interest in institutional authority has moderately decreased. According to the Google trend search¹⁰⁸ of various religious terms in quantitative statistics during the beginning of the pandemic, the term “prayer,” “God” and “Jesus” have increased considerably since the outbreak of COVID-19, the term “Church (the Cathedral)” has receded in the search queries. This shows an interpretational possibility for a detachment from the traditional form of spirituality. Furthermore, the changes in religious search terms worth noting during this period show more apparent differences in religious practices, between the individual and institutional levels. Terms such as “meditation” and “yoga” have also shown remarkable increases since the pandemic. Shoji and Matsue interpret these statistical results as follows: Just as e-mails are not a substitute for hand-written letters but rather a new mode of communication, online religion is not a modality or alternative form of religious practice. At the individual level, the digitalization of religion tends to promote more private aspects of practice, in the direction of the self’s spirituality. On the other hand, on

107. Ibid., 5.

108. Seth Stephens-Davidowitz succeeded in predicting Trump’s victory in the 2016 US presidential election, which data-computing firms failed to do. He argues that the statistical value of search engines clearly reflects raw reality because people show explicit trust in search engines, search for subtle and secret information equivalent to a confessional and believe that others will never know their search results. Seth Stephens-Davidowitz, *Everybody Lies: Big Data, New Data, and What the Internet Can Tell Us about Who We Really Are* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2017), 4. Hence, considering that the internet search term is a cover that includes people’s emotions and interests, it may be possible to infer to some extent a correlation between the pandemic and religious interest.

the traditional-institutional religious level, they note a significant correlation between digitalization and deinstitutionalization of religion.¹⁰⁹

Despite the intense and wide deinstitutionalization of religion and spirituality, there are many critiques and concerns about the superficiality induced by an explicit exclusion of the value of tradition and community. More than 30 years ago, Paul Tillich correctly diagnosed that the decisive element in the predicament of humans in the Western technical society is the loss of the dimension of depth.¹¹⁰ Life in the dimension of depth is replaced by life in the horizontal dimension, and it expands too rapidly and at the expense of the vertical, the ultimate concern.¹¹¹ Kevin Healey notes that core spiritual values, such as religious devotion, obedience, and prophetic speech on behalf of the marginalized have succumbed to the seduction of consumerism and satiation, the pursuit of superficial happiness.¹¹² The new spiritual current like SBNR has the potential to bring about an ego-centered complacency divorced from the wisdom of a community¹¹³ rather than the true liberation of the self as ultimately concerned. Lillian Daniel evaluates SBNR as a comfortable adaptation to an egocentric and narcissistic culture. The faith community they reject is indeed the school of in-depth human maturity. “People challenge us, ask hard questions, disagree, need things from us, require our forgiveness.

109. Shoji, 15

110. Paul Tillich, *The Spiritual Situation in Our Technological Society* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 41.

111. Ibid., 43.

112. Kevin Healey, Robert H. Woods Jr., *Christians, Ethics and Religion in the Age of Social Media: Digital Proverbs for Responsible Citizens*, First ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 31.

113. James Martin, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life*, HarperOne, 2010, Kindle, chapter 2.

It's where we get to practice all the things we preach."¹¹⁴ Isaac Hecker, the Paulists priest, said, religion helps us to "connect" and "correct."¹¹⁵ "You are invited into a community to connect with one another and with a tradition. At the same time, you are corrected when you need to be. And you may be called to correct your own community—though a special kind of discernment and humility is required in those cases."¹¹⁶

Therefore, the new spirituality in the digital age should not exclude the value of communion and the teachings of traditional religions. Correspondingly, traditional religions should also reform communication methods of injecting hierarchical doctrines in a top-down manner. The desirable correlation between religion and spirituality in the digital age is the mutual exchange of the communal wisdom of traditional religion and the unlimited imagination and vitality of the new spiritual movements. An authentic communication would gather wisdom among religious members in organic and integrated interaction of online and offline environments. It is the proper time to pay attention to a new integrated religious-spiritual vision in the digital culture of authentic communication that shares and reflects on each other's meaning of life, identity, faith, and ultimate values in depth.

2.3. Timely Call for the Religious Conversation

Traditional religions in the digital age have been striving to discover the potential of spirituality in the historical continuum that preserves tradition, authority, and community values amidst the challenges of the culture of digital communication. For

114. Jonathan Merritt, "Why Christians Need the Church: An Interview with Lillian Daniel," *Religion News Service*, August 13, 2013, <https://religionnews.com/2013/08/13/answering-the-spiritual-but-religious-an-interview-with-lillian-daniel/>.

115. Martin, *The Jesuit Guide*, chapter 2.

116. Ibid.

example, a Jewish trend towards defining Shabbat as a time to unplug from digital technologies is creating a non-traditional Shabbat experience that seeks to moderate the realities of networked individualism and conforms to a progressive interpretation of Jewish law.¹¹⁷ Catholicism has been attempting to consider and use the Internet as a space for community building from the earliest days of the digital media.¹¹⁸ Protestants tend to encourage more responsible and individual decision-making in internet use, placing a higher value on self-responsibility, contrary to the hierarchical approach of the Catholic and Orthodox traditions.¹¹⁹ Operating an online Muslim community, Islam enabled fluidity and dynamic open communication that challenged traditional religious and social boundaries and authority.¹²⁰ Much current digital Buddhism engages with the uncertainty of contemporary life.¹²¹ Cyberspace Hinduism embodies the paradoxical convergence of perhaps the most ancient religion in which the ancient sages saw ultimate reality with their inner eyes and the most modern media's auditory and visual appeal.¹²²

Christianity emphasizes the communication of truth through a communal medium based on doctrinal and theological foundations. It affirms the human nature of

117. Andrea Lieber, "Networked Individuals: The Virtual Reality of the Sabbath in Twenty-first Century American Judaism," in Giulia Isetti et al., *Religion in the Age of Digitalization: From New Media to Spiritual Machines* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021), 83.

118. Heidi A. Campbell and Alessandra Vitullo, "Assessing Changes in the Study of Religious Communities in Digital Religion Studies," *Church, Communication and Culture* (2016): 83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23753234.2016.1181301>

119. *Ibid.*, 84.

120. *Ibid.*

121. Gregory Price Grieve and Daniel Veidlinger, "Buddhism in the Age of Digital," in Isetti et al., 43.

122. Augustine Pamplany, "Hinduism and New Media: Identities Being Deconstructed and Constructed," in Isetti et al., 57.

desire for contact, especially for connection, interpreting this as the image of a relational God and practicing evangelization through active use of diverse media. At the same time, Christianity's relationality is always rooted in the journey toward the truth. The relativism of truth is explicitly shunned and rejected. As Paul Tighe stated, human communication should be "a shared commitment to searching for truth, rooted in the conviction of the ultimate objectivity of truth, which gives human dialogue and debate their ultimate value."¹²³ In the flood of unrestricted access guaranteed by digital media, in-depth conversations based on silence and self-reflection, and conversations that give and receive inspiration in faith, hope, and love are more needed.

In this context, networked religion and spirituality desperately call for authentic communication, but the reality is not that simple. In general, contemporary Christians are reluctant to converse on spiritual matters, and feel ambivalence about this. According to the Barna group's survey¹²⁴ of 1,714 U.S. adults on how Christians' approach to sharing their faith has changed in twenty five years, "People are thinking about God less and less and the less people think about God, the less they talk about God."¹²⁵ But at the same time, it has also been found that active and engaged Christians are more likely to talk about spiritual matters, particularly in digital circumstances.

Responses to the reasons for avoiding religious conversation can be broadly interpreted in two categories. One is the reluctance and aversion to religious content itself. For example, "I'm not religious and don't care about these kinds of topics (23%),"

123. Paul Tighe, "The challenge for the Church in a digital culture," *ABC Religion and Ethics*, May 3, 2012, <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/the-challenge-for-the-church-in-a-digital-culture/10100572>.

124. Barna Group, *Spiritual Conversations*, 91.

125. *Ibid.*, 83.

“I’m put off by how religion has been politicized (17%),” “I don’t feel like I know enough to talk about religious or spiritual topics (17%),” “Religious language and jargon feels cheesy or outdated (4%).” The other is stress and concerns about social relationships associated with the conversation. For instance, “Religious conversations always seem to create tension or arguments (28%),” “I don’t want to be known as a religious person (7%),” “I don’t know how to talk about religious or spiritual topics without sounding weird (6%),” “I’m afraid people will see me as a fanatic or extremist (5%),” “I’m embarrassed by the way religious language has been used in popular culture (5%),” “I’ve been hurt by religious conversations in the past (4%).” It is noteworthy that the younger the generation,¹²⁶ the more conscious of their social reputation. The report interprets that the greatest vice for the young generation—who grew up in a culture that values tolerance for people of various religious, social and political beliefs and that allows people to make their own decisions—, is that they are perceived as narrow-minded, so they tend to be more sensitive to offending other groups,¹²⁷ and this led to be reluctant to have conversation on the religious and spiritual matters.

However, the report also shows some encouraging and inspiring results. Many relatively young Christians feel a more personal responsibility for sharing their faith than in previous generations: Millennials (65%) and Gen X (67%) Christians are most likely to agree that sharing one’s faith is the responsibility of every follower of Christ, as compared to Boomers (60%) and Elders (55%).¹²⁸ Looking at the phenomenon of

126. This survey report presupposes the definition of a generation as follows: Gen Z were born 1999 to 2015 (only 13- to 18-year-olds included); Millennials were born 1984 to 1998; Gen X were born 1965 to 1983; Boomers were born 1946 to 1964; Elders were born before 1946.

127. “Why People Are Reluctant to Discuss Faith,” Barna Group, August 14, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/reasons-for-reluctance/>.

youth's being unchurched, some may find this statistic is not that credible. Nevertheless, while it is true that the proportion of Generation MZ is significantly lower than that of other generations, the enthusiasm and commitment of the youth who have still remained in the church are markedly higher than that of other generations.¹²⁹

Looking at people's perception of religious conversation within the environment of digital technology, face-to-face communication was still overwhelmingly favored. Nine out of ten Americans who have shared their views on faith or religion have done so in person (92/89)¹³⁰. After that, Facebook (43/59), Phone (32/30), Text (28/26), E-mail (22/23), Letter (9/9), Preaching (8/33) and so on.¹³¹ In terms of preference for the method of religious conversation between face-to-face and digitally mediated communication, a third of Christians share their faith in a digital way as similarly as face-to-face, only 12% prefer digital sharing. Distinctive generational features are that older people prefer e-mail (52%) and younger people text (39%).

Whether advances in digital technology promote one's life in religion is unclear. Although more than half agree that "technology and digital interactions have made sharing my faith easier" (53%), similar proportions (55%) pointed out that the flood of digital technology has increased the tendency to avoid real religious conversation. In particular, generation MZ is aware of the impact of digital media and recognize that in-

128. Barna Group, *Spiritual Conversations*, 19.

129. "Is Evangelism Going Out of Style?" *Barna Group*, accessed February 19, 2022, <https://www.barna.com/research/is-evangelism-going-out-of-style/>.

130. The former number means the respondent's own experience as "I have shared," and the latter number means the respondents has received from others as "someone else has shared." Barna Group, *Spiritual Conversations*, 35.

131. *Ibid.*

person religious conversations are challenging because of the excessive use of digitalized communication: “It’s harder to have a private, one-on-one conversation now than in the past because people are so busy with phones and technology.” (Millennials 69%: Gen X 69%: Boomers 60%).¹³² The range of social media use for religious conversation among believers is very diverse. They mainly use Facebook posting Christian symbols, and religious pictures along with Bible verses in the personal profile section or share faith-related articles. This reveals network religion’s dynamic reciprocal relationships, such as responding to a friend’s faith post with a prayer. As the younger generation acknowledges the ease of digital technology in sharing their digital beliefs (M: 58%, X: 64%, B: 39%), they also recognize its cautions (M: 58%, X: 53%, B: 30%).¹³³

The result of the Barna report implies four aspects¹³⁴: Firstly, all the generation admit that face-to-face meetings are the preferred means of sharing faith at present. Of course, although the overall population proportion of generation MZ, who tend to avoid in-person communication, will increase as time goes by, the ability to have meaningful real-life conversations offline is still recognized as an essential skill that Christians need to develop more. Even in an overwhelmingly digitalized environment, face-to-face

132. Ibid., 39.

133. Ibid., 36. This different generational results in perception are also consistent with Generation Z’s perception of digital technology in another survey. “While those in Gen X and M flooded social media with high school reunion groups, wedding photos, and personal thoughts, Gen Z has sought to use social media with more discernment and purpose. (...) most Gen Z’ers do not underestimate the significance of privacy, nor the power of data and the implications of digital footprints.” Astha Khanal, “Gen Z’ers Are More Cautious Online than the Previous Generation,” *Pacific Standard*, May 6, 2019, accessed February 17, 2022, <https://psmag.com/ideas/gen-zers-are-more-cautious-online-than-previous-generations>.

134. Ibid., 42–43.

communication must be valued in religious conversation, so a more creative pastoral approach is needed in the interaction between online and offline.

Secondly, juxtaposed with the first point, digital faith interaction will become the standard for religious conversations in the near future. The more digital technology mediates our communication, the more inevitable this prospect becomes. This requires wisdom in creating a meaningful virtual communication for Christians to bear spiritual fruit to enrich the culture of in-person faith conversation in the future.

Thirdly, in terms the issue of the digital divide, the survey reveals a growing need to help Christians of the older generation to learn the manners of online communication. Most older generations have learned how to communicate in in-person settings only. While an in-person conversation is immediate, reciprocal, and informed by physical presence and body language, online communication is much simpler, and one can engage in communication while doing something else. Also, it is challenging to grasp the tone, intention, and context of a conversation. Hence, the Church can be utilized for literacy education and ongoing formation for elders.

Fourthly, young people struggle in their own way in the internet world, where there are many temptations, conflicting opinions, and intense disagreements. It has been called a digital Babylon. Here is another space where the church community can serve as a guide.

In a nutshell, although the practice of faith sharing and religious conversations recede overall in the digital age, simultaneously, it is still confirmed that there are ambiguous but tacit needs and desires for such conversation. Thus, this current situation provokes a deeper understanding of religious conversation and an exploration of its

appropriation as a religious tradition that embraces the value of communal wisdom in pastoral perspective for people who are vulnerable in a digitized world.

3. SUMMARY

Technological advances throughout human history have always created tensions between prosperity and dehumanization in human culture, like a double-edged sword. The unprecedented digital technology revolution brought about the networking of the self, which acquires the status of an autonomous and constitutive subject while also experiencing vulnerability. The networked self of the younger generation is exposed to the vulnerability of self-isolation. In the flood of non-face-to-face communication technology, the ability to empathize in in-person relationships is compromised. The strengthened tendency to avoid conflict leads to isolation from others. The ability to experience solitude, silence, and reflection rapidly decreases, and ultimately, this can lead a cultural crisis of self-alienation.

Furthermore, although the information-oriented networked self has provided individuals with the ability to absorb diffuse, saturated information, the older generation is showing vulnerability to cognitive bias due to their cognitive deficits, social change, and digital illiteracy in the digital divide. They are vulnerable to confirmation bias and negativity bias toward fake news in this post-truth era, leading to a vicious cycle that is a significant factor in social and generational conflict.

Religion in the digital age has also been transformed into a networked religion over the past thirty years. It is based on a revolutionary change in the concept of traditional religion's community, identity, and authority in the dynamic and integrated interaction of online and offline information, participation, tradition, and innovation. In

this environment, people are increasingly disenchanted with the hierarchical doctrinal communication of the existing religious system. They are showing a trend toward non-institutional spirituality represented by the so-called SBNR. However, the new spirituality that excludes religious tradition and communal wisdom contains a self-contradiction due to its shallow egocentrism, resulting in a separation from ultimate concerns.

Various established religions are attempting pastoral ministry in a digital environment. As a relational religion, Christianity has emphasized the value of mutually respectful communication and religious conversation and called for its creative pastoral use. Although contemporary Christians are getting used to the trend of belief in the new digital culture, at the same time, while flexibly adapting to it, Christians hope for a more integrated, religious-spiritual vision that consistently shares and reflects on the meaning, identity, faith, and ultimate values of life in the light of truth. Recognizing these signs of the times, the following chapter will take up the anthropological, biblical, and theological exploration for the foundations of Christian/Ignatian spiritual conversation, as a particular perspective of the religious conversation.

CHAPTER II

INTERDISCIPLINARY EXPLORATION ON CONVERSATION

This chapter will focus on thematic analysis of the literature on authentic conversation in various spheres such as the anthropological, biblical, and theological sources to make possible an interdisciplinary comprehension of what is Christian/Ignatian spiritual conversation. This will help also to establish a hermeneutical interpretation for a constructive application of spiritual conversation regarding the condition of conversation in the digital era, the object of study of next chapter.

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTHENTIC CONVERSATION

This section focuses on an authentic conversation to overcome the crises found in the digital communication culture diagnosed in Chapter I. Just as a person seeks a doctor when they become ill, it can be assumed that the practice of authentic conversation can be regarded as the role of a doctor to heal sickness in communication culture. The discussion needs to examine the healing characteristics and the dynamics of the healing process.

In fact, in the fields of modern psychoanalysis, and philosophical counseling, various studies and practices have been attempted, paying attention to the healing aspect of conversation.¹³⁵ The healing aspect of conversation is not only concerned with information analysis for understanding the spoken message itself and but also the contextual interpretation of all non-verbal, inter-relational, and emotional dimensions in

135. Ji-hye Jo, "Gidokin Yeosungdule Chiyoujukdaewhae gwhanhan hyounsangjuk youngu," 기독교인 여성들의 치유적 대화에 관한 현상학적 연구 [Phenomenological Research on Healing Dialogue with Christian Women] *Sinangkwha Hakmun* 24 (2019): 8; Byoung-jun Park, "Gonggamgwha Chulhacksangdam: Max Scheler 'Gonggam' gaenyumeul jungsimeuro," 공감과 철학상담, 막스 셸러의 '공감' 개념을 중심으로 [Sympathy and Philosophical Counseling in the light of Max Scheler's Concept of Sympathy] *Sogang Journal of Philosophy* 36 (February 2014): 12.

the field of conversation. The healing aspects brought about by an authentic conversation can be broadly categorized into three categories: interiority, empathy, and ethicality.¹³⁶

1.1. Interiority

The healing aspect of conversation leads into the problem of the inner self, that is, the mind, rather than the outward expression of a person. In particular, deep interest in the internal wounds and pains experienced and expressed in the other person's life history is the main driving force for conversation. In other words, an authentic conversation is a journey of inner healing, paying attention to the total interiority of others, where the source of pain and wounds is located, and looking for traces of the wounds and darkness that have taken root inside even if the speaker himself or herself is not aware of it.¹³⁷

Therefore, the conversation should pay attention not only to the message of the spoken word, but also to the mood and emotion of the conversation participant. A conversation participant's mood and emotions radiate unconscious orientation and are important indicators of their deeper state of existence. The vague emotion and atmosphere felt by the other person indicate one's existential state while connecting with the wounds that lie deep within the reality of one's life and the unconscious intentionality. In addition, the source of the interiority drives a person to interpret and relate to the world in their way. Through the continuous healing process of conversation, and one slowly moves from the surface layer to the depth of consciousness and leads to the qualitative change of the interiority.¹³⁸

136. These three classifications result from reinterpreting regarding the five characteristics of healing dialogue in Ji-hye's article. See Jo, 5–49.

137. *Ibid.*, 38.

138. *Ibid.*, 39.

1.2. Empathy

An authentic conversation promotes reflection and understanding not only of the interiority where the root of the wound is located, but also the history of life in the holistic level of human existence living with that inner existence and its narrative nature. In other words, the healing aspect of authentic conversation has a narrative character that expresses, composes, and interprets the overall understanding of the conversation participant's life.¹³⁹ Conversation participants go through the process of rediscovering meaning by weaving their experiences of past wounds not as fragments of disconnected events, but as a unique story connected with their present life through narrative dialogue. A holistic understanding of one's existence and life can be achieved through this process.

The narrative of one's existence and life history is thus autobiographical, self-confessing, and unique. Narrative dialogue is an act of sharing one's uniqueness between conversation participants. Here, the capacity of empathy is needed to achieve genuine personal communication. Genuine empathy¹⁴⁰ presupposes a separate consciousness between the subject and the other and at the same time transcends egocentric direction and has an orientation towards the pain or joy of the other.

139. Ibid., 40.

140. Here, the empathy follows the original meaning of sympathy defined by Max Scheler. He classified its meaning through the analysis of four types of phenomena called sympathy: The first is "Immediate community of feeling (*das unmittelbare Mitfühlen*)," for example, of the same sorrow, with someone. The second is "Fellow-feeling about something (*das Mitgefühl an etwas*)," rejoicing in other's joy and commiseration with other's sorrow. The third is "Mere emotional infection. (*die bloße Gefühlsansteckung*)" The fourth is "True emotional identification (*die echte Einfühlung*)" Scheler thinks the second type is the most genuine one, in which one follows and experiences other's experiences and feelings, and, at the same time, actually "participates (*Teilnahme*)" and "reaction (*reaktion*)" to those feelings. Byoung-jun, 12. Also see, Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy* (London and NY: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 12.

1.3. Ethicality

The empathy arising from an authentic conversation goes beyond the mere emotional dimension of simply being happy or sad together. Instead, it moves forward to the participation and active practice of being for others who bear the pain.

Levinas emphasizes the otherness of subjectivity through the concept of the face of others, and envisions an ethical intersubjectivity that bears the pain and burden of others, thus criticizing the subject-centered Western philosophy since modern philosophy. For him, subjectivity is formed in the ethical responsibility of supporting the suffering of others and enduring “substitute suffering” for others, as the meaning of Latin *subjectum* (*sub-jacere*: to throw, place, or set under) in the sense that it is subjected or subordinated to the responsibility that ultimately defines it.¹⁴¹

In an authentic conversation, the wounded person who bears pain through this participation is placed at the center of the relationship. The one who confesses one’s wounds shares one’s pain with the listener, and the listener supports the existence of the other and participates in their pain, which forms the ethicality of healing aspects in an authentic conversation.¹⁴²

2. THE PHILOSOPHICAL GROUND OF AUTHENTIC CONVERSATION’S SACREDNESS

An authentic conversation brings a healing benefit to the communication culture. Thus, it naturally results in a justifiable request to practice it actively. But can the value

141. Peter Atterton, Matthew Calarco, and Maurice Friedman, *Levinas & Buber: Dialogue & Difference* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2004), 14 “[Levinas’] Subjectivity always entails pre-cognitive dimensions that are from the outset intersubjectively conditioned. The other has become other-in-the-same, as indicated. But the other-in-the-same is not *objectively* different from the factual other who faces me, because neither are objects and both are expressions or modes of alterity.” Bettina Bergo, “Emmanuel Levinas,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford University, Fall 2019), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/levinas/>.

142. Jo, 41–42.

of sacredness be related to this realm of human conversation? The philosophy that provides deep wisdom to these questions is Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue. He was a great thinker who "brings clearly and methodically to consciousness a counterpoise, that is, a consideration of the *Thou* against the world of the *It*, which was leading into technocratic developments increasingly perilous for the integrity of man and even for his physical existence."¹⁴³ Although this appraisal was written half a century ago, Buber's philosophy of dialogue offers hope to present and motivate counter-acting and integrative directions in today's age of precarious human communication caused by new advances in digital technology. Maurice Friedmann states "The development of Buber's thought can best be understood as a gradual movement from an early period of mysticism through a middle period of existentialism to a final period of developing dialogical philosophy."¹⁴⁴ Here, a core theme that penetrates all of these thoughts is the idea of personal encounter in a meeting as he boldly declares that "All real living is meeting."¹⁴⁵

2.1. The Ontology of *Zwischen*

In Buber's philosophy of dialogue, the personal relation in a meeting has its ground on the ontology of interval, namely, "betweenness" (*Zwischen*), where the meeting of two persons occurs. Levinas explains Buber's understanding of the self through the concept of *Zwischen* as a more contemporary sense: "The self is not a

143. Gabriel Marcel, "I and Thou," in *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, eds. Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1991), 42.

144. Maurice Friedmann, *Martin Buber, The Life of Dialogue* (New York: Harper Torch books, 1960), 27.

145. Martin Buber, *I And Thou; a New Translation by Walter Kaufmann* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 11.

substance but a relation. It can only exist as an *I* addressing itself to a *Thou*, or grasping an *It*.”¹⁴⁶ A relation not only begins from the meeting of two persons, but also exists in the *Zwischen* as the twofold attitude of *I–Thou*, and *I–It*. This is the dialogic principle, which is “not an abstract conception but an ontological reality that Buber pointed to but that could not be properly represented in discursive prose.”¹⁴⁷ The relation of *I–Thou* or *I–It* is determined by the subject’s attitude towards the object, the other. The object does not define the being, but the relation does. In an *I–It* relation, *I* treat *It* as a measure of instrumental usefulness for the realization of a purpose. The *I* use *It* only as a means. But in the relation of *I–Thou*, the direction is the complete opposite. With Kantian terms of the formula of humanity,¹⁴⁸ it is a relation in which humans are treated as ends rather than as means and indeed in which humans are treated as unique personalities rather than instrumental usefulness. Here *I* am emotionally connected with *Thou*, and *I* am the one who cares for *Thou*, who is devoted to *Thou* who gives and receives vitality from *Thou*. The object is not used as a means but is respected for the other’s autonomy and freedom.

Here, we need to pay attention in Buber’s philosophy of dialogue to both the otherness and reciprocity in the *I–Thou* relation. In an authentic conversation, we have to stand facing the other person.¹⁴⁹ In other words, the conversation’s primary condition is

146. Emmanuel Levinas, “Martin Buber and the theory of knowledge,” Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, eds., *The Philosophy of Martin Buber* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1991), 136–37.

147. Michael Zank and Zachary Braiterman, “Martin Buber,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford University, Spring 2022), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/buber/>.

148. “So act that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.” Samuel Kerstein, “Treating Persons as Means,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford University, Summer 2019), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/persons-means/>.

149. “In genuine dialogue the turning to the partner takes place in all truth, that is, it is a turning of the being.” Martin Buber, “Elements of the Interhuman,” in M. Buber, *The Knowledge of Man: Selected*

to perceive the other person, and to acknowledge and accept the other person. This does not mean that you fully agree with the other person's message, but that you affirm the other person's personhood. At the same time, the participants of authentic conversation thoroughly trust and accept reciprocity, which is foundational to an *I-Thou* relationship. It is an element that exists "between" the two individual subjects. The two facing each other for conversation is the space where reciprocity resides, and the essential element of human existence is manifest. This reciprocity is not an auxiliary component but an actual place and embodiment of events occurring between humans.

2.2. *I-Thou* and *I-Eternal Thou*

The relation between *I-Thou* takes place in three spheres in our lives: The life with nature, the life with humans, and the life with intelligible forms.¹⁵⁰ In the nature, all "creatures live and move over against us, but they are unable to come to us,"¹⁵¹ and one finds it hard to cross the language barrier, even if one calls such things, *Thou*. We can move on to forming relationships with a tree or a natural landscape. The tree is not *It* anymore but *Thou* to me, and this gives me a feeling of vitality. In the life with humans, *I* have a relation with the other person. Here relation takes the form of words. Language is completed consecutively in the exchange of words, and words formed in language are

Essays (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 85. Buber views the relationship between *I* and *Thou* as a conversational one, comparing three types that make up an interactive relationship. First, it is an authentic conversation. It is a conversation in which, by word or silence, the conversation participants acknowledge the other person in their existence and essence as they are, listen to their intentions, and create a lively interaction between the two. Second, it is a technical conversation, that needs understanding and questioning the facts. Third, it is a monologue disguised as a conversation. Here, two or several people take turns talking to each other in one space, talking to everyone, and thinking that they are saying something to one another. Martin Buber, *Zwiesprache Traktat vom dialogischen Leben* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider Verlag, 1978), 43.

150. Buber, *I And Thou*, 6.

151. *Ibid.*

reciprocated. In life with intelligible forms, “There the relation is clouded, yet it discloses itself; it does not use speech, yet begets it. We perceive no *Thou*, but none the less we feel we are addressed and we answer - forming, thinking, acting.”¹⁵² Here *Thou* is an eternal *Thou*.

However, when it comes to the actual practice of Buber’s ontology of *Zwischen*, one finds a tension between ideal inspiration and realistic limitations. Hence, some consider his ontology to be an inspirational poetics rather than a critical philosophy.¹⁵³ Boos pointed out, “the *Zwischen* represents the temporal and spatial enabler of genuine dialogue but simultaneously causes its infinitely elusive character, for it does not engender a common, collective realm or a shared, mundane reality.”¹⁵⁴ Buber’s philosophy of dialogue thus poses a challenge to be realized and practiced as a fundamentally sacred inspiration. This tension leads us to understand his view of God before discussing the ethical practice of his philosophy of dialogue.

Buber rejects the path of philosophical epistemology attempted by Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Hegel, a rationalistic and critical method of proving the existence of God. He emphasizes that God cannot be expressed in human language. He likened the basis of his view of God to a “narrow ridge.”¹⁵⁵ He realized that he was not a being

152. Ibid.

153. “What remains most objectionable in Buber is the tendency toward an aestheticization of reality and the problem of Buber’s often slippery poetic rhetoric.” Zank and Braiterman, “Martin Buber.”

154. Sonja Boos, “Martin Buber,” in *Speaking the Unspeakable in Postwar Germany: Toward a Public Discourse on the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 2014), 46–47.

155. “I wanted by this to express that I did not rest on the broad upland of a system that includes a series of sure statements about the absolute, but on a narrow rocky ridge but the certainty of meeting what remains, undisclosed.” Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. by Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Kegan Paul, 1947), 184.

capable of standing on broad, systematic high ground containing a series of definite statements about the Absolute, but rather that he was standing on a narrow boulder in a deep chasm, but with only the certainty of meeting someone who had been concealed to express it poetically. In other words, he refused to claim complete knowledge through a conceptualization of God. For him, God is not the notion that Western philosophers have been describing, but “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” (Ex 3:6)¹⁵⁶ He views God as an object of faith rather than an object of knowledge. God is beyond human language. The presence of God lies in the interactive reciprocity between God and humans. God is the God who spoke to Israel, saying, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” (Ex 20:2) Thus, the relation between humans and God in the Scripture is a dialogue between YHWH and Israel.¹⁵⁷

We as human beings are potentially dual beings with *Thou* or *It*, but God always only exists as *Thou* to us eternally. Buber’s understanding of God is also an extension of the *I–Thou* relation. He emphasizes that every *I–Thou* relation we have reflects the *I–eternal Thou* relation. As such, “In every sphere in its own way, through each process of becoming that is present to us we look out toward the fringe of the eternal Thou; in each we are aware of a breath from the eternal Thou; in each Thou we address the eternal Thou.”¹⁵⁸

Every particular *Thou* is a glimpse through to the eternal Thou; by means of every particular Thou the primary word addresses the eternal Thou. Through this meditation of the Thou of all beings fulfilment, and non-fulfilment, of relations

156. Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 78.

157. *Ibid.*, 26.

158. *Ibid.*

comes to them: the inborn *Thou* is realized in each relation and consummated in none. It is consummated only in the direct relation with the *Thou* that by its nature cannot become *It*.¹⁵⁹

Buber emphasizes that *I* alone cannot approach God. God can only be approached by an encounter between *I* and *Thou*. Like the *I–Thou* in the life with humans, the *I–eternal Thou* relation can also create and maintain intimacy. This occurs not through an ascetic mysticism that has negated the secular world, but through a sincere *I–Thou* relation lived out daily. Ultimately, the extension of all relations is present in the *I–eternal Thou* relation. Each *Thou* in the meeting moment is like a window through which the eternal *Thou* confront us and at the same time Whom we encounter. Through the meeting of *Thou*, gradually, we step forward to the eternal *Thou*.

2.3. Buber’s Philosophical Grounds for Authentic Conversation

Buber’s philosophy of dialogue suggests a qualitative leap in the relationship between *I* and *Thou*. Using the language of Buber, the characteristic of the digital age networked self seems to be defined by the relationship of *I–It*.¹⁶⁰ Although the new aspect of digital media’s relationship promotes the emotional connection and invigorating presence required by the *I–Thou* relationship, the quality of care and dedication to the other person seems to be more deprived than in previous times. The phenomenon of the

159. Buber, *I and Thou*, 75.

160. While the criticism regarding relevancy to the digital environment will be addressed in the next part of the research, here we address the question of the adequacy of Buber’s assertion in the mid-20th century. Still, this study assumes that in the current digital environment of the COVID-19 pandemic, where non-face-to-face communication is reinforced, the space of “otherness” and “reciprocity” claimed by Buber may be extended to apply to virtual space. Even though Buber had never experienced or predicted a digital communication platform, it is clear that he intended that an authentic conversation depends on the transformation in the subject’s internal disposition rather than its external environment. This leap to an authentic conversation culture is a matter of the subject’s attitude, rather than a digital technological evolution. In other words, it requires respect for other people’s sharing, an open mind, and the courage to share and face the truth as it is.

avoidance of conflict best illustrates the relationship between *I-It*. Indeed, various digital communication apps and devices in the social isolation of the COVID-19 quarantine situations are causing a psychological pathology called “digital depersonalization.”¹⁶¹

Furthermore, under the outlook of *I-eternal Thou*, the ultimate third sphere of *I-Thou*, God is our beginning, always present in our history. As such, we must have great trust in the moment of conversation itself. In this sense, Facebook, the flagship platform of the relationship-oriented network, should ask itself whether its alleged social mission—connecting people, building community, and bringing the world closer together—has degenerated relationships to the level of *I-It* and is spreading superficiality. At the same time, digital media users should also reflect on whether their relationships with others through media are turning into *I-It*.

Although Buber had not explicitly mentioned a mandate of spiritual conversation, the philosophy of dialogue that he proposes as the completion of his philosophy presupposes the existence of an eternal *Thou*, God, and the reciprocity through a sacred relationship that a personal encounter with God reveals. Not only that, but it also confirms that it is the most suitable means of ultimate union with God through an authentic conversation. “The eternal *Thou* is addressed in each *I-Thou* encounter because it is the power that enables each and every dialogic encounter to occur, a relation which gathers up and includes all others.”¹⁶² Thus, Buber’s authentic conversation between *I* and the eternal *Thou* provides the ontological basis for authentic conversation

161. “Digital depersonalization is closely linked to a lack of ‘wholeness of perception’ and ‘wholeness of relatedness.’ Digital imagery is always incomplete. An object in a cyber world is a partial object. Relationships with partial objects are experienced as partial, insufficient, and lacking. This constitutes the depersonalization quality of unreality.” Elena Bezzubova, “Digital Depersonalization.”

162. Buber, *I and Thou*, 80.

between *I* and *Thou*, and this leads to the presence, reciprocity, and personal encounter of the eternal *Thou*, God. “*I–Thou* finds its highest intensity and transfiguration in religious reality, in which unlimited Being becomes, as absolute person, my partner.”¹⁶³ This is the philosophical ground and implication of authentic conversation that this section focuses on, the possibility of the sacredness of an authentic conversation, and the mandate to pursue the sacredness of conversation participants.

3. THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CONVERSATION

For Christians, the Scripture is the Word of God, written under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, so it draws God’s people to certainty about all revealed truth together with sacred tradition.¹⁶⁴ Although we read the Scripture through our eyes, we listen to the Word of God with our hearts because it is believed that the Scripture conveys the voice of God. The truth expressed in the Scripture becomes the ultimate wisdom for Christians to live. Still, it is not a unilateral message or prescription but a record of divine-human conversations between personalities. In this section, I first examine the conversational nature of the Scripture and then analyze the conversations employed in the Scripture.

3.1. The Conversational Nature of the Scripture

Before figuring out what position the Bible as a Christian scripture takes on the communication mode of conversation, it is worth noting that the Bible itself already invites the reader to interpret from a dialogical point of view. The readers (whether they are believers/non-believers/individuals/community) can also understand Scripture in a

163. Martin Buber, *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation between Religion and Philosophy* (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016), 37.

164. Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, 18 November, 1965,” in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975), sec. 9 (hereafter cited as *DV*).

dimension of communication. The relationship between the Bible and the reader can also be interpreted and understood within the framework of a monologue or dialogue relationship.

For thousands of years, Christians have regarded the Bible as the Word of God and have received it as the source of their faith.¹⁶⁵ An absolute obedience and total surrender to the Word of the God demands genuine humility and straightforward simplicity and clarity in one's faith. This belief promotes and is enhanced by the view of Scripture as a monologue. This has a one-way process of sequentially passing from God to the Biblical author, the Bible, and finally to the believers.¹⁶⁶ However, this view can also be the basis for solidifying literalism and fundamentalism and even to anti-intellectualism within a closed belief system. As a reaction to and rejection of the monological view, some people have fallen into a relativism that views Scripture as just one of various scriptures. This leads to another polarization, leading to the denial of the sacred values of the Scripture in the Christian faith. In this regard, Kuhn proposes a dialogical view as a more integrated perspective of the two extremes: "Scripture is not simply a *divine monologue*. Instead, both the history of its development and its final, canonized form bear witness to its character as a *sacred dialogue*."¹⁶⁷ The dialogical

165. "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work." 2 Tm 3:16–17.

166. "God inspires inerrant/infalible teaching, reporting, and interpretation of events among faithful believers and the biblical authors through the Spirit; God preserves the inerrancy/infalibility and unity of sacred revelation as it is passed on, written down, and gathered into the canon; As a result, inerrant/infalible word of God is preserved in the Bible, and Spirit aids interpretation and application." Karl Allen Kuhn, *Having Words with God: The Bible as Conversation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 4.

167. *Ibid.*, 5.

view does not ignore the sacredness of God’s Word in the Scripture, but rather emphasizes the fact that the Scripture reflects a sacred conversation between God and humans, between humans, and about God himself and his will, and what it means for the people of God. The legitimacy of the dialogical view of Scripture can be derived from three aspects.

3.1.1. The conversational structure of the scripture

First, the Scripture overall employs conversational structures and patterns in the texts. Numerous narratives in the Bible either explicitly or implicitly contain and represent conversational communication between God and the biblical authors. Although the stories of the Old Testament reflect various genres such as narrative, chronology, and law, in fact, most narratives are based on face-to-face conversations. 42.5% of biblical words contain direct speech quotes rather than indirect speech.¹⁶⁸ The Hebrew verb root *mr* (means “to say” in English) appears 5,308 times in the entire text of the Hebrew Bible.¹⁶⁹ Actions in the texts of the Scripture are primarily expressed through direct speech, as well.¹⁷⁰ For instance, the story of creation is structured as a dialogue rather than a monologue. It is “not presented as the result of some event or action, but as a series of speech acts ascribed to the creator.”¹⁷¹ “The world is then said to obey God’s order in

168. Gary A. Rendsburg, *Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1990), 160.

169. Sergeiy Sandler and Pascual Esther, “In the Beginning there was Conversation: Fictive Direct Speech in the Hebrew Bible,” *Pragmatics: Quarterly Publication of the International Pragmatics Association* 29, no. 2 (2019): 253.

170. Cynthia L. Miller, *The Representation of Speech in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: A Linguistic Analysis*, 2nd ed. Harvard Semitic Monographs (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 2.

171. Sandler and Esther, 254.

a narrative pattern of commands followed by a report of their fulfillment.”¹⁷² Even in “more monological or numerous narratives, the direct speech construction is observed in the conversational frame.”¹⁷³

God reveals his will and teachings, but at the same time, he even changes his behavior through an intimate conversation with humans.¹⁷⁴ God is not the only one who speaks, but also the one who asks and hears. In the Psalms, people deepen their intimate relationship with God by honestly expressing the various emotions that arise in their lived experience, from joyful praise and heartfelt devotion to desperate disappointments, pain, and petition for revenge. Despite these raw human words, God’s Word in the Bible always “invites us to enter into honest, intimate-perhaps even ‘irreverent’ conversation with God.”¹⁷⁵

3.1.2. Dynamic reformation of the scripture

Second, the Scripture reflects conversational dynamism and reformation in community diversity. The Scripture does not report only the clear understanding and effective communication of God’s Word by the people of God. Various forms of communication reveal disagreements and conflicting accounts of God, such as plenty of discussions, arguments, debates, etc. But it is worthy of noting that the biblical authors preserve these even though they could have been easily deleted. This fact shows that, in the first place, the human understanding of the Word of God presupposes a dynamic, dialogical interpretation. In the Scripture, the instruction of God is not presented as a

172. Ibid., “Then God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” Gn 1:3.

173. Sandler and Esther, 253.

174. Gn 18:16–33; Ex 33:11.

175. Karl Allen, 11.

fixed and immutable rule in human language, but rather promotes and guides conversation within the community of faith. In the Old Testament, it is often found that “new laws [are] being added, and old laws recast or set aside. This kind of change can be regarded as a canonical witness to the process of unfolding law”¹⁷⁶

In the Old Testament, various interpretations and debates about the words of God are frequently seen. Ezra and Nehemiah separate the Israelites from the Gentiles as the criterion for those belonging to the New Jerusalem, which is faithful to the law of Moses (Ezr 10:44; Neh 13:1–3, 23–27; Deut 7:1–6; 20:16–18). The authors of Ezra and Nehemiah commonly quote the Torah’s instruction as a motive for their actions and understood that the policies of exclusion and annihilation were in obedience to the will of God.¹⁷⁷ In contrast to this, the book of Ruth narrates the moving story of Ruth, a Gentile, following her mother-in-law, Naomi, to the end. This is inconsistent if the law of Moses is taken literally, but in the perspective of salvific history, Ruth gets married to Boaz, gives birth to Obed, and becomes the great-grandmother of King David. Interestingly, the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Ruth, which contain these diametrically opposed interpretations of the Mosaic law, were all written during Israel’s exile. Likewise, the books of Isaiah, Malachi, and Jonah interpret Moses’ law about the Gentiles contextually according to their respective circumstances and positions.¹⁷⁸

The same is true in the New Testament. In establishing the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians in the early Christian community, the Jerusalem conference

176. Terrence E. Fretheim, *The Pentateuch: Interpreting Biblical Texts* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 169.

177. Karl Allen, 54.

178. *Ibid.*, 56–62.

(Acts 15) compromised by exempting circumcision or observance of the entire Mosaic Law and enacting dietary restrictions instead.¹⁷⁹ But Paul, in his epistle, “no longer believed that food commended one to God or offended God, and had come to the view that food was morally and religiously neutral.”¹⁸⁰ Going one step further, in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, Jesus declares that only the human heart, not the material outside, can fulfill the righteousness of God.¹⁸¹ As such, the dynamism and reformation of God's instruction in the Bible invites us to form and forge the right relationship between God and humanity, between people, and between humans and creation through ongoing conversation with the living Word of the Bible.

In addition, the Old and New Testaments are documents that have undergone the process of canonization. The Bible went through a process of classifying and confirming the documents to be included in it through the various conferences held in early Church history. The history of canonization itself also recognizes and proves Scripture's dynamic reformation for the sake of a sound and more integrated understanding given the diversity and inconsistency of the community.¹⁸² In other words, the dialogical character of the Bible is not accidental, but the inevitable result of the rediscovery of the conversational nature of God Himself within the Judeo-Christian tradition in the process of religious integration carried on by the canonical editors.

179. Acts 15:20.

180. Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Carlisle, 1995), 199.

181. “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.” (Mt 5:17); “It is not what enters one's mouth that defiles that person; but what comes out of the mouth is what defiles one.” (Mt 15:11)

182. Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 63–68.

3.1.3. The interpretational aspect of scripture

Third, the Bible requests the reader to confront God honestly and to interpret it in their own context. As Osborne stated, the Bible was not revealed via the tongues of angels. Though inspired by God, it was written in human language and within human cultures.¹⁸³ It necessarily requests “the interpretation which entails a ‘spiral’ from text to context, from its original meaning to its contextualization or significance for the church today.”¹⁸⁴ In other words, there is a shift from the revelatory text of the biblical literary forms to the interpretive function of the readers. When we look at the Bible as a work of literature, it is easy to see that it employs a variety of genres. As Osborne classifies them, in terms of types of literature, there are narrative as a main proportion, and poetry with the types of war songs, love songs, lament, praise songs, and wisdom literature with the forms of the proverb, saying, riddle, admonition, allegory, dialogue, confession, onomastica, beatitudes, and prophecy, apocalypse, and epistle. “Every interpreter comes to a text with certain expectations based in part upon his or her genre understanding.”¹⁸⁵ Authors and readers share a conventional understanding of a literary genre. “Authors accept it, more or less faithfully, and shape their texts in adherence to it; readers’ expectations and attitudes when approaching texts are colored by it, and it affects their understanding of texts.”¹⁸⁶

183. Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL.: Intervarsity Press, 1991), 6.

184. Ibid.

185. Ibid., 150.

186. Sven S. Hartman, “Datierung der ugaritischen Apokalyptik,” in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, ed. David Hellholm (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1983), quoted in Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 151.

Likewise, the various revelatory forms of communication in the Bible encourage the readers to interpret passages through ongoing reflection, in depth prayer, and conversation. The biblical narrative does not provide a performance checklist of normative acts of propositional truth. This process leads to an imaginative and humble reflection with God about what it means to live God's will in our time and space. As Bauckham states, the faith community should recount the biblical story without losing the sense of events and theological meaning, "always remaining open to the never exhausted potential of the texts in their resonances with contemporary life."¹⁸⁷

3.2. Conversation Employed in the Scripture

It is noteworthy that God's first word to humans was in the form of a question both in the Old and New Testaments.¹⁸⁸ The Scripture expresses that God desires to hear from humans, that they ponder God's Word in their hearts,¹⁸⁹ and that they build relationships through reflection as a conversational partner, rather than as a king's command giving a unilateral guideline in a top-down manner.

3.2.1. Conversations in the Old Testament

The Old Testament employs dialogue as a literary genre in many places, and dialogues with Adam, Abraham, and Moses are considered as prototypes. The divine-human conversation as a prototype reveals the image of God as the Divine initiator of conversation, aware of and attentive to the human need to be seen, heard, and valued.¹⁹⁰

187. Richard Bauckham, "Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 43–44.

188. "Where are you?" (Gn 3:9); "What are you looking for?" (Jn 1:38)

189. See Mary's example. Lk 1:29; 2:19; 2:51.

190. Sheri Juanita Ray, "Transforming Conversation: Engaging God and Others in Authentic Spiritual Dialogue." (DMin. Diss., Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2018), 44.

Thematically Old Testament dialogues are divided mainly into inner-negotiation and outer-confrontation. The former is a conversation dealing with people's loyalty toward the commandment of Yahweh in the context of the relationship between Yahweh and the Israelites. The latter shows people's disloyalty toward Yahweh and his commandments in the relationship between Yahweh and the non-Israelites. Both aspects of dialogue contain the dichotomous distinction between God's people and God's enemies as commonly expressed in a revelatory fashion.

Prophets generally prefer the genre of dialogue. The author of Isaiah implicitly composes a typical conversational structure in various layers when Yahweh's message is communicated. The first layer is the conversation between Yahweh and the other speakers who have seen the vision, the second layer is between Yahweh and the people to whom the message is destined, and the third layer is between the mediators of Yahweh and the people to whom the message is sent.¹⁹¹ The Book of Jeremiah similarly begins with a conversation between Yahweh and Jeremiah. Here, Yahweh leads the conversation, and Jeremiah shows the pattern of responding.¹⁹² The Book of Ezekiel often reveals dramatic action, speeches, and disputations. The oracles and literary forms display both diversity and freshness.¹⁹³ The Book of Jonah shows the process of change in the prophet's stubbornness by engaging in a conversation to the end even with those who disobey God's will.¹⁹⁴ The book of Micah adheres to the prophetic tradition of the

191. Thomaskutty, 35.

192. Ibid.

193. Ibid.

194. Ibid.

judgment speech, the mourning cry, and the disputation speech in implicit conversation with false prophets.¹⁹⁵

Old Testament texts use dialogue to effectively describe various characters. Among them, the book of Job is the prime example of achieving the dramatic effect of conversation.¹⁹⁶ “The book of Job is a sympathetic portrait of a man in torment—a man who cries out in anger and despair.”¹⁹⁷ The conversations between Job and his friends are typical of a completely failed conversation without listening and genuine empathy. The apathy for the suffering of a human being causes not only the wrath and despair of the suffering Job, but also the final anger and judgment of God. The dialogue of the Book of Job shows the futility of unsympathetic interpretations and cheap solutions to the problem of human suffering, and ultimately how harmful and worthless ego-centered conversation between humans alone can become without the presence of God.

In a nutshell, conversation has the effect of emphasizing the actual situation of the characters and further building up the argument between the characters, thereby maximizing the dramatic elements of the story.

3.2.2. Conversation in the New Testament

There is no word “conversation” in the New Testament that translates to “talking” in the modern sense.¹⁹⁸ It is only an archaic term that mainly refers to behavior or conduct. Moreover, there is no direct reference to conversation. However, the

195. Ibid.

196. Ibid.

197. Stephen Miller, *Conversation: A History of a Declining Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 37.

198. Luther A. Weigle, *Bible Words in Living Language* (London: Nelson, 1957), 8–10.

teachings of Jesus described in the Gospels were guided mainly through conversation. He preached in front of large crowds, but also many times he ministered on the road, at supper, with all generations, all races, and ethnicities, through face-to-face spontaneous encounters, sometimes intimately and other times in the midst of controversy.

Jesus opened himself up to meeting people of different personalities. He did not separate himself in an arrogant manner, did not hesitate to get his hands dirty, was not reluctant to engage in friendly communication or hostile conflicts, and entered into conversation faithfully. It is in his encounters with people that his character is revealed. Jesus “is shown to be supremely responsive, with a benevolent heart ready and willing to serve, while simultaneously being unafraid to guide and direct the conversation to achieve desired outcomes.”¹⁹⁹

All four Gospels mainly employ dialogue to convey the narrative. The Gospel of Mark develops drama within the frame of an action-packed narrative. The dialogue genre creates the individual personalities and conflicts between characters in the story. The focus is on the conversation between Jesus and the characters rather than the detailed description of the controversy. It usually results in the crowd’s astonishment while watching the scene.²⁰⁰ Jesus’ teaching employs parables with outsiders and interpretation to His disciples and insiders.²⁰¹

In the Gospel of Matthew, dialogue occurs remarkably less than other Synoptics. In the beginning, the conversation between the angel Gabriel and Joseph also suggests the

199. Rob J. Bewley, *Transforming Conversation: How Jesus Talked to People: Insights from Mark's Gospel* (Cambridge, England: Grove Books, 2011), 27.

200. E.g., “All were amazed and asked one another, “What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.” (Mk 1:27)

201. Thomaskutty, 37.

implicit nature of the dialogue of command and obedience.²⁰² Rather than engaging in a conscious conversation, Jesus employs discourses and teachings to large groups of people.²⁰³ The conversation with the devil²⁰⁴ illustrates the typical pattern of dialogue in the Gospel of Matthew. Interlocutors also come to Jesus requesting or asking questions, and Jesus answers them. Sometimes Jesus strictly commands silence, and sometimes he shows the patterns of request-rebuke-response (8:25–27; 15:21–28), double meaning-misunderstanding-clarification (16:5–12), and statement/action-misunderstanding-clarification (21:18–22).²⁰⁵

The Gospel of Luke has a similar level to other synoptic gospels in employing dialogue, and the use of conversation stands out, especially in the narrative about Jesus' childhood. The conversation between the angel and Zechariah (1:13–20) reveals the possibility that the conversation turns out to be closed due to distrust of God's Word. In contrast, the conversation between the angel and Mary (1:26–38) expresses trust in God's Word, leading to deep reflection on the conversation. Elizabeth and Mary's communication expresses joy and gratitude, and the discussion between twelve-year-old Jesus and the teachers (2:46–47) also shows Jesus' familiarity and talent for conversation. Luke also devotes a significant amount to the discourse of Jesus.²⁰⁶ By maintaining both the use of discourse and the liveliness of conversation, Luke portrays vibrant characters.

202. *Ibid.*, cf. Mt 1:20b–25; 2:13–15; and 2:19–23.

203. cf. Mt 5:3–7:27; 10:5–42; 11:4–30; 13:3–52; 18:3–20, 22–35; 23:1–39; 24:4–25:46.

204. cf. Mt 4:1–11.

205. Thomaskutty, 38.

206. cf. Lk 6:2–49; 7:24–35; 10:2–24; 11:2–13; 17–36; 39–44; 46–52; 12:1–13:9; 13:22–35; 14:3–17:10; 17:20–18:17; 19:12–27; 21:3–36.

The Gospel of John uses dialogue as the primary narrative technique far more than the Synoptic Gospels. This is because the Synoptic Gospels are centered on the actions and words of Jesus, whereas the evangelist John intends to communicate clearly with Jesus and what Jesus intended. This Gospel goes beyond simply presenting objective data on events involving Jesus. Instead, it emphasizes the revelatory manifestation of Jesus' identity.²⁰⁷ In particular, the first part of the Gospel of John, 1:19-12:50, the so-called Book of Signs, employs a dialogue or dialogue structure as a whole, enough to be regarded as a book of dialogue.²⁰⁸ Here the extension of Jesus' initiative conversation becomes more prominent.²⁰⁹

3.2.3. The model of authentic conversation: conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in the gospel of John.

All the conversations reported in the Gospels between Jesus and a specific person can provide the biblical archetype and model of authentic conversation for all Christians. Jesus encounters people and guides them through an inner transformation leading to salvation. Conversation with Jesus means an encounter with the incarnate God and the grace of true knowledge of the One who is the revelation. Indeed, a holy invitation for asking a decision to follow Himself.

207. Ray, 15–16.

208. Thomaskutty categorized the book of the Signs in the Gospel of John based on the dialogue through a micro, meso, and macro analysis: A glory-focused revelatory dialogue (1:19–2:12); a challenge and riposte dialogue (2:13–22); a pedagogical dialogue leading to a monologue (3:1–21); a report-and-defense dialogue to a narrative commentary (3:22–36); an inter-religious dialogue in dual-stage setting (4:1–42); a request rebuke-response dialogue (4:43–54); a sign and a controversy dialogue leading to a monologue (5:1–47); from sign centric dialogues to question-and-answer dialogues (6:1–71); a religious-theological dialogue formed in a series of challenge-and-riposte (7:1–52; 8:12–59); a dramatic dialogue leading to a monologue and a community (9:1–10:21); a forensic dialogue develops from-antithetical-to-synonymous mode (10:22–42); a glory-focused revelatory dialogue (11:1–53); a conflict-centric dialogue as a conclusion (11:54–12:50). Regarding the methodology he employed, see Thomaskutty, 19–26.

209. Robert Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 254.

There are many stories of Jesus' conversation in the Gospels. More than others, the Gospel of John best exemplifies the conversational love accomplished by Jesus Christ. Among them, the conversation with the Samaritan woman in John Chapter 4 can be seen as a prototype of authentic conversation. Hence, this subsection attempts to analyze and focus on the meaning of the text as a model for authentic conversation with various biblical references.

If the background is set in verses 1–6, verses 7–26 contain the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. The topics of the conversation are the water of life in verses 6–15, the woman's personal story regarding her husbands in verses 16–19, and worship in Spirit and Truth in verses 20–26. This central conversation (verses 7–26) begins and ends with Jesus' words, and there are thirteen speech units. Seven are the words of Jesus, and six are the words of the Samaritan woman. Of these thirteen utterances, ten use λέγει (speak), and three use ἀπεκρίθη...εἶπεν (answer).²¹⁰ Through these conversations, the Samaritan woman is gradually changed.

The background of the conversation is unusual. The sight of Jesus talking to the Samaritan woman in broad daylight evokes even tension. At that time, the Jews considered Samaria and its inhabitants unclean. The women of Samaria, which were unclean, were more unclean than men, and they were the ones who made other people who came in contact with him unclean as well.²¹¹

The conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman and their thematic medium is summarized in the following table.

210. Thomaskutty, 138.

211. Andrea J. Köstenberger, *John: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2004), 148.

Verse	Jesus ([J])	Thematic Medium	Samaritan Woman ([S])
7	[J1] "Give me a drink."	Water	
9			[S1] "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?"
10	[J2] "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."		
11–12			[S2] "Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?"
13–14	[J3] "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks		

	the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”		
15			[S3] “Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”
16	[J4] “Go call your husband and come back.”		
17a			[S4] “I do not have a husband.”
17b– 18	[J5] “You are right in saying, 'I do not have a husband.' For you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true.”	Husband	
19–20		Spirit and Truth	[S5] “Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain; but

			you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem.”
21–24	[J6] “Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You people worship what you do not understand; we worship what we understand, because salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth.”		
25			[S6] “I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the

			Anointed; when he comes, he will tell us everything.”
26	[J7] “I am he, the one who is speaking with you.”		

Table 1. Conversation analysis according to thematic medium (Jn 4:7–26)

a) The existential situation of a woman reflected in the thematic medium of conversation

The topic that mediates the conversation in the text clearly reflects the woman’s existential self. Firstly, “water” ([J1]–[S3]) demonstrates the woman’s inner thirst. The description of a woman coming alone to draw her water in this hot daytime indicates that this woman is not very welcome to the other women of her town and that she has avoided the gossip, scorn, and ridicule of others. It can be seen that this woman lives a life wholly alienated from mainstream society under the cultural norms of her time. As seen in [S3], she is crushed by daily helplessness and fatigue, revealing an existential emptiness caused by an inner emptiness and thirst.

Secondly, the “husband” ([J4]–[S4]–[J5]) reflects the private realm of problems in inter-human relationships. She was losing direction in her life, and she did not take the issue of sin in human relationships seriously and was living in isolation from her neighbors. In those days of a male-dominated society, women had no right to abandon men. She had been married five times, and the situation of the Samaritan woman, who now cannot even have a legal husband, must have been a scandal.²¹² However, at that time, men could easily abandon women, and husbands were necessary for women’s

212. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 152.

survival. It was socially and legally impossible for a woman to become independent without a man, whether a husband, father or son.²¹³

Thirdly, spirit and truth ([S5]–[J6]–[S6]) reflect the realm of relationship with God. The text reveals the woman’s religious and national concerns as a Samaritan and her ultimate concern for salvation. By exposing that Jesus already knew about her husband, he not only reveals his all-knowing ability but also prompts the woman to see him as a prophet. The Samaritan woman changes her perception by confessing that Jesus is a “prophet” ([S5]) who is “greater than Jacob.” She now begins to perceive a spiritual dimension where previously she thought only of material water. Now she asks what true worship is in the Samaritan tradition. Jesus’ self-revelation (Ἐγώ εἰμι) in [J7] regarding his relationship with God culminates in the whole conversation (verses 7–26). The change in the title of Jesus given by the woman shows a gradual recognition of the identity of Jesus.²¹⁴ Jesus’ self-revelation in conversation integrates within himself the themes of “the gift of God” ([J2]) and “worship in spirit and truth” ([J6]). By recognizing him as the Messiah, the Samaritan woman comes to know that the very person she is talking to right now is the Giver of the “water of life” and a true place of worship.

b) The implications as a model for authentic conversation

This conversation reports the dramatic transformation through the personal encounter between the conversation participants. One of the persons identifies himself as “God”; then the argument of this authentic conversation is to recognize Jesus as God and

213. Janeth Norfleete Day, *The Woman at the Well Interpretation of John 4:1–42 in Retrospect and Prospect* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 169.

214. Ἰουδαῖος (the Jew in v.9), Μειζων Ἰακωβ (the one greater than Jacob in verse 12), κύριος (sir in verses 11,15,19), προφήτης (prophet in verse 19), Χρισ-τός (Messiah in verses 25–26). Thomaskutty, 142–43.

the one through whom is possible a self-transcendence and inner transformation. This story implicitly includes the possibility of healing through conversation of participants who have two crisis factors (self-isolation and cognitive bias) of the digital communication culture diagnosed in the Chapter I. Therefore, it seems to be the most appropriate conversational story reflecting its purpose, fruits, and challenges to the culture of digital communication.

- The purpose of authentic conversation

This conversation has a clear purpose. It is the inner healing and restoration of the Samaritan woman, and ultimately the salvation of the soul obtained through meeting with God. It is worth noting the verb ἔδει (had to), in verse 4.²¹⁵ The use of this word does not mean that Jesus was going through Samaria, either by accident or unconsciously, but rather as a divinely ordained will that it must happen. It shows an articular divine providence, that is, that the will of God is involved in this journey.²¹⁶ Jesus had a longing for salvation for Samaria. As a result of the conversation, he is acknowledged by the Samaritans as “the savior of the world.”²¹⁷ [J1] shows that the beginning of a conversation that will bring salvation to the soul started through a very common and familiar topic, and surprisingly ended with a spiritual matter. Jesus deals with the personal problems of a woman's life ([S3]), the problems related in human relationships ([S4]), and the problems of religiosity ([S5]). This leads to the ultimate meeting of the Messiah and restoration of the authentic relationship with God. And these

215. “He had to pass through Samaria.” Jn 4:4.

216. Francis J. Moloney, *Belief in the Word* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 137.

217. “Many more began to believe in him because of his word, and they said to the woman, ‘We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.’” Jn 4:41–42.

issues are intimately interconnected within the dynamics of the conversation. Here, we confirm in the biblical story that Martin Buber's genuine dialogue between *I–Thou* is ontologically based on the sacred dialogue between *I–eternal Thou*.

- The fruit of authentic conversation

This conversation shows the fruit of authentic conversation. It encompasses all the healing aspects of authentic conversation, namely interiority, empathy, and ethicality, as stated in the previous section.²¹⁸

First, concerning interiority, as seen in [S1], the Samaritan woman shows a deep-rooted rejection of Jews, who, in her words, despise Samaritans. However, she also has an adverse reaction to her own people, especially Samaritan women. She too sees them as unclean, meaning that Jews should not have contact with them. She hates the Jewish despising of Samaritans, but she also sees herself with that same view. She hates being scorned, but she sees herself through the eyes of scorn, and her feelings are complex and contradictory. The Samaritan woman, who was accustomed to being despised and ignored, presented a self-deprecating answer to Jesus' request.²¹⁹ In fact, it was the influence of internalized shame that escaped the eyes of others and caused her to come to the well at a time when no one else did. In [S2], Jesus is compared to Jacob, and even Jesus is downgraded to being less than Jacob. But when Jesus heard the woman's sarcastic remarks, Jesus did not defend himself, make excuses, or attack them. Seeing the

218. See Chapter II, section 1.

219. Herman Riddemos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 154.

shame inside the woman, he showed a desire to give the water of life and “cared for” the deep interior life of the woman.²²⁰

Second, concerning empathy, Jesus openly shows his own vulnerability. Jesus humbles himself to the woman’s level as a conversational partner. From the point of view of an orthodox Jew, this is an act of renunciation. Jesus takes a very radical attitude beyond all taboos, and he lowers himself to the level of the Samaritan woman. This shows the incarnate Jesus with the human desire to feel thirst as Jesus asks for water. Jesus, tired and thirsty, knows everything about human beings, understands and empathizes with them, and practices that empathy. Jesus came as a whole human being and ultimately gave Himself wholly as a gift for the human race. In particular, Jesus embraces the narrative of the conversational partner’s entire life in [J4]. The woman’s confession that Jesus is a prophet shows the development of her awareness. She felt that Jesus empathized with her entire life with the eyes of love.

Third, regarding ethicality, we found that the Samaritan woman moved forward with actions, not just ending with words. The woman who had been drawing water left her water jar and went into the village. Just as the first disciples of the Lord left their nets and family,²²¹ the plowman left the plow,²²² and followed Jesus, she ran full of joy in bringing good news.²²³ She has now become a missionary to deliver the message of the Messiah, the Christ.²²⁴ The authentic conversation led to the salvation of the whole

220. Ibid.

221. Mk 1:16–20.

222. Lk 9:62.

223. Rom 10:15; Is 52:7.

224. Jn 4:29.

village. The story does not end with individual salvation, but salvation is transmitted to the community, other nations, and the ends of the world. Indeed, love must overflow.

- The challenge in authentic conversation: bias and misunderstanding

One of the distinctive features of John the Evangelist's narrative technique is the use of misunderstandings.²²⁵ Because the words of Jesus are ambiguous and contain metaphorical or double meanings, Jesus' interlocutors do not understand the deeper meaning as a reflection of Jesus' divinity, and often they ask the wrong questions or respond with protests. The story of the Samaritan woman is the best example of the motif of misunderstanding in John's Gospel. Ethical, sexual, and ethnic barriers between Jewish men and Samaritan women create cognitive biases that are difficult to resolve. All three thematic conversations mentioned above also reveal misunderstandings about women. In [S2], she misapprehended the living water of Jesus on a material level, and the misconception continues after that.

Nevertheless, Jesus continues the conversation with kindness and patience. Ultimately, he led her to an encounter with God through proper worship. Jesus knew her helplessness, anguish, and thirst and became her companion on her long journey of recovery. Jesus did not focus on digging into her dark past. [J4] does not imply a confrontational technique to reveal the infidelity of a woman, but an expression to show that Jesus already knew the depths of her life from the beginning and respected her as she was.²²⁶ Furthermore, when this woman did not understand the meaning of living water,

225. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John(I–XII)* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), CXXXV.

226. Ernst Haenchen, *John 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapter 1–6*. (Augsburg: Fortress Publishers, 1985), 221.

Jesus was trying to open her understanding, so that she could know that the drinking water is the divine water of life that applies to her husband, who is not obligated to draw water.²²⁷

3.2.4. The mandate for authentic conversation among believers

The New Testament urges all followers of Jesus to have authentic conversations that share their faith in Christ and reveal the mandate and rationale for such conversations some Epistles.²²⁸

Paul calls believers a new creation (2 Cor 5:17) and clarifies that the source of the new creation is God, who has entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation. He further emphasizes that we, as new creations in Christ, must act as ambassadors of Christ: “So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (2 Cor 5:20) The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “Ambassador” as “an appointed or official messenger; a person who speaks or acts on another's behalf; a person's representative,” or “a representative or promoter of a specified cause; a spokesperson, an advocate.”²²⁹ Paul sees the role of the ambassador as establishing alliances and friendly relations between two parties, and the ambassador of Christ as the facilitator of reconciliation between God and humans. He recognizes reconciliation with God as the ecclesial mission and emphasizes its urgency by using the Greek verb *deomai*, which means imploring, begging, and urging.

227. Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 185.

228. Matthew Chad Glover, “A Project to Engage Millennial and Generation Z Young Adults in Abundant Life Church by Teaching them how to have Spiritual Conversations before and After the Sunday Morning Worship Services,” (Dmin Diss., Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021), 22.

229. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “Ambassador,” accessed February 1, 2022, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/6095?redirectedFrom=ambassador#eid>

The first letter of Peter also emphasizes the necessity of authentic conversation, which presupposes an attitude of holiness from the heart toward Christ: “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.” (1 Peter 3:15-16)

The Greek *hagiazō* means “to make holy,” “purify or consecrate,” or “sanctify.” The word ‘heart’ translates *kardia*. This word is understood as the center and seat of “spiritual life, . . . the soul or mind, as it is the fountain and seat of the thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes, endeavors.”²³⁰ Peter is saying that each believer must truly exalt Christ from their heart, and this is possible only when the inner heart that is sanctified and the outward public expression through the lips are connected through authentic conversation. Through this process, we can be prepared for hope in Christ, and it keeps us faithful in it. Peter pays special attention to the word “hope.” “Peter could have chosen faith, salvation, joy, or another similar term, but he selected hope. Hope is a close equivalent to faith but has key components in Petrine writing.”²³¹ For Peter, hope is Christological as his views on the incarnation (1:20–21), death (2:24), resurrection (1:3), ascension (3:22), second coming (1:13), union with the Church (3:18) are coherently connected with hope in Christ. The meaning of the word “always prepared” means that although the first epistle of Peter was written for the persecuted Christian community and he was prepared for the martyrdom to testify to the gospel of Christ, he had in mind the informal environment of everyday life rather than the formal environment of the courtroom. The author wanted people to be able to spontaneously explain and defend

230. Glover, 32.

231. *Ibid.*, 50.

Christ-centered hope in the daily sufferings of contemporary Christians living in a pagan society.

As we have seen above, the New Testament exhorts Christ's followers to engage in authentic conversation as "ambassadors of Christ," for the ministry of reconciliation between God and humans, and the mission of bearing witness to "hope in Christ" anytime and anywhere.

4. THE THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CONVERSATION

If we assume that spirituality as lived religious experience is prior to theology, both ontologically and psychologically, then theology generated by spirituality is the primary evaluator and critic of spirituality.²³² Theology judges the adequacy of a particular spirituality to the Gospel and sacred tradition. It also helps the believer understand their experience, appropriate it more deeply, and live it more fully. This section will examine systematic theological reflection on the conversation and attempt to clarify the conversational relationship between God and humanity, the ontological foundation and ultimate horizon of authentic conversation.

4.1. Conversation as Participation in Trinitarian Communion

The theological significance of conversation rests on the creation and covenant of God in the beginning. God's creation out of nothing (*Creatio ex nihilo*) is God's creative word and action. The creative Word of God does not merely mean the establishment of a creature's existence but suggests that its existence involves its relation

232. Sandra Schneiders, "Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?" in *Horizon* 13, no. 2 (1986): 270–71.

to God and other creatures.²³³ The purpose of creation is the establishment of communion between the Creator and the creature, especially with the human as *imago Dei*, in the form of a covenant. “This communion has the form of an on-going conversation of God with humanity where humans are responsible to God in everything they do.”²³⁴ The origin of this ongoing conversation between the Creator, humans, and creation flows from the divine communion of the Triune God.

Each Person of the Trinity is related to the other. This relation of the Trinity indicates that it has an unlimited openness to all things. The personality and actions of the three Persons belong to each Person. Still, the external activities of the three Persons—creation, salvation, and sanctification—are common with each of them. Although the Father is the protagonist of creation, the Son and the Holy Spirit also participate. The Son is the protagonist of salvation, but the Father and the Holy Spirit also participate, and the Holy Spirit is the protagonist of sanctification. Still, the Father and the Son also participate in this mission.

Anne Hunt proposes an analogical imagination of divine communion and human conversation, based on the Paschal Mystery²³⁵ at the heart of the Christian faith. The event of Christ’s death on the cross for the salvation of humankind shows that not only death, but His whole life and whole existence is characterized by self-surrendering to

233. Christoph Schwöble, “God as Conversation: Reflection on a Theological Ontology of Communicative Relations,” in Jacques Haers and de Mey, Peter, *Theology and Conversation: Towards a Relational Theology* (Leuven; Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2003), 50.

234. Ibid.

235. Anne Hunt’s work is mainly based on Hans Urs von Balthasar’s interpretation of the Paschal theology of Christ’s Crucifixion, Hell, and Resurrection. On Balthasar’s Paschal Theology see H.U. von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale. The Mystery of Easter*, trans. with an introduction by A.N., Edinburgh, 1990, quoted in Anne Hunt, “Trinity and Paschal Mystery: Divine Communion and Human Conversation,” in Haers and de Mey, 79.

other-centeredness.²³⁶ This surrender of Christ is the pure love of the Son towards the Father. Although it is the Son's voluntary act, it was also the event of a triune surrender, of mutual self-giving and self-yielding love. The Father surrenders His Son; the Son surrenders Himself, the Spirit is the Spirit of self-surrendering love."²³⁷

Christ's descent into hell implies the entry into loneliness and desolation of the sinner in hell in the utter defenselessness and vulnerability of love.²³⁸ In this descent into darkness, the sheer light of glory is thoroughly hidden. The infinite depths of hell only reveal the glory of love that denies all that is not love. If death on the cross was considered as an act of liberty, the descent to hell is a passive "being removed."²³⁹ In absolute vulnerability and powerlessness of obedient love in the triune God, Christ descends into hell to be with the sinners, not for reigning over them. In loneliness and hellish desolation as "a being-only-for-oneself," Christ as "a being-for-the-other" stands in solidarity with those who reject solidarity with God.²⁴⁰

Despite the moment of extreme separation of the Father-Son, the Resurrection of Christ brought the Father and the Son united in the Holy Spirit in the eternal plan of the Trinity for our salvation. This is also Son's self-surrender and obedience toward the Father. He allows His father to raise Him. In total active receptivity, He receives the fullness of the divine and enters into full communion with His Father.²⁴¹

236. Hunt, 80.

237. Ibid.

238. Ibid., 81.

239. Ibid.

240. Ibid.

241. Ibid., 83.

The Paschal Mystery is, therefore, an expression of an eternal trinitarian conversation, traditionally called a “*perichoresis*” or “*circumincession*” (mutual indwelling, mutual immanence), expressing an essential orientation towards the other in the never-ending dynamic exchange of giving and responding. In this way, the divine person is described not in terms of “being-for-oneself,” but as “being-in-and-towards-the-other.”²⁴² This dynamic divine communion of the Trinity reveals the existence of God as conversation. The human being as the image of God walks on the path to realizing divine communion as the original inspiration of conversation. This not only frees us from the entanglement of prevalent postmodernism into autonomy or independence from egoism or egocentrism, but also opens us to “God’s total self-giving, self-receiving, mutuality, sharing, freedom, invitation, gift, acceptance, intimacy, co-indwelling, and communion.”²⁴³

Although the theology of the Trinity is a mystery beyond all our understanding, it is a beckoning rather than a stop sign.²⁴⁴ The Triune God is inviting us to draw closer to Him until the day we meet face to face (1 Cor 13:12) in eternal life. Therefore, we should be conscious of the nature of our own *imago Dei* and ask for the grace to seek the fullness of human conversation within the inspiration of the eternal divine communion of the Triune God. “For truly our conversation is nothing less than a participation in the divine conversation, so to speak, that is trinitarian being, a share in and an entry into the one

242. Ibid., 85.

243. Daniella Zsupan-Jerome, *Connected Toward Communion: The Church and Social Communication in the Digital Age* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 51.

244. Ibid. 49.

trinitarian consciousness, a participation in that radical ‘being–for another’ that is the essence of inner trinitarian life and love.”²⁴⁵

4.2. Conversation in the Christological Perspective

While the essence of inner trinitarian life and love involves divine inspiration in the act of human conversation toward divine communion in God as divine conversation, then the history of economic-trinitarian life and love drives an authentic conversation in human history on the mystical horizon of the revelation and incarnation of Christ the Son.

As stated above, the Old Testament creation and covenant symbolized the divine-human “establishment of conversation” in the context of salvific biblical history. The sin which Adam and Eve contracted²⁴⁶ in yielding to the tempter was a “disruption of conversation.”²⁴⁷ Although our first parents, who succumbed to the serpent’s seductive voice, made the disobedient choice, yet God sought out and invited them into conversation: “Where are you? (Gn 3:9)” They opened their eyes outside their relationship with Creator. They felt shame, became afraid of God, and conversed with God only for avoiding their responsibilities. The conversation with God turned into a monologue of self-justification by accusing others.²⁴⁸

245. Hunt, 88.

246. “By yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a personal sin, but this sin affected the human nature that they would then transmit in a fallen state. It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice. And that is why original sin is called ‘sin’ only in an analogical sense: it is a sin ‘contracted’ and not ‘committed’—a state and not an act.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1997), 404.

247. Schwöble, 53–55.

248. *Ibid.*, 55.

Nevertheless, God desired to restore the disrupted conversation with humans. The establishment of the covenant for Israel and its re-establishment repeated with the Israel's repeated infidelity symbolizes the divine will to restore the conversation between God's consistent faithfulness in love and humans' contradictory response. God, who was incapable of anything other than love in truth, finally sent his Son into the world to complete the greater mystery of love, the ultimate culmination of revelation, in Jesus Christ.²⁴⁹

Jesus, who became a human, not only preached the word of God but listened to it and put it into practice in perfect obedience. In Christ, who is the incarnated Word, the conversation between God and humanity reveals not the sin of disobedience of Adam and Eve, but the story of faith, the completion of the restoration of conversation in unbroken trust.

The "restoration of conversation" in the salvation history of eternal love can be interpreted from the conversation aimed at communion between God and humanity. The document on Revelation of the Second Vatican Council declares that the revelation of God has been revealed to humanity in the most intimate image.

Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col. 1:15, 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex. 33:11; John 15:14–15) and lives among them (see Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself... By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.²⁵⁰

249. "Christ, the Son of God made man, is the Father's one, perfect and unsurpassable Word." *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 65.

250. *DV*, sec. 2.

Christ, the Mediator of all revelation, is also the interlocutor of the conversation between God and humans. Christ incarnated is the way through which the divine Word of God can be audible by a human in the form of human history, and at the same time the way through which humanity's faithful response can be speakable to God. By hearing the word of God and responding through Jesus, all humans are united and bring about ongoing salvation in Christ.

By his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man. "We are called only to become one with him, for he enables us as the members of his Body to share in what he lived for us in his flesh as our model".... For it is the plan of the Son of God to make us and the whole Church partake in his mysteries and to extend them to and continue them in us and in his whole Church. This is his plan for fulfilling his mysteries in us.²⁵¹

4.3. Conversation in Ecclesiological and Eschatological Perspectives

The Church was foreshadowed from the beginning of the world and was remarkably prepared in the history of the people of Israel and by means of the Old Covenant.²⁵² It is established definitively and visibly with the advent of Christ by the Triune God.

The Trinity, the source and exemplary image of the Church, is the goal of that Church. Born of the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit, the ecclesial communion must return to the Father in the Spirit through the Son, until the day when everything is subject to the Son and he turns over everything to the Father, so that "God may be everything to everyone." (1 Cor 15:28)²⁵³

251. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 521.

252. *LG*, sec. 2.

253. Bruno Forte, *The Church: Icon of the Trinity: A Brief Study* (Boston, MA: St. Paul Books & Media, 1991), 29.

If we understand the origin of the Church as the Triune God, then the relationship of openness and conversational love and communion in the Trinity is also fundamentally the goal of the Church, the People of God. The Church is constituted in such a way that God enables and authorizes those who have heard God's word to proclaim it and so to continue the divine-human conversation.²⁵⁴ The Word of God spoken to humanity in Christ is sustained by his people, who are called witnesses of the Word of God. Since the Church, unlike the Son, is a creature, it is not impeccable in herself but constantly moves toward the fullness of Christ so that she is to be understood as an "ongoing conversation." Its content is the gospel of Christ, the message that God has restored the relationship to his human creatures in order to bring about the perfected community with his reconciled creation.²⁵⁵ It is never a standstill but re-forms and re-shapes through communication interpretation in community life. Furthermore, since the divinity of the Word of God is oriented toward the salvation of the whole creation, the Word proclaimed by the Church shapes and drives the action and mission of love and service to the world. God's word carries beyond the walls of the Church to the end of creation, both in a spatial and in a temporal sense.²⁵⁶ Therefore, the Church as an ongoing conversation is also a "never-ending conversation" towards an eschatological goal. Here, the eschaton is not only "the *visio beatifica* where we will then see what we have heard and believe but also the *auditio beatifica* where the voice of triune God and

254. Schwöble, 59–60.

255. Ibid., 59.

256. Ibid., 61.

the voices of God's reconciled creation will be united in perfect harmony,"²⁵⁷ as the "ultimate face-to-face conversation" between God and humanity.

5. SUMMARY

Chapter II aimed to establish an interdisciplinary foundation for hermeneutical interpretation in response to the crisis in the culture of digital communication. We explored the critical thematic analysis of the literature on conversation in various spheres.

Firstly, in the anthropological sphere, we examined the perspectives of psychological philosophical counseling, in which the healing aspects of an authentic conversation were found and functioned in interiority, empathy, and ethicality. Through Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue, we noted that a culture of authentic communication can be achieved only based on the qualitative leap of relationships from *I-It* to *I-Thou*. In his ontology of *Zwischen* (Betweenness), the participants' total acceptance of otherness and intersubjectivity is inevitably required for an authentic conversation. We confirmed it should be directed ultimately toward the transcendental relationship between *I* and the eternal *Thou*. Here, the status of spiritual conversation as the ultimate model of authentic conversation is implicitly revealed.

Secondly, in the biblical sphere, the scripture shows its conversational nature from its written structures and patterns, dynamic reformation in its community history, and the method of interpretation. We also explored that both OT and NT employed conversation in their genres, emphasizing the characters and storyline. In particular, we researched the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman in the Gospel of

257. Ibid., 62.

John as the model of spiritual conversation in that the conversation reflects on the participant's lived experience and existential situation and results in the fruit of healing and inner transformation. At the same time, this conversation reveals several challenges, such as bias and misunderstood communication, problems that also frequently occur in the culture of digital communication. As Paul and Peter commonly exhort the faithful, spiritual conversation is mandated to the faithful as ambassadors of Christ. The mission of reconciliation between God and humans bears witness to hope in Christ.

Thirdly, in the theological sphere, we investigated that conversation symbolizes participation in trinitarian communion. Through an analogical imagination of divine communion and human conversation, based on the Paschal Mystery, which is located at the heart of the Christian faith, the human being as the image of God walks on a path to fulfill divine communion as the original inspiration of conversation. As both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation, Jesus Christ restores the disrupted conversation between God and humans and always presents with us all as the interlocutor of the divine-human conversation through His salvific mission in human history.

Based on the theoretical, conceptual foundations in the three spheres above related to authentic conversation, this study now moves on to the level of spiritual conversation from the Ignatian approach and its practical application for the context of the culture of digital communication.

CHAPTER III

THE IGNATIAN SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION AND ITS APPLICATION TO THE DIGITAL COMMUNICATION CULTURE

The previous chapter opened a way to understand what an authentic conversation from the perspective of different disciplines is. Although the direct object of this study is the spiritual conversation in Christian/Ignatian tradition, it also presupposes a human lived experience in the cultural context of digital communication in which the conversation takes place. This chapter intends to explore how the dynamics of authentic conversation established in Chapter II can be employed to address the crisis we documented in digital communication culture in Chapter I.

As a result, this chapter unfolds first by looking at the human being, that is, at the anthropological understanding of spiritual conversation. Then, we turn to an examination of the Ignatian spiritual conversation and its content. Finally, we propose its application in the digital era to the networked self and networked religion.

1. ANTHROPOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION

According to Sandra Schneiders, human beings are characterized by a capacity for self-transcendence toward ultimate value, whether or not they nurture this capacity or do in religious or non-religious ways.²⁵⁸ In the context of digital communication, this human capacity can lead be the protagonist of authentic conversation. To this end, this section will propose the concept of the spiritual conversation focusing on the human agent.

258. Sandra Schneiders, "Approaches to the Study of Christian Spirituality," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Holder (Oxford, UK, and Malden, MA: Blackwell Publications, 2005), 26.

1.1. Semantic Approximation of Spiritual Conversation

What is a spiritual conversation? Defining this term requires not only conducting research on conversation but also the basic process of conversation itself. Definitions of terms are more necessary in a conversation involving moral, political, or religious values. Mutual recognition of dictionary definitions does not resolve an argument about the meaning of these values. Recognizing a different understanding of each other on the terms creates the possibility of reducing frustration and miscommunication in the conversation.²⁵⁹

Although the spiritual conversation is a compound word of two words: “spiritual” and “conversation,” it implicitly assumes that it is a human act. Thus, a conceptual investigation into “spiritual person” and “conversation” should be preceded by reviewing dictionary definitions of each term, semantic approximations, and a proposed definition.

1.1.1. Spiritual person

In history, the adjective “spiritual” was used before its noun form. The Latin *spiritualis* (or *spiritualis*) appeared in Jerome’s work translating from the Greek *pneumatikos* (1 Cor 2:14–3:3) in the New Testament, along with its antonym *sarkikos*.²⁶⁰ Those words were not used to speak of any opposition between the spiritual and the physical, but to refer to different ways of living: one accords with the Holy Spirit, and the other not. The noun *spiritualitas* did not appear until the 5th century and then only at

259. Peter Boghossian and James Lindsay, *How to Have Impossible Conversations*, Lifelong Books, New York 2019. Chapter 3–2. words, Ebook.

260. Hans D. Betz and Don S. Browning, *Religion Past & Present*, vol. 12, s.v. “Spirituality,” (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 224–25.

intervals. From the 12th century, it began to be opposed to corporality or materiality, expressing something of the entitative order as a more philosophical meaning. In the 17th century, spirituality became associated almost exclusively with inner disposition, the interior state of the soul,²⁶¹ and sometimes it was pejoratively applied for being suspected of Quietism or fanaticism. From the 19th century, an attempt was made to establish an academic term among historians. Since the 1950s, the term has become very popular, often replacing terms such as “devotion,” “piety,” “interior life,” etc.²⁶²

Although originating within a Catholic context, various Protestants have recently adopted the term “spirituality.” Furthermore, in the semantic range, today’s spirituality is not limited only to contexts of Christianity. It is also widely used in non-Christian religions, allowing for a wide variety of understandings ranging from a very broad interpretation in the sense of a religious attitude or mentality, religiosity, etc. to highly specialized conceptions based on content, especially, associated with derivation from the word *spiritus*.²⁶³ There is no universal definition of spirituality, nor is there a common definition asserted by mainstream scholars. Today, various scholars acknowledge diverse definitions of spirituality, and this study will proceed with a discussion based on Schneiders’ definition: “spirituality as lived experience can be defined as conscious involvement [and transformation] in the project of life integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.”²⁶⁴

261. Perrin, 30.

262. Principe H. Walter, “Spirituality, Christian,” in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michel Downey (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 931–32.

263. Hans D. Betz, 255.

264. Sandra Schneiders, “Christian Spirituality: Definition, Methods, and Types,” in *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Philip Sheldrake (London: SCM Press, 2005), 1.

Schneiders' definition was selected from the definitions of many scholars of spirituality because of her hermeneutic methodology adopted in this research. Assuming Schneiders' definition of the interdisciplinary study of spirituality from a descriptive/critical perspective,²⁶⁵ a "spiritual person" is a person who has a conscious lived experience of involvement [and transformation] in integrating his/her life through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value he/she has chosen.

1.1.2. Conversation

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the early use of "conversation" had the broader meaning of "The action of living or having one's being *in* a place or *among* persons."²⁶⁶ It was gradually used in a more restricted sense, to refer to "The action of consorting or having dealings with others; living together; commerce, intercourse, society, intimacy." Eventually, it became even more limited and synonymous with dialogue or an "Interchange of thoughts and words; familiar discourse or talk." Today we use the term "conversation" to mean two or more participants using linguistic forms and nonverbal signals to communicate.

The etymology of "conversation" came from the Latin *conversatio*. It is a noun derived from the verb *convertere*, a combination of *vertere*, which means to turn, transfer, or change, and *cum*, which means together-toward.²⁶⁷ Likewise, *communicatio* (communication in English) and *colloquium* (colloquy in English), the prefix *cum* creates

265. It is interdisciplinary, so that spirituality must use whatever approaches are relevant to the reality being studied; and is descriptive-critical to understand religious experience as it occurs rather than prescriptive-normative.

266. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "conversation," accessed March 25, 2022, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/40748#eid8277082>.

267. *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. "conversation," accessed March 26, 2022, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=conversatio>.

the sense of being together and intimacy.²⁶⁸ Meanwhile, the word with a slightly different root is *dialogus*, which means the back-and-forth nature of communication and is a word that has its origins in Greek. It is a compound word of the prefix *dia* (δια), meaning “through, because” and *logos* (λογος) meaning “speech and reason,” so it means that words come and go.²⁶⁹ Unlike words that take the prefix *cum*, it does not have a direct “communal character to be together.” Still, in their meaning, it can be seen to indirectly cross over to a sphere of familiarity and intimacy through the exchange of words. Therefore, although the terms “conversation” and “dialogue” are often used interchangeably, while “conversation” evokes the thematic elements of communication in the space between the conversational people, “dialogue” tends to emphasize the verbal and behavioral aspects of exchange of the word as giving and receiving. In addition, *dialectica* has a similar structure; there is a difference in the fundamental direction. This word, which appears to have come from *lego*, meaning to collect, pass through, select, read, etc., has been translated into dialectics, or probabilistic reasoning in English.²⁷⁰ As such, dialectics is the art of investigating the truth that is found in the opinions expressed between people; similarly, it can be applied to *discursus* (discourse in English)²⁷¹ and *discussionem* (discussion in English)²⁷².

268. *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. “cum,” accessed March 26, 2022, https://www.etymonline.com/word/com-#etymonline_v_15853.

269. *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. “dialogue,” accessed March 26, 2022, https://www.etymonline.com/word/dialogue#etymonline_v_53921.

270. *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. “dialectic,” accessed March 26, 2022, https://www.etymonline.com/word/dialectic#etymonline_v_8515.

271. *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. “discourse,” accessed March 26, 2022, https://www.etymonline.com/word/discourse#etymonline_v_11403.

272. *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. “discussion,” accessed March 26, 2022, https://www.etymonline.com/word/discussion#etymonline_v_11414.

In this way, it can be seen that the exchange of words is classified into two meanings. One is to talk face to face, and the other is to exchange opinions and draw conclusions. In a broad sense, the former is for communion, and the latter is for consensus. Words belonging to the former include conversation and dialogue, and the latter includes discourse, discussion, debate, dialectic, etc. For our purpose, this study will use “conversation” more in the former context of emphasizing the communal relationship between the communicating subjects, and sometimes “dialogue” will be used when referring to the method of verbal communication or the form of a literary genre.²⁷³

1.2. Proposed Definition of Spiritual Conversation

Through synthesizing the above definitions, this study proposes to define a spiritual conversation as follows: Spiritual conversation is a conscious communication between two or more spiritual persons. If a spiritual person, as has been stated, “is a person who has a conscious lived experience of involvement and transformation in integrating his/her life through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value he/she has chosen”, then the content of a “spiritual conversation” is sharing the lived experience of self-transcendence and inner transformation towards the ultimate value (or horizon) chosen by each participant, with an approach with three characteristics: ecumenical/interreligious, cross-cultural, and holistic.²⁷⁴ As Schneiders points out, all

273. “The term dialogue is used in a more specific sense as ‘a literary work in the form of a conversation between two or more persons; a conversation written for and spoken by actors on the stage; hence, in recent use, style of dramatic conversation or writing.’” Johnson Thomaskutty, *Dialogue in the Book of Signs: A Polyvalent Analysis of John 1:19–12:50* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015), 40.

274. Spirituality is not limited to a particular religion or region but ecumenical, interreligious, and cross-cultural within the anthropologically inclusive context. It is holistic in that it does not restrict itself to explorations of the explicitly religious. Still, it examines all the elements integral to spiritual experience, e.g., the psychological, bodily, historical, social, political, aesthetic, intellectual, and other dimensions of the human subject of spiritual experience. Principe, 936; Schneiders, “Spirituality in the Academy,” *Theological Studies* 50 (1989), 692–93.

human beings are spiritual in nature and have the potential for self-transcendence in and through the establishment of personal relationships.²⁷⁵ In understanding the ultimate value, by opening up and embracing even that the human lived experiences and perspectives of those who do not identify with God may also be spiritual, the possibility of dialogue can be secured among people of very different perspectives, in particular, within the digital communication culture, which encompasses nonreligious and atheistic worldviews.²⁷⁶

At the same time, spirituality in the religious sense can be seen as the highest actualization of personal relationships based on a relationship with God, and in particular, within the context of Christianity, spirituality can be appropriately defined as “particular actualization of the capacity for self-transcendence that is constituted by the substantial gift of the Holy Spirit establishing a life-giving [and transforming] relationship with God in Christ within the believing community.”²⁷⁷ Assuming Schneiders’ definition of the study of Christian spirituality as interdisciplinary and descriptive-critical, a Christian is a spiritual person who has a conscious lived experience of involvement [and transformation] in integrating his/her life through self-transcendence by a lived relationship with the Christian revelation, chosen as his/her ultimate value. From this perspective and independently of his/her particular denomination, is open to all the dimensions of reality with an ecumenical/interreligious attitude, cross-cultural perspective and holistic approach to his/her Christian lived experience.

275. Sandra Schneiders, “Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?” *Horizon* 13, no. 2 (1986): 266.

276. *Ibid.*, 267.

277. *Ibid.*

Therefore, the definition and use of spiritual conversation in this study will cover both broad and narrow terms according to the scope and context of recognizing one's ultimate value (or horizon). When it comes to a narrow interpretation, it indicates a conversation in which spiritual topics relate to its motivation, procedure, and result. At the same time, it also means that the way the conversation occurs can be seen as spiritual in a broad interpretation. In this regard, various kinds of dialogue can be called spiritual conversations,²⁷⁸ ranging from typical spiritual direction at a retreat, to sincere faith-sharing, to a dialogue between two souls filled with love for God, to conversations among good-willed spirits, to conversations at communal discernment of specific apostolate, and even to pleasant chats during ordinary breaks.

Spiritual conversation within the Ignatian tradition, which will be analyzed in the next paragraph, is clearly under a narrow conception of religion, however its supreme purpose is the “good of the souls,” and the meaning of the salvation of souls is firmly rooted in the Christian revelation. But at the same time, Christian revelation symbolizes self-communication towards God's universal salvific will and embraces the universal truth of religions, sects, and thoughts. Therefore, the scope of the concept of Ignatian spiritual conversation not only includes doctrinal particularity but also goes beyond to harmonize the universality of Christ, “the light of nations.”²⁷⁹

278. See Marius Nepper, “Conversation spirituelle”, in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité. Ascétique et mystique. Doctrine et histoire*, II/2, ed., Charles Baumgartner (Paris: Beauchesne, 1953), 2212–18.

279. Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on The Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 21 November, 1964,” in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975), sec. 1 (hereafter cited as *LG*).

2. SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION IN THE IGNATIAN TRADITION

Keeping in mind the knowledges and reflections of the previous sections, this section now explores the Ignatian spiritual conversation, which is the central topic of this study. Spiritual conversation's legacies have been passed down from the various traditions of Christian spirituality in discourse and practice. Almost all the saints have emphasized the value of spiritual conversation in the faithful's spiritual life and have presented their methodologies and norms of practice under their various traditions. It is not because of its comparative advantage over other traditions that this section focuses on the Ignatius tradition of spiritual conversation. Every spiritual tradition has a unique value that transforms into spiritual life. However, considering the culture of digital communication, which is the scope of this study, we try to proceed with the relevance that the Ignatius tradition can promote and strengthen the pastoral practice of spiritual conversation in the digital age.

2.1. Conceptual Analysis of Ignatian Spiritual Conversation

In the time of Ignatius, the spiritual conversation was primarily a practical discourse. However, as wisdom accumulates and goes through tradition and historical transition, past practices are established as conceptual and theoretical frameworks and systems to become more deeply understood and relevant to the present day.

2.1.1. Ignatian spirituality's contextual relevance to contemporary issues

The term, Ignatian spirituality is talked about a lot today, but it was relatively unknown until a few decades ago.²⁸⁰ Until the middle of the 20th century, the Jesuits

280. John W. O'Malley and Timothy W. O'Brien, "The Twentieth-Century Construction of Ignatian Spirituality," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 52/3 (Autumn 2020): 1.

lacked a clear articulation of what distinguishes them from other spiritual traditions.²⁸¹ Then, in 1953, the French Jesuits, Joseph de Guibert's *La Spiritualité de la Compagnie de Jésus*, specialized Ignatius' "mysticism of service" in zeal for the good of others and thus led to engagement with the world in all its concrete details.²⁸² Further, another French Jesuit, Maurice Giuliani, synthesized much of the work done up to that point, resulting in a coherent portrait of the Society's apostolic spirituality, which is the beginning of what we call Ignatius spirituality today.²⁸³ Since Ignatius spirituality is a constructive culture rather than a given as a literal dogma and an interpretation of tradition's historical continuity and discontinuity,²⁸⁴ the contemporary features of Ignatian spirituality, which this section notes, may also demand both diachronic and synchronic approaches to culture and history. In this regard, Ignatian sources have testified the relevance with the culture of digital communication is to be found in participation and pastoral care and service for the vulnerable and marginalized in the digital environment.

a) Participatory spirituality of the times

Digital communication culture has been forming quite a trend throughout this era, and Ignatian spirituality has never neglected the matter of souls among the world's realities for the past 500 years or so. During the revolutionary era as the pre-modern feudalism and post-modern world systems interchanged, Ignatian spirituality has shown the most exemplary internalization of the Catholic tradition encompassing that of the

281. Ibid., 2.

282. Ibid., 20.

283. Ibid.

284. Ibid., 4.

Benedictines, the Franciscans, and the Dominicans.²⁸⁵ Ignatian spirituality is oriented towards the world outside the walls of the cloister.²⁸⁶ The expression Nadal emphasized, “the world is our house” reveals the presumption that God is to be sought and found in all peoples, countries, and cultures, and suggests an engagement with all aspects of the cultures in which Jesuits might find themselves.²⁸⁷ Furthermore, his other expression, “we are not monks,” means that Ignatian spirituality could not be one of retreat from the world, lived in isolation from problems of contemporary life.²⁸⁸

With St. Ignatius there is rather the service in the open fields, and even by journeys and far-flung expeditions for the sake of the Master’s interests. The apostolic service, which among the Benedictines always remains an occasional extension of the service at home, becomes on the contrary for the Jesuits the service for which everything is organized, and the service as truly essential as the personal service to the Master.²⁸⁹

Ignatian spirituality has always responded or adapted faithfully to contemporary situations and demands. “Accommodation” and “inter-religious dialogue” are characteristic of pastoral strategies for reconciliation between our time’s diverse cultural and religious traditions, as preceded by the Jesuits in China and India before the rites

285. “Ignatius’ era was an important turning point in the world’s civilization, comparable to the so-called “Axial Age,” the historical term suggested by Jaspers, where the world’s major religions and ideologies, such as those of Buddha, Confucius, and Socrates were active.” Paek-seop Shim, “Oh Neul, Inyasio Young Sunge Joo Mokhaneun Iyu,” *Jigum Yeogi* 오늘, 이냐시오 영성에 주목하는 이유, 지금 여기, [“Today, Why we pay attention to Ignatian Spirituality,” *Now and Here*,] July 31, 2013, <http://www.catholicnews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=10179>; When it comes to comparing the historical connotation of modernity with Jasper’s axial age, see Vittorio Cotesta, “The Axial Age and Modernity,” *ProtoSociology* 34 (2017): 233, <https://doi.org/10.5840/protosociology20173413>.

286. Patrick Nullens, “From Spirituality to Responsible Leadership: Ignatian Discernment and Theory-U,” *Leading in a VUCA World. Contributions to Management Science* (2019): 194.

287. O’Malley and O’Brien, “The Twentieth-Century Construction,” 36.

288. *Ibid.*, 137.

289. Joseph de Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice: A Historical Study* (Chicago: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1964), 180.

controversies, the Chinese and Malabar rites experiments.²⁹⁰ Hence, all profane activities of life are brought into the faith commitment and are therefore brought under deep reflection and examine in the light of Holy Spirit about the meaning and purpose and true orientation of all creation.²⁹¹ It is even called a “frontier spirituality,” for those who want to be active on those risky frontiers, where the Church meets our secular and pluralistic world.²⁹² These points are very characteristic of Ignatian spirituality, which distinguish it from other traditional spiritual heritages. It is represented by its participation in and intervention into social realities, the declaration of a prophetic message to the world, and the emphasis on discernment and decision-making involved in apostolic action. Discernment and decision-making are a correlation between internal reflection or contemplation while pursuing external action.²⁹³

In short, Ignatian spirituality values will and action externally, as it targets specific lives and changes in the world through the *Spiritual Exercises*. Still, internally, the process of discernment takes a large part in following evangelical values and making decisions consistent with God’s will. The discernment of spirits—which recognizes whether a person experiences consolation or desolation on the spiritual and internal level and how a good or evil spirit influences them—is the key to determining whether the individual and community are moving toward true happiness in the contemporary context.

290 Ibid., 138.

291. Monika K. Hellwig, “Finding God in all things: a spirituality for today,” in *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader*, ed. George W. Traub (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 17.

292. Fredrik Heiding, *Ignatian Spirituality at Ecclesial Frontiers* (New York: Lulu, 2012), 150.

293. Paek-seop, “Oh Neul”

b) Advocatory spirituality for the marginalized

Ignatian spirituality does not see spirituality as the enjoyment of a special, superior selected group of a few after presupposing a history of faith at a certain mystical level. Instead, the ultimate goal of Ignatian spirituality is to find God in all things, and it is a spirituality of dynamic activity that takes the frontier of the environment of those who do not enjoy the richness of faith in the prospect of Christ's universal salvation. Roger Haight rediscovers the sacred value of human action while attempting a contemporary interpretation of the principle and foundation of the *Spiritual Exercises* 23, which expresses the fundamentals of Ignatian spirituality: "the first principle and foundation embraces the absolute worth of human action in and for the world. Human action counts because God has shared with human beings' responsibility in participating in God's own creative activity in the world over time."²⁹⁴

The principles and foundations, as well as the transformational meditations of "The Two Standards" (136–157), "The Three Kinds of Humility" (165–168), and the "Examen" (24–42), commonly "promotes a greater freedom to love and a greater detachment from anything that might interfere with a total commitment to divine praise and service."²⁹⁵ The grace, which Ignatius suggests that retreatants constantly ask for in the second week of the *Exercises*, "to be received under the standard of the cross, in great spiritual poverty, accepting insults and humiliations to better imitate Christ," implies opening themselves completely to the level of communion with the excluded and

294. Roger Haight, "Foundational Issues in Jesuit Spirituality," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 19 no. 4 (September 1987): 42.

295. Andrew Prevot, "Ignatian Spirituality, Political Effectiveness, and Spiritual Discernment: Dean Brackley's Account of Liberation Theology," *Political Theology* 18, no. 4 (June 2017): 319.

marginalized of our society. Contemplative prayer for a holistic intimacy with Christ invites and drives them to commit their lives to the mission of advocating for the economically, socially, and spiritually marginalized. This unifying relationship with God “makes one to see that the God of goodness is already working in those toward whom we are sent even before we arrive to be with them.”²⁹⁶

Dean Brackley discovers these implications not only from the contemplation of the life of Jesus in the second week of the *Exercises*, regarding Jesus’ preaching the Beatitudes and his ministry to the socially marginalized, but also from the socio-political dynamics of today in the third and fourth weeks of the *Exercises* (190–229), that is, the contemplation of the events of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. The deeper the contemplation of the Passion of Christ, the more one can share in God’s sorrow for the wounded creature.²⁹⁷ Furthermore, it makes one place one’s sufferings in a deeper context, leading to a genuine acceptance of our own weakness, even to boasting about it to the world,²⁹⁸ in the weakness of God, which is stronger than human strength.²⁹⁹ Similarly, contemplation Jesus’ resurrection also enables the Spirit of Christ to transform us into new creatures. “Contemplating his victory-in-death nourishes that transformation,

296. Jean Ilboudo, “Social Commitment and Ignatian Spirituality,” *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* 111 (2006): 141.

297. Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times: New Perspectives on the Transformative Wisdom of Ignatius of Loyola* (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 185.

298. “If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.” (2 Cor 11:30); “About this person I will boast, but about myself I will not boast, except about my weaknesses.” (2 Cor 12:5); “he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me.” (2 Cor 12:9)

299. “For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.” (1 Cor 1:25)

deepening hope and joy and pointing us to where we can find Christ, consoling the crucified of today.”³⁰⁰

Ignatius and his first companions regarded service to the marginalized as “an integral part of [Jesuits’] ministry . . . [and] intrinsic to their pastoral self-understanding.”³⁰¹ Ignatius himself opened the house of Casa Santa Martha to promote the social and spiritual renewal of prostitutes whom no one had been cared and rejected. He glorified God while imitating Jesus, who associated with socially excluded sinners such as tax collectors and prostitutes.³⁰² Furthermore, he included service to those in prisons and hospitals and “other works of charity” among the fundamental works of the Society in the *Formula of the Institute*.³⁰³

From its establishment to the present day, the Jesuits have consistently emphasized the Ignatian way of proceeding through their direct commitment³⁰⁴ and their orientation towards the poor and marginalized of the world.³⁰⁵ From the second half of the 20th century, especially after the 32nd General Congregation, a new expression of

300. Brackley, 202.

301. John W. O’Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 167.

302. “Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.” Mk 2:17.

303. Formula of the Institute 1550, no. 1; in *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms: A Complete English Translation of the Official Latin Texts*, ed. John Padberg (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources [IJS], 1996), (hereafter cited as *Const*), 4.

304. “. . . is particularly directed towards . . . those who are at the margins of the Church or of society, those who have been denied their dignity, those who are voiceless and powerless.” GC 34, d. 6, no. 12; All documents of General Congregation are taken from *Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees of the 31st–35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John W. Padberg (St. Louis: IJS, 2009), hereafter cited *GC* with its decree and number.

305. “. . . *direct personal experience*” with the poor, noting that “we can break out of our habitual way of living and thinking only through physical and emotional proximity to the way of living and thinking of the poor and marginalized.” GC 34, d. 9, nos. 7, 14.

“faith doing justice” became prominent. Although this expression initially appeared vaguely related to the concrete accountability between traditional ministries and formal education, reflection on the social character inherent in most ministries has become widespread appropriation into the Ignatian spirituality.³⁰⁶

Furthermore, in a recent declaration the “Universal Apostolic Preferences” (UAP), the fundamental conversion of Ignatian followers is given first and foremost towards

...walking with the excluded: Walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world, those whose dignity has been violated, in a mission of reconciliation and justice. This advocacy aspect of Ignatian spirituality urges us to pave the way for evangelizing ourselves by learning from the poor and marginalized rather than simply serving them.³⁰⁷

Ignatian spirituality does not stereotype those in need as desirable religious or ethical people but transforms people to be people for others and with others discerning God’s will and living a life of grace in a spiritual journey. In this way, the advocacy Ignatian spirituality consistently presents a pastoral vision in connectedness with various social minorities, unchurched youth, marginalized elderly, foreign laborers, and non-institutional religious people who are increasingly excluded and marginalized in the structure of social polarization and inequality in capitalism today.

2.1.2. Ignatius’ use of the term “spiritual conversation”

Ignatius lived a conversational life, flourishing in his faithful spiritual relationship with God and offering his whole life for the salvation of his neighbors’ souls.

306. O’Malley and O’Brien, “The Twentieth-Century Construction,” 38.

307. “This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them.” Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Vatican website, November 24, 2013, 198, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

He cherished godly conversation³⁰⁸ as a means of accomplishing every Christian's mission to proclaim the Good News.³⁰⁹ As attested by the *Autobiography* and the testimony of his first companions, Ignatius conversed intimately with anyone. In a conversation with friar in Salamanca,³¹⁰ he would "speak familiarly," in which he briefly introduced his activities, that is, his intimate communication about the things of God. This reveals the aspect of spiritual conversation as the primary tool of the ministry of evangelization. Ignatius prospered in his spiritual life "based on a conversation with God in prayer. It is developed through conversation with others—spiritual directors, confessors, like-minded friends who share one's ideals and way of life. It is expressed in conversation as ministry—sharing the gospel with others."³¹¹

The phrase "Ignatian spiritual conversation" represents a technical term that implies an apostolic method essential to the Ignatian charism.³¹² This official meaning was often used in Ignatius's work. The root word 'converse' in its two forms

308. Noting various variations of the words that Ignatius referred to spiritual conversations, such as godly conversations, holy conversations, and honorable conversations, Ann Elizabeth interprets that Ignatius' concept of spiritual conversation developed over time, from spontaneous dialogues that he referred to by different names, to a practice—consistently referred to as *spiritual conversation*—with stable (paradigmatic) features. Ann Elizabeth Dentry, "Toward an Interpretive Ministry of the Word in the Lutheran Tradition, Grounded in 'spiritual Conversation' with Particular Reference to the Work of Martin Luther and Ignatius of Loyola" (ThD. Diss., University of Toronto, 2009), footnote of 143.

309. Thomas H. Clancy, *The Conversational Word of God* (St Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 6.

310. "We do not preach, but we do speak familiarly with some people about the things of God; for example, after eating with some people who invite us." *Autobiography*, no. 5. All translations of the *Autobiography* are taken from Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean, trans., Saint Ignatius of Loyola: *Personal Writings*, (London: Penguin Books, 1996). Hereafter cited as *Auto*.

311. David L. Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 51.

312. German Arana, "Spiritual Conversation: A Privileged Apostolic Instrument of the Society of Jesus," *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* 36, no. 1 (2005): 22.

(*conversar* and *conversación*) appears thirty-nine times in Ignatian literature (*Spiritual Exercises, Constitutions and Autobiography*) and 316 times in his letters.³¹³

Meanwhile, Ignatius's use of the term "spiritual conversation" can also be applied to both the broad and narrow definitions mentioned above.³¹⁴ As Guibert pointed out, Jesuit spirituality reflects the duality that is "not highly speculative" on the one hand and "very strongly doctrinal" on the other hand.

Jesuit spirituality is more fascinated by those other truths which our minds have less difficulty in grasping, that is, by the essential elements within the mysteries. In other words, it draws its inspiration from the mysteries themselves in the simple and concrete form in which they have been delivered to us by Scripture and dogmatic tradition in the proper meaning of this term.³¹⁵

[Jesuit spirituality] is very strongly doctrinal. Its true foundation is to be sought, not in sentiments even when they are very pure and ardent, nor in personal experiences even when they are most soaring and most profoundly analyzed, but in those fundamental doctrines which are certain and guaranteed by the official teaching or *magisterium* of the Church.³¹⁶

Such duality of Jesuit spirituality also affects the scope of contents in the Ignatian spiritual conversation. When it came to recalling Ignatius' engagements with ordinary people in his everyday life, Ignatius generally mentions in his *Autobiography* "to speak about things of God (*hablar de las cosas de Dios*)" in a more familiar way. Though it is not used exclusively, the term he preferred in the *Spiritual Exercises* seems to be "to converse," in comparison to official preaching, which he officially distinguished as "speak of," as a more casual form covered in the broad meaning of spiritual conversation. Therefore, we can understand that Ignatius' selection of terms tended to use

313. Ibid.

314. See Chapter I, section 1.1.3.

315. Guibert, 581.

316. Ibid., 582.

“speak of” in a broad sense and “converse” in a narrow sense, but this was not a strict distinction but showed fluid adaptability in various dialogue situations.

2.1.3. The ends of Ignatian spiritual conversation: “good of souls”

The papal bull, *Exposcit Debitum*, issued by Julius III in 1550, known as *The Formula of the Institute*, which Ignatius had drawn up as a statement of Society’s identity and basic purpose, and which is the most fundamental charter of the Society of Jesus, does not directly mention the word, “spiritual conversation” itself. But Geronimo Nadal, who was one of the closest collaborators in Ignatius’ life, interpreted the second and third sentences describing the Jesuits’ work in *the Formula*, “any other ministration whatsoever of the word of God (*aliud quodcumque verbi Dei ministerium*)” as indicating the ministry of spiritual conversation as their premier ministry.

He is a member of a Society founded chiefly for this purpose: to strive especially for the defense and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine, by means of public preaching, lectures and any other ministration whatsoever of the word of God, and further by means of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity, and the spiritual consolation of Christ’s faithful through hearing confessions and administering the other sacraments.³¹⁷

In the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, Ignatius listed the means of helping one’s neighbor such as good example (637) and prayers and holy desires (638), the administration of the sacraments (640–642), sermons and instruction in Christian doctrine both inside and outside of church, (645–647) and finally, “... They will endeavor to be profitable to individuals by spiritual conversations, by counselling and exhorting to good works, and by conducting *Spiritual Exercises*.” (648)³¹⁸

317. *Exposcit Debitum* of Pope Julius III, in *Const*, 3–4.

318. Clancy, 3.

That is to say, Ignatius recognized and used spiritual conversation as a vital tool for the apostolic purpose of saving neighbors' souls, and not just a means of governing the institution of the Society. Through history, practical effects have been generated as a means of salvation and benefit for all neighbors' souls, also known as the "good of souls" in the world, wherever God's love and the joy of the Good News are desired to be conveyed. As such, spiritual conversation for Ignatius had a coherent direction within the sense of mission for the sake of the "good of souls." When he was a penitent, he decided to curtail his penances and move out of the cave for spiritual conversation, to promote the good of the old woman's soul in a nearby village.³¹⁹ Later, Ignatius also had to confront the Inquisition more than once in Salamanca because of his enthusiasm for sharing the fruit of the *Spiritual Exercises* through spiritual conversation.³²⁰ As Restrepo pointed out, "Ignatian conversation is essentially purposeful, it seeks to win for Christ. It consists in a help that always ought to produce some kind of progress. It is not idle or vain talk; it is not a waste of time."³²¹ So, this clear apostolic purpose is realized with the flexibility (*tantum quantum*) in both characteristics of Ignatian spirituality as discussed above, participatory to the times and advocacy for the marginalized. Participatory commitment to each situation and advocacy solidarity with the vulnerable for justice in peace always presupposes spiritual discernment in faith. This discernment in faith is manifested more vividly through the wisdom and art of a conversational approach in encounters with people in the apostolic commitment.

319. *Auto*, 21.

320. *Auto*, 65.

321. Dario Restrepo, *Spiritual Conversation According to St. Ignatius of Loyola* (Saint Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1976), 19.

Ignatius' companions said that Ignatius often emphasized the approach of spiritual conversation, "We have to go in by our neighbor's door but come out by our door."³²² This expression has parallels with the context of the phrase in which Paul's pastoral strategy is revealed in 1 Cor 9:22. Just as Paul changed everything about himself and assimilated himself to the new missionary environment for the salvation of all, Ignatius also highlights listening to the situation and context of others carefully observing the interests and linguistic habits of others. This "neighbor's door" implies not only a social friendliness but also a pastoral strategy and purpose. Ignatius intuitively understands the movement of human soul in the battle between the good spirit and the evil spirit and was convinced that the spiritual battle required the parallel strategy of evils.³²³

Whenever we wish to win someone over and engage him in the greater service of God our Lord, we should use the same strategy for good which the enemy employs to draw a good soul to evil. He enters through the other's door and comes out his own. ... So we with a good purpose can praise or agree with another concerning some particular good things, dissembling whatever else may be wrong. After thus gaining his confidence, we shall have better success. In this sense we go in with him his way but come out our own.³²⁴

The apparent purpose and the flexible approaches of Ignatian spiritual conversation explicitly and implicitly encompass four characteristics of spiritual conversation as proposed based on Schneiders' studies above.³²⁵ On the one hand, it explicitly reveals a descriptive-holistic approach to other's Christian lived experiences as Ignatius himself communicated with others. On the other hand, it tacitly includes an

322. Clancy, 26.

323. "It echoes the content of the *Two Standards* meditation, in which two irreconcilable worlds [contend] for the destiny of men and women and the motions of their hearts." Dentry, 158.

324. Ignatius of Loyola, *Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959), 51–52. Hereafter cited as *Letters*.

325. See Chapter III, 1.1.1.

ecumenical and cross-cultural perspective such as Jesuits' inculturation at the mission field.

The apostolic purpose of this spiritual conversation can be seen today as indirection.³²⁶ It places importance on an intimate presence in spiritual conversation and the ability to understand and observe the other person's nature, interests, and inner longings more deeply. Peter Canisius encourages Christians to "be shrewd as serpents" in biblical terms. (Mt 10:16). No matter how great one's religious or spiritual desire for service, sometimes one must keep pace with the other person. Especially in most conversations with people one meets for the first time, one should be willing to speak on secular topics naturally but then look for the occasion to give the conversation a religious turn. In the end, the "neighbor's door" has significance as mutual trust and social ease for spiritual conversation and must be associated with "our door" as the ultimate purpose of allowing the Holy Spirit to easily enter the soul of a neighbor who is in danger "in ultimate contest between the savior and the deceiver."³²⁷

The primary value of spiritual conversation, which covers both broad and narrow definitions for Ignatius, is the "good of souls," the spiritual benefits of the other's participating in the spiritual conversation, in one's active participation in Christ's salvific mission. In other words, Ignatius perceived spiritual conversation as an instrument for the proclamation of the word in salvific ministry, through and towards a genuine personal relationship with God.

326. Dentry, 159.

327. Ibid., 160.

2.1.4. The premise of Ignatian spiritual conversation: prayer and the examen of consciousness

Like any other Ignatian apostolate, Ignatian spiritual conversation always presupposes prayer and self-reflection in relation to God. Ignatius' "vivid conversation with God was the primary source for his understanding of spiritual conversation."³²⁸ All of the essential sources of Ignatian spirituality can be described as a conversation between God and Ignatius. For instance, the *Autobiography* as a "history of the conversation between God and Ignatius;" the *Spiritual Diary* as a "testimonial of an interior conversation with the Trinity;" and the *Exercises* as "a manual for how to converse with God."³²⁹ He mandates "In dealing with the neighbor pray every day especially with the intention that God give you the grace of discretion, so that you will build up and not tear down."³³⁰

The topics and contents of the Ignatian spiritual conversation also clearly reveal the priority of the relationship with God. No matter how broadly the definition of Ignatian spiritual conversation is permitted for pastoral variation, God is always a central topic of the spiritual conversation experienced in Ignatius' own life. Here it is worth noting that the contents expressed by him are not things "about" God, but rather "things of God (*cosas de Dios*)" and its experience. For him, the conversation is not about what

328. Dentry, 129.

329. Alfredo Sampaio Costa, Emilio Gonzalez Magafia and Jose Carlos Coupeau, "La Conversazione Spirituale: Presentazione; 'Power-Point'," in *La Conversazione Spirituale: Progetto Apostolico nel Modo di procedere Ignaziano* (Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana 2006), 69–70, quoted in, Dentry, footnote of 129.

330. *Letters*, 158. The letter sent from Rome to Father Stephen Baroello in Sicily in January 1548.

has been discursively learned about God, but about what one has experienced directly.³³¹

Hence, Ignatius' spiritual conversation has less conceptual language with logically well-organized vocabularies. Instead, it is a rather descriptive language, spontaneously sharing godly experiences and awareness of God's activities and interventions in one's daily life. Of course, they, by no means, should exclude knowledge obtained from other forms of learning, such as academic and ecclesiastical propositions. After the Inquisition in Salamanca, Ignatius seriously realized the significance of systematic theology for public preaching for the sake of "the good of souls." But "things of God" were a knowledge that he experienced directly through his life and learned within a unique and personal relationship with God. In this regard, he constantly emphasized an experiential knowledge of God in the *Spiritual Exercises*: "For it is not so much knowledge that fills and satisfies the soul, but rather the intimate feeling and relishing of things."³³²

Furthermore, Ignatius underscored the process of spiritual transformation while being conscious of an experience of God. He experienced God, who was constantly active in his soul, and he became gradually aware of the changing mode of his experience. It began at the time of his recovery, lying down in bed in the Loyola Tower, with a sense of powerlessness, reading and reflecting by himself. The consciousness of his God-experience fully developed at the end of his life, at a level where "every time and hour he wanted to find God, he found him."³³³

331. Rolphy Pinto, "The Mystagogical Dimension of Spiritual Conversation: An Ignatian perspective." *Gregorianum* 101, no. 2 (2020): 400.

332. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*. In *Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings*, trans. Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean (London: Penguin Books, 1996), no. 2. Hereafter cited as *SpEx*.

333. *Auto*, 99.

As expressed above, if the *Spiritual Exercises* can be regarded as “a manual for how to converse with God,” Ignatius suggests the utmost prayer method that promotes experiential awareness of God in the *Spiritual Exercises* is the “colloquy,” which is a personal conversation between the retreatant and God. Ignatius says in the note on colloquies, “Colloquy is made, properly speaking, in the way one friend speaks to another, or a servant to one in authority—now begging a favor, now accusing oneself of some misdeed, now telling one’s concerns and asking counsel about them.”³³⁴

The colloquy has a methodological value for prayer as it ensures ease and efficacy³³⁵ in response to times of burdens and trials that the praying soul frequently confronts. When a retreatant derives and relishes the fruits of earnestly meditating and reflecting while coming to an end of prayer, or when one feels that one’s meditation is not going as one wished, or when one feels tired or desolate, the colloquy provides an opportunity for trusting, aspiring, pleading, and receiving. An urgent and sincere asking in one’s prayer fosters trust and leads to a more profound and more constant belief in God “who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us,” (Ep 3:20). Moreover, Ignatius stirs praying soul to develop a sensitivity to the mystery of Christ through triple colloquy, or threefold conversation with Our Lady, the Son, and the Father.³³⁶ Through this guidance for reflecting on the life of Jesus, the retreatant can encounter the consoling Lord more intimately.

334. *SpEx*, 54.

335. Dominic A. Paul, “Ignatian Colloquies: Their surpassing Value,” *Review for Religious* 64 no. 1 (2005), 79.

336. *SpEx*, 63; 147.

Based on the experience of an intimate relationship with God, Ignatian spiritual conversation finally becomes an art of intimacy. Ignatius clearly distinguished spiritual conversation from formal preaching in the ministry of the Word. The criteria for this differentiation are the method of delivery: formal or intimate. This distinction cannot be attributed to the motive of avoiding the Inquisition at the time.³³⁷ The motivation rather comes from how Jesus Himself engaged in the ministry of the Word. Ignatius desired an intimate knowledge of Jesus.³³⁸ Indeed, looking at God's people's responses to Jesus' Word ministry in Scripture, there is also admiration and awe for the holy prophets sent by God; though in fact, it is clear that they became fully inspired by Jesus, a good shepherd who diffused a sense of attraction and intimacy. Similarly, Ignatius was also more converted by reading about the lives of Christ and the saints than by preaching.³³⁹ Ignatius understood Jesus' ministry of the Word as both public proclamation, as in reading from the Book of Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth, and also as intimate daily conversation with individuals and groups.³⁴⁰ It is in these everyday personal conversations that Jesus himself spent the most time during his public life. In the sense that Jesus tried a very conscious pedagogical effort in the conversations, he showed the figure of a teacher rather than a preacher.³⁴¹ The art of the intimacy of Jesus' ministry of the word comes from the effort of pedagogy or accompaniment. It is well expressed through one-on-one encounters with Andrew, Peter, Mary, Nicodemus, the Samaritan

337. *Auto*, 65.

338. *SpEx*, 104.

339. Clancy, 8.

340. Lk 4:16–21.

341. Clancy, 5.

woman, the man born blind in the Gospel of John, and the Emmaus story as the model of group conversation in the Gospel of Luke.

2.1.5. The distinctiveness of Ignatian spiritual conversation

Likewise, as other spiritual conversations under various spiritual traditions have their characteristics, Ignatian spiritual conversation also has its distinctiveness.

First, Ignatian spiritual conversation for the sake of salvation for the other is not a one-sided admonition by the spiritual guru (the one with spiritual authority). Instead, those who receive spiritual help have autonomy and subjectivity. Ignatius clearly states in the Annotation 18 of the *Spiritual Exercises* that the measure of what one should give as exercises is determined by taking into account “the one who wishes to be helped.” “The *Spiritual Exercises* should be adapted to the disposition of the persons who desire to make them, that is, to their age, education, and ability. (...) Similarly, exercitants should be given, each one, as much as they are willing to dispose themselves to receive, for their greater help and progress.”³⁴² Ignatius underscores the employment of the *Exercises* for those who *they* themselves want to be helped, instead of those *he* wants to help. This implies that whoever it is that comes seeking help voluntarily comes first in the relationship of spiritual conversation.³⁴³ Therefore, the subject of Ignatian spiritual conversation presupposes reciprocity in respecting others as autonomous beings who choose to receive help for themselves, not as passive beings relying on temporal and unilateral service.

342. *SpEx*, 18.

343. Patrick Goujon, “Helping Others: The Role of Conversations and of the Spiritual Exercises,” *The Way* 59, no. 3 (July 2020), 81.

Second, Ignatian spiritual conversation has an open system in the sense that it does not provide a fixed prescription or a norm; sometimes, it brings about creative tension. Ignatius's understanding of spiritual conversation was not a fixed entity. So, it may include seemingly contradictory values and attitudes within itself. Indeed, these contrasting elements cause various tensions, but they are dialectically integrated again within the ultimate direction of its end, "the good of souls."

For example, two contradictory statements about other participants of spiritual conversation coexist in the Ignatian tradition. On the one hand, it guides us to meet and welcome more people and lead them to spiritual progress in their lives. On the other hand, we must be extraordinarily prudent in choosing our conversation partner and select those who are expected to be more fruitful in apostolic effectiveness. While the former, universal accessibility, is as easily understandable and agreeable as it is in line with Paul's confession: "*omnia omnibus factus sum* (I have become all things to all),"³⁴⁴ the latter, the selective approach, has actually often caused the Jesuits to face harsh criticism for its social snobbery or at least elitism.³⁴⁵ As another example, in his public letter, Ignatius strictly stressed refrain from using vain words, even including a witty attitude for keeping virtues of prudence and humility.³⁴⁶ It can be read as if he seems to forbid even a sense of humor, which is considered an essential communication skill in the

344. 1 Cor 9:22b.

345. Clancy, 22.

346. "Let no one seek to be considered a wit, or to affect elegance or prudence or eloquence, but look upon Christ, who made nothing at all of these things and chose to be humbled and despised by men for our sake rather than to be honored and respected." "to the community at scholastics at Alcala (1541)," *Letters*, 440.

contemporary sphere.³⁴⁷ However, such tensions can be reflected upon and discerned, keeping pace with the changing times in line with its ultimate purpose, “the good of souls.” According to the “First Principle and Foundation” of the *Spiritual Exercises*, it needs to be discussed in a more creative and flexible sense, integrated with a more dialectical discourse and practiced based on openness and sincere desire to give God the Creator greater glory.

2.2. Practical Analysis of Ignatian Spiritual Conversation

Above, after examining the Ignatian sources at a conceptual (theoretical) level for the definition, purpose, and characteristics of Ignatius spiritual conversation, we now look at how the Ignatian spiritual conversation was actually used from the early Jesuits to the present day, and what kind of guidelines are provided for the necessary and required qualifications of participants.

Not only Ignatius himself, but his early companions as well valued the significance of spiritual conversation in the ministry of the Word and were actually experts in its practice. Ignatius gathered his first companions through spiritual conversations in Paris, and this became the roots of the Society of Jesus. In the *Chronicon*, Planco referred to thousands of instances of spiritual conversation, which he regarded as an essential and frequent routine in the lives of all Jesuits.³⁴⁸ Nadal describes Pierre Favre as a person with an extraordinary charm and remarkable talent in spiritual conversation, and, using Ignatius’ words, evaluates him as a person who can draw water

347. “Today a sense of humor and an ability to see the non-serious side of things is regarded as a very attractive quality in a person. The apostle, therefore, who reads the signs of the times should be able to laugh at himself and at others as long as charity and decency are preserved. This should be an essential part of the personal graciousness that characterizes the ministry of spiritual conversation.” Clancy, 44.

348. O’Malley, 111.

from a rock.³⁴⁹ In his letter to Claudio Aquaviva in 1583,³⁵⁰ the General of the Society then, Peter Canisius wrote that Francis Xavier, the apostle of the Indies and Japan, was also tremendously successful in the ministry of the Word through “his ability to touch the souls even of great sinners, and to know without any apparent effort the character and personality traits of the men he was dealing with.”³⁵¹

2.2.1. Two categories of Ignatian spiritual conversation

As O’Malley states, Ignatius spiritual conversation can be divided into two major categories based on its formality. One is rather a spontaneous conversation, which did not specially arrange the topic or way of the conversation. It was just a mutually encouragement in “the things of God” in people’s daily lives. It mainly “consisted of those that arose rather spontaneously among themselves and with others in which no specific agenda was operative.”³⁵² Although Erasmus’ well-known dialogue entitled “The Godly Feast” (*Convivium religiosum*), at the time under the influence of the Renaissance, might be seen as a model for this conversation, above all the Jesuits were inspired by the New Testament. The story of the disciples on the way to Emmaus noted that their hearts were burning within as them Jesus spoke to them on the way and opened the scriptures to them. (Lk 24:13-35).³⁵³

349. Clancy 52; Nadal’s Sixth Exhortation, no. 24, in *MonNad*, V, *Commentarii de Instituto Societatis Iesu* (Romae, 1962), vol. 90 in the MHSI.

350. Clancy, 62. “The eternal peace of Christ Jesus” (January 1583) in volume VIII of O. Braunsberger’s edition of Canisius’ *Epistolae et Acta* (8 Volumes, Freiburg-im-Breisgau, 1896–1923).

351. *Ibid.*, 63; “The eternal peace of Christ Jesus,” no. 8.

352. O’Malley, 112.

353. *Ibid.*

Another form of spiritual conversation is more structured and tactically planned, including the private and communal conversation that Nadal distinguished. Nadal presented two distinct modes of the use of spiritual conversation, as the private and the communal mode.³⁵⁴

a) The private mode

The private mode of Ignatian spiritual conversation is, in the words of Ignatius, a conversation in which the “preachers and lecturers proclaim from on high,” while “we ought to try to suggest quietly to individuals.”³⁵⁵ Furthermore, it can give “a greater liberty and effectiveness because one can fit the words to the disposition and reaction of the individual.”³⁵⁶ Nadal was convinced to trust this way, saying “And if we are men dedicated to Christ we will not fail to win souls with this method, by his grace.”³⁵⁷

This mode, also called “individual spiritual dialogue” by Nadal,³⁵⁸ was remarkable in the practice of apostolic service for the neighbors of the early Jesuits. It used to be expressed as “going fish” so as to be “the practice of going out into the marketplace, prisons, ships in dock, and other places, not to preach to a group but to approach individuals.”³⁵⁹

The purpose of winning people was not simply to promote a vocation to the Society but to initiate a sacred conversation and direct the partner toward a more spiritual

354. Nadal’s Sixth Exhortation, nos. 23–27 and no. 28.

355. Clancy, 52; Nadal’s Sixth Exhortation, no. 23.

356. Ibid.

357. Ibid.

358. Ibid., 55; Nadal’s Sixth Exhortation, no. 28.

359. O’Malley, 112.

and Christian life. This sense of universal evangelical purpose was achieved through concrete and intensive strategies and actions. When they were sent two by two, for the purpose of preaching or confession, “at least one Jesuit besides the sacristan stayed behind in the church to continue the conversation as people arrived.”³⁶⁰ Indeed, the experiences of the early Jesuits of private spiritual conversation can be described as “devout conversation, commando style.”³⁶¹

These individual spiritual conversations required a higher level of communication skills and effort than formal sermons. These conversations go beyond the skills of simple persuasion. Instead, they seek to love the other person and to try to find something lovely from the conversation partner. Nadal emphasizes that “The first thing to do is to concentrate one's heart and soul in loving the person you want to aid.”³⁶² This also requires that we “find out everything possible about the person, his present and past station in life, his intelligence, his physical makeup, his temperament, his past, and present deeds.”

Nadal never viewed individual spiritual conversations as the exclusive domain of the Jesuits. Instead, he exhorted and hoped that spiritual conversation would be spread and appropriated to more people, effectively promoting evangelization. He urged that “our penitents and the friends with whom we dialogue to learn the art of spiritual conversation themselves, so that they may help members of their families and household, their friends and relatives. Women can thus aid other women.”³⁶³

360. Ibid., 113.

361. Ibid.

362. Clancy, 53; Nadal's Sixth Exhortation, no. 25.

363. Ibid., 55; Nadal's Sixth Exhortation, no. 27.

In today's context, individual Ignatian spiritual conversation is actively engaged in personal experience-focused conversations about "things of God" in settings such as spiritual direction, faith sharing, and one-on-one, face-to-face pastoral counseling. Through these conversations, this practice promotes the recovery of ontological relationships through respect and love for the partner, heals personal inner wounds, rediscovers the meaning of life, and ultimately develops a sense of faith within the deeper theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, which helps to discern and discover the will of God in daily life. As seen in the "Conversation with Jesus and the Samaritan Woman," which was examined in the preceding section, the experience of God led to the fruit of inner transformation. The more authentic is spiritual conversation, the more the Holy Spirit directly intervenes and transform in one's soul in the experience of God.

b) The communal mode

Nadal recalls his experience at Messina in Sicily, introducing a communal mode of spiritual conversation. When the Jesuits arrived at Messina to start a school mission, they organized a group of local believers who frequented the church. During one gathering, "one of these persons read aloud from a religious book supplied by the sacristan, and afterward they conversed among themselves on spiritual topics."³⁶⁴ Sometimes, it was "practiced communally, as a kind of mixture of the sermon and spiritual conference on the one hand and of an individual spiritual dialogue on the other."³⁶⁵

364. O'Malley, 112.

365. Clancy, 55; Nadal's Sixth Exhortation, no. 28.

While Nadal described the model of communal spiritual conversation in terms of the action for the apostolate of the Word, Ignatius also wrote about this practice in his letter to those dispatched as participants in the Council of Trent.³⁶⁶ Here the communal aspect of spiritual conversation among the Jesuits for their service is well illustrated. Ignatius first orders in a detailed style the internal and external attitudes one should have as a participant in the council, and concludes the letter with the recommendation that the three priests “take an hour at night in which each can share with the others what has been done that day and discuss plans for the morrow.”³⁶⁷ They would have been able to prepare for tomorrow with a clearer direction, thankful for the special grace they received from the Lord through reflection and discernment as they gathered together in the community after fervent work during the day. Nadal, too, at the end of his exhortation, encouraged the practice and spread of communal spiritual conversation within the religious communities such as rectories, religious houses, and Christian family homes as well.

Today, the Jesuits actively promote and utilize spiritual conversation more in the communal mode. In particular, the 36th General Congregation in 2016 embodied and testified to the spirit of the early Jesuits by discerning the signs of the times and rearming and refueling all Jesuits in an evangelical way of proceeding. GC 36 reconfirmed and strengthened the tripartite mission of reconciliation—with God, within humanity, and with creation³⁶⁸—with the new insight that the Society’s apostolic mission flowed from a

366. *Letters*, 96.

367. *Ibid.*

368. GC 35, d.3, nos. 18–36; GC 36, d.1, nos. 21–30.

concrete “discerning community with open horizon.”³⁶⁹ In his address to the participants, Pope Francis emphasized the need to return to the fundamental inspiration of the *Formula of the Institute*, Ignatius and his early companions, and to focus on religious identity as an essential cornerstone of the apostolic mission. In response to this, Decree 1 of the GC 36 states that Jesuits “identify primarily as companions and with what that means in terms of community and apostolic discernment.”³⁷⁰ The Jesuit community is proclaimed as the “privileged place of apostolic discernment,”³⁷¹ “concrete space in which we live as friends in the Lord,”³⁷² “a room of encounter and sharing, and a space of truth, joy, creativity, pardon, and of seeking the will of God,”³⁷³ and finally “homes for the Reign of God.”³⁷⁴ The Congregation put spiritual conversation as “an essential tool that can animate apostolic communal discernment.”³⁷⁵ Through this tool, Jesuits deepens their understanding of what the Holy Spirit is saying to them individually and communally and make common apostolic discernment simpler and more practical with the zeal of loving and serving the Lord. The practice of spiritual conversation within the community “concretely bridges the triptych of Jesuit identity, Jesuit community, and Jesuit mission.”³⁷⁶

369. GC 36, d. 1, no. 7.

370. John W McCarthy, “Transformation of Spiritual Conversation, in The Moments of GC 36 for its Members,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 49, no. 3, 2017, 26.

371. GC 36, d.1, no.8.

372. *Ibid.*, no.9.

373. *Ibid.*, no. 10.

374. *Ibid.*, no. 13.

375. *Ibid.*, no. 12.

376. McCarthy, 27.

2.2.2. Disposition or some rules suggested

In a letter to his followers, Ignatius gave specific instructions regarding the inner attitude and preparation for spiritual conversation. These are mainly the letters of 1541 to Broët and Salmerón who had recently been sent to Ireland by Paul III, of 1546 directed to the Fathers sent to the Council of Trent, and a late document that contains a series of warnings to the Jesuits of Portugal.³⁷⁷

The rules indicated by Ignatius are not norms to be observed as absolute doctrines, nor some new theory. Instead, they are rather suggestions connected to the rules of discernment and hermeneutic guidelines on the fruits and the spiritual progress that Ignatius himself obtained through abundant relational experiences of spiritual conversation.³⁷⁸ The rules proposed by the saints a half-millennium ago need to be understood within creativity in the performative dimension for the cultivation of virtue.

a) Internal disposition: trust in God's grace and inner freedom

Ignatius presupposed a theological foundation for human conversation. Since God is our beginning and is with our history, we should engage in conversation with greater trust in these conversational moments. Ignatius was convinced that spiritual conversation is where a salvific event takes place. "As associating and dealing with many people for the salvation and spiritual progress of souls can be very profitable with God's help, so on the other hand, if we are not on our guard and helped by God's grace, such

377. "To The Fathers at the Council of Trent (1546)," *Letters*, 93–96.

378. Arena, 33.

association can be the occasion of great loss to ourselves and sometimes to all concerned.”³⁷⁹

Conversation participants become mediators of a love that transcends themselves that is passed on in the interpersonal encounter each time they lovingly encounter the divine mystery inherent in the other person.³⁸⁰ To have a conversation demands opening people to God’s grace by trusting in the goodness and good will of humans, and at the same time, it demands a faith that the Holy Spirit has spoken to the others and that one in turn can learn something from others. Furthermore, Ignatius emphasized that, as the basis of the inner attitude toward conversations, one must first approach individuals with love and a desire for their well-being.³⁸¹ He counseled to be more prepared for conversation. In the conversation, one should be present without showing attachment to one’s opinion, without taking sides with anyone.³⁸² He requested the greatest possible calmness and humility as “a lowly and humble person.”³⁸³ For this, one must cultivated one’s mind to maintain inner freedom, that is, indifference, or “auto-forgetfulness of the ego,”³⁸⁴ in which one sets aside one’s attachments and interests for the good of others so that one can open to the exploration of new truth, open to the alteration of different views. Even when the Holy Spirit shows one something unexpected and surprising, one needs the inner freedom to welcome it, and, at the same time, the courage to share the truth as it is.

379. “To The Fathers at the Council of Trent (1546),” *Letters*, 94.

380. Arena, 40–41.

381. O’Malley, 111.

382. “To The Fathers at the Council of Trent (1546),” *Letters*, 94.

383. “To the Members of the Society in Portugal,” *Letters*, 442.

384. Arena, 41.

b) The rules of empathy

Be slow to speak. Be considerate and kind; Be slow to speak, and only after having first listened quietly, so that you may understand the meanings, leanings and desires of those who speak. You will thus know better when to speak and when to be silent; try to avoid causing dissatisfaction to anyone; and I would deal on an equal basis with all, without taking sides with any; Finally, if some point of human or divine science is under discussion and I have something to say, it will be of great help to be unmindful of my own leisure or lack of time, that is, my own convenience. Rather I should accommodate myself to the convenience of him with whom I am to deal, in order to influence him to God.³⁸⁵

The rules that Ignatius directed explicitly to the attendees of the Council of Trent are timeless and still remind us of the fundamental spirit of a culture of communication today. It implies that everyone involved in the conversation has respect for the sharing of others and an open mind to listen to what is being shared deeply. It is rather a universal anthropological principle that only love can save humans through empathic conversation we can foster and foster loving relationships. It is the rule for fostering loving attention, empathic, patient that facilitates understanding the other's internal knowledge.³⁸⁶ When a person is open to others, it is not because of the expected profit or outcome in the utilitarian view, but on whether they show a loving attentiveness and authentic empathy for us. This sincerity of the heart is revealed through attentive and receptive listening in the adequate and timely balance between speaking and silence.

c) The rules of discernment

Ignatian spiritual conversation is at the service of the search for the will of God, which becomes transparent as an act of freedom; it orients the individual towards the

385. "To The Fathers at the Council of Trent (1546)," *Letters*, 94.

386. *Ibid.*, 42.

existential fullness to which he is called.³⁸⁷ As in all Ignatian ways of proceeding, Ignatius employs the rules of discernment, mainly by applying the general rules of the first and second weeks of the *Spiritual Exercises* in a more summarized form. The rules for discernment of spiritual conversation presuppose a spiritual strategy oriented towards conversation's ultimate ends, as investigated in the previous section. Specifically, as already described in the Annotation 7 in the *Spiritual Exercises* and the rules of the first week 318–322, these focus on the pattern of inner human movement, that is, the flow and pattern of spiritual consolation and desolation.

When the giver of the Exercises sees that the recipient is experiencing desolation and temptation, he or she should not treat the retreatant severely or harshly, but gently and kindly. The director should encourage and strengthen the exercitant for the future, unmask the deceptive tactics of the enemy of our human nature, and help the retreatant to prepare and dispose himself or herself for the consolation which will come.³⁸⁸

d) The rules of modesty

6. The lips should not be kept too tightly shut or too wide apart; 7. The whole expression should show cheerfulness rather than sadness or any other immoderate emotion; (...) 11. In a word, every gesture and movement is to be such as will make a good impression on all; 13. When they have occasion to speak, they should be mindful of moderation and good example both in what they say and the manner and tone in which they say it.³⁸⁹

During the last two years of his life, Ignatius wrote the rules of modesty, especially for those in formation. This implies an acknowledgment of the importance of non-verbal communication that underlies verbal communication, as well as the importance of physical language, gestures, and outward attitudes in Jesuit life and

387. Arena, 44.

388. *SpEx*, 7.

389. These rules were composed in the last two years of Ignatius' life for the special benefit of the Roman scholastics. They were in force by January of 1555. Clancy, 70–71.

mission. He makes concrete suggestions regarding the scholastics' outward attitude, face, appearance, walking style, eyes, way of looking at others, lips, hands, and pace in their daily life. Among them, the preceding is specified in the context of the dialogue.

3. APPLICATION OF IGNATIAN SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION TO THE DIGITAL COMMUNICATION CULTURE

Ultimately, a conversation is realized through practice in our daily lives, not as a theory or concept. Rather than explaining a hundred words about a conversation, saying just, "Hello, how are you doing?" as a greeting with a smile is closer to a holistic understanding of the essence of a conversation. Furthermore, a spiritual conversation, like any virtuous practice, demands practical performance of engagement, time, energy, and commitment.³⁹⁰ These practices are performed to achieve dialectical interpretation rather than unilateral literalization.

The practical application of spiritual conversation is a dual interpretative task. One is the intersubjective interpretation of each other's words uttered through the personal encounter between *I-Thou*. The other is a contextual understanding and acceptance of the other's existential horizon, living and breathing in historical reality. Concerning the former, the depth of an individual's experiences and stories in the horizon of his or her spiritual life deserves the same respect as the depth of the historical texts that underpin the religious traditions of faith, such as the Jewish, Islamic, and Christian scriptures.³⁹¹ Here, Ignatian spiritual conversation can be seen as a space where *I* and

390. McCarthy, 28.

391. "The hermeneutical perspective has become for me a way of seeing the life of the self or in more Christian terms, the life of the soul. That life is first and fundamentally a life of interpretation of experience. It is in the joining of event of experience and interpretive meaning that the life of soul takes place." Charles V. Gerkin, *The Living Human Document: Re-Visioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984), 34.

Thou can create the “fusion of horizons.”³⁹² This is the hermeneutic basis for suggesting that the application and practice of Ignatian spiritual conversation within the vulnerability of the culture of digital communication can provide a remedial value. The latter task is a hermeneutic reflection on the significance of Ignatian spiritual conversation to those who live in the contemporary era where networked religion is germinating and becoming rampant. Without this task, the practice of Ignatian spiritual conversation in the digital age loses practical utility and its justification. Here, suppose Ignatian spiritual conversation is viewed as a text or as a legacy of the spiritual tradition. In that case, the networked selves in today’s networked religion can be considered as readers of the text. The fusion of historical horizons from the hermeneutical relationship between the spiritual tradition and contemporary digital technology is implicitly revealed in the inner transformation of the networked self who lives in networked religion.

Therefore, the following sections will suggest a constructive interpretation through hermeneutical application to Ignatian spiritual conversation within the dynamics of intersubjective interpretation between the text and the reader. To this end, I will attempt to discuss this topic from two perspectives: micro and macro. From a micro perspective, the first section will interpret the remedial value through the dynamic process among the four internal components—listening, speaking, silence, and reflection—of Ignatian spiritual conversation. The intersubjective subjects here are the

392. The process of hermeneutics that occurs between the text and the reader proceeds through the medium of language. A hermeneutic process is an event in which the traditional horizon included in the text meets and converges with the horizon of the reader's pure perception, transcending time and space. In this case, the reader is not a ruler but a listener with open expectations and stands in the position of an experiencer, not a theorist. The fusion of these two horizons “goes deeper and deeper, gets fuller and fuller, or perhaps richer and richer” understanding through a continuous spiral cycle rather than a vertical, one-sided direction. Cf. Theodore George, “Hermeneutics,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford University, Winter 2021), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/hermeneutics/>.

participants in the spiritual conversation, especially who have exposed the vulnerability of the networked self, mainly in both the older generation and generation MZ as mentioned above. Furthermore, from a macro perspective, the second section will discover the potentialities and challenges of the hermeneutical application of Ignatian spiritual conversation in networked religion. Here, Ignatian spiritual conversation is viewed as the texts of traditional and communal wisdom and spirituality for networked religion in the culture of digital communication as the reader of the text.

3.1. Ignatian Spiritual Conversation and Networked Self

As seen above,³⁹³ the required antecedent activities of Ignatian spiritual conversation are prayer and the examen of consciousness. This reveals that Ignatian spiritual conversation, unlike other conversations, is fundamentally based on trust in the presence and action of God. Therefore, it should be noted that the principal-agent, the dynamic initiative in spiritual conversation, depends on the Holy Spirit's presence and action, or in broader sense, the transcendental movements towards the horizon of ultimate value. Thus, the remedial effect of spiritual conversation that this study claims also depends on God's presence in authentic communication among the participants. This is the distinctive point in which spiritual conversation differs from psychological counseling even though they commonly share its healing properties, such as interiority, empathy, and ethicality.³⁹⁴

Considering the priority of God's presence and activity in Ignatian spiritual conversation, we need to approach its dynamic-transformative power through a more

393. See Chapter III, 2.1.4.

394. See Chapter II, 1.

contemplative gaze centered on its intrinsic value rather than on its function and utility. Metaphorically speaking, it is the difference between contemplating the beauty and essence of life when looking at a tree in the forest and producing economic utility after logging it. Therefore, Ignatian spiritual conversation can be considered as a contemplative object, which involves the dynamic interaction among the internal components in the two strata between the foreground and the background as in Nicolai Hartmann's insight:³⁹⁵

The foreground is comprised of the real, concrete, and sensible dimensions of the object, everything that is independent of the presence of a subject who beholds the object and seeks to understand it. The background strata vary with the kinds of content the foreground lets appear, and the background exists only for the subject who grasps it.³⁹⁶

Ignatian spiritual conversation comprises listening and speaking as the foreground where the participants explicitly perform, and silence and reflection as the background where the participants are implicitly engaged. These two strata are not separate or independent. Still, they are in one and the same dynamic in which the transforming power of the Holy Spirit influences each other while circulating within the space of the conversation.

395. This section borrowed Nicolai Hartmann's ontological aesthetic insight that explained the encounter with the absolute intrinsic value of aesthetic objects. "The bestowal of meaning that comes into human life via aesthetic values consists fundamentally in nothing other than in the convincing feeling of standing face-to-face before something of absolutely intrinsic value—before something for whose sake alone it would be worth living, regardless of how the conditions of one's life stand otherwise" (AE35b). Keith Peterson and Roberto Poli, "Nicolai Hartmann," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford University, Spring 2022), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/nicolai-hartmann/>.

396. Ibid.

3.1.1. Listening and speaking for the networked self

Like any conversation, Ignatian spiritual conversation also presumes encounter and interaction through the authentic communication between *I* and *Thou* as in line with Buber's term.³⁹⁷ Yet, Ignatian spiritual conversation requires a more active and attentive listening and intentional speaking than any other conversation.

Listening does not indicate a just sensual act of auditory receptiveness. Instead, it is more a holistic attitude that recognizes that everyone engaged in the spiritual conversation has authority in their own lived experiences, as Pauline Oliveros describes:

The ear hears, the brain listens to the body's senses vibrations. Listening is a lifetime practice that depends on accumulated experiences. Listening can be focused to detail or open to the entire field of sound. Listening is a mysterious process that is not the same for everyone. Humans have developed consensual agreements on the interpretation of sound waves delivered to the brain by the ears.³⁹⁸

It therefore always involves the creation of a respectful welcome to and open space for others. Listening not only focuses on the content of the words but also affirms and accepts the other's life and existence as a whole.³⁹⁹ Although *I* am listening to *Thou* following my subjective point of view, *I* am not reducing *Thou* under the supervision of my perception, but rather respecting *Thou* as *Thou* are and trusting *Thou* without giving admonishment, advice, judgment, or evaluation. Listening is the intense channel for the dynamic transformation of oneself and others. As St. Paul testifies, "faith comes from

397. See Chapter II, 1.3.

398. TedxIndianapolis, "The difference between hearing and listening," video of lecture, Pauline Oliveros, Ted, published November 15, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QHfOuRrJB8&list=RDXMKJ9J1Lzf4&index=20.

399. Michael Hansen places the utmost importance on the reverence of those who engage in spiritual conversation, noting that Ignatius himself emphasized the ends, means, and relationships rather than the content of the conversation. Michael Hansen, *The First Spiritual Exercises: A Manual for Those Who Give the Exercises* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2013), 35.

what is heard” (Rom 10:17), and listening is an active agent of one’s existential conversion. As the Ignatian spiritual conversation’s ultimate end is the “good of souls,” the basic premise of active listening makes it possible to affirm the other’s existence, welcome the other, and accept the other’s differences unconditionally.⁴⁰⁰

Another part of the internal components as the foreground is speaking. Speaking here implies intentional speaking from the heart, not a superficial or rhetorical expression. It is the true expression of one’s experiences, feelings, thoughts, and the sharing of one’s existence. As we have seen,⁴⁰¹ spiritual conversation is an exchange of words in trust and respect for communion, not an argument or discussion for consensus. Speaking is not just a demonstration of one’s righteousness or justification, but an honest sharing from the heart, sharing feelings, and thoughts, the movements of one’s mind, and even a disclosure of the vulnerability that has bloomed through the genuine conversation with an eternal *Thou*. Speaking essentially takes all that is shared within the relationship with God as its content. Its main goal is to share personal prayer experiences or frankly share the process of reflection and life-discernment, rather than an intellectual or abstract theory about God. As Karl Rahner envisioned, we will spell out a great word to the glory of God when we are all assembled as each of us is a letter of the alphabet, a little word of God.⁴⁰²

William Bausch also states that even though someone does not explicitly speak of God, all human stories can be considered religious within the following four types:

400. Park, 102.

401. See Chapter III, 1.2.

402. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1990), 33.

“stories that signify self-discovery, stories that reveal life’s mystery, stories that signify mystical experience and stories that signify a conversion experience.”⁴⁰³ Diaz adds, “These stories have a single purpose, which is to help the speaker recognize God in his/her own story, to identify what God is saying, and finally to respond adequately in a way that could help oneself and others.”⁴⁰⁴ Thus, through speaking, the participant of spiritual conversation enters into a close relationship with God again, and naturally gains the generosity of the mind to help the neighbor as well.

Ignatian spiritual conversation’s listening and speaking have significant implications in the digital age. In particular, it provides inspiration and potentiality for the remedial dynamism in response to the vulnerabilities of the older generation and generation MZ as previously mentioned.⁴⁰⁵ Primarily, the practice and training of listening and speaking is a reminder of the absolute dignity of humanity. As aforementioned,⁴⁰⁶ generation MZ’s preference for text-based non-face-to-face communication and tendency for self-isolation due to avoidance of conflict are the result of the environment of digital technology. As also previously examined,⁴⁰⁷ the older generation’s vulnerability to cognitive bias is none other than a survival reaction caused by emotional alienation and low self-esteem felt in the digital divide.⁴⁰⁸

403. William J. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications), 193.

404. Diaz, Luz Marina Diaz, “Spiritual Conversation as the Practice of Revelation,” *The Way* 55, no. 2 (April 2016): 44.

405. See Chapter I, 1.

406. See Chapter I, 1.1.

407. See Chapter I, 1.2.

408. The more the older generation believes that they are excluded from mainstream information due to the digital divide and that legacy media deceive them, the more they consume fake news from

However, Ignatian spiritual conversation's listening and speaking dimensions induce one's existential decision of accepting the other person's absolute dignity, not dependent on their external conditions. We have found the possibility that *I* can transform my own view from the *I-It* to *I-Thou* through the relationship with eternal *Thou*.⁴⁰⁹ Even though *I* live in a place dominated by digital realities, at least *I* can prevent my conscience from indiscriminately reducing others to merely usable data. Therefore, the practice of listening and speaking in spiritual conversation nurtures one to accept others' human dignity with an attitude of trust and respect in the encounter with even those whom I've never met, or those who are merely connected by Facebook's "People You May Know" in a personalized algorithm or even those who hold political views that are the exact opposite of mine.⁴¹⁰

Moreover, listening and speaking cultivate a disposition to embrace and share the vulnerability of each other's interiority, like mind, emotions, and underlying motivations, rather than just the content of what the other person conveys. Unlike analog communication, digital communication enhances extended and impersonal connections. If there is no reverence for otherness, digital communication degenerates into an accelerated exchange of information, with only a superficial connection, not a bonding relationship such as neighborhood, brother/sisterhood, and friendship. This is because

YouTube, which can be easily accessed as an alternative. Social isolation is exacerbated as emotional alienation, lower self-esteem, dissatisfaction, and antipathy towards social structural inequality reinforce their cognitive biases trapped in this vicious psychological cycle. Jun-kyoung Kum, "Noindureun uriwha darun saesangeul salgo ida," *Media Today* 노인들은 우리와 다른 세상을 살고 있다, 미디어 오늘, ["Older people live in a different world from us] August, 17, 2019, accessed March 13, 2022, <http://www.mediatoday.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=201819>.

409. See Chapter II, 2.3.

410. Park, 102.

there is no sharing of pain, only the exchange of information. In that sphere, everyone only comes to be ashamed of their weaknesses and fragility.⁴¹¹ Generation MZ find it hard to reveal their weaknesses and are used to a culture of showing off their visual appearance and capability, so that performance pressure⁴¹² is becoming more severe. Social media's proliferation of superficial relations reinforces the unrealistic self and material pride by sharing only beautiful and often digitally manipulated pictures. This pressure and anxiety strengthen the self-isolation of generation MZ as mentioned earlier. Here, active and attentive listening and intentional speaking are more appropriate for developing a sense of empathy for interior pain and weaknesses. As much as my words are actively listened to, and my existence is sufficiently accepted, empathized, and assured of its safety, *I* can begin to share my genuine innermost thoughts, my vulnerable weaknesses, and even painful memories.⁴¹³

3.1.2. Silence and reflection for the networked self

As a background of its internal components, Ignatian spiritual conversation involves a silence based on prayer and discerning reflection. It indicates not only the temporal process of antecedent or descendant of the conversation participants' particular behaviors but also the total process of the conversational context in sacredness. Silence and reflection are "often more eloquent than a hasty answer and permit seekers to reach

411. Pyong-chol Han and Chae-yong Yi, *Taja ui Chupang = Die Austreibung Des Anderen* [The expulsion of the other society: perception and communication today] (Seoul, Mapo-ku: Munhak kwa Chisongsa, 2017), 114.

412. "The goal for their social media presence seems to be about appearing happy at every turn—with all profiles that are attached to their real names. Appearing successful, appearing positive, never showing that you're vulnerable, never showing that you've failed at anything, never showing that you're sad. There's a kind of constant performance that's expected on social media." Barna Group, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2018), 22.

413. Park, 103.

into the depths of their being and open themselves to the path towards knowledge that God has inscribed in human hearts.”⁴¹⁴ This is because spiritual conversation itself includes a revelatory dimension. As Gabriel Moran points out, revelation cannot be merely considered as one into a finished historical event if we understand “revelation” as the participation of present-day people in the revelatory experience.⁴¹⁵ Instead, it is an ongoing process and can be experienced in different contexts, whether within the walls of our religious tradition or beyond those walls.⁴¹⁶ God is present in our daily experiences, as we share and reflect upon these experiences in spiritual conversation to find God in them.⁴¹⁷ As such, we can say spiritual conversation is an activity of faith-revelation as long as revelatory experiences orient the life of those who participate in them.⁴¹⁸

In this regard, silence becomes a space of active self-surrender that directs participants’ will to God’s revelatory presence and action and downplays their initiative.⁴¹⁹ It provides an inner space for the conversation to be led by God’s initiative. The Bible shows that the divine voice of God comes through the silence in one’s inner space sometimes after a long wait. The sound of sheer silence of the Lord came to Elijah only after the loud noise of great wind, earthquake, and fire and finally caused him to go

414. Benedict XVI, “Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI For the 46th World Communication Day: Silence and Word: Path of Evangelization,” (hereafter “Silence and Word”), Vatican website. January 24, 2012, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20120124_46th-world-communications-day.html.

415. Gabriel Moran, *Uniqueness: Problem or Paradox in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 46.

416. Diaz, 50.

417. Diaz, 48.

418. Moran, 52.

419. Park, 97.

out of the cave and begin a conversation. (1 King 19:9, 11) Thus, in one's inner space, silence prepares and completes the birth of meaning before the feast of sound. As the

Estonian composer, Arvo Pärt notes:

Before one says something, perhaps it is better to say nothing. My music has emerged only after I have been silent for quite some time. Literally silent. For me, 'silent' means the 'nothing' from which God created the world. Ideally a silent pause is something sacred . . . If someone approaches silence with love, then this might give birth to music. A composer must often wait a long time for his music. This kind of sublime anticipation is exactly the kind of pause I value so greatly.⁴²⁰

Likewise, Ignatius shows great affection for silence. He opened his eyes to silence during his conversion in Loyola and became gradually familiar with it.⁴²¹ He came to love the life of silence and contemplation, to the extent that he considered joining the Carthusian order, which lives a mystic, contemplative life in great silence.

Nevertheless, silence does not just mean a muteness or a static monotone in Ignatian spiritual conversation. Despite even emerging into deep silence at his time in Manresa, Ignatius realized that his vocation was fundamentally rooted in an apostolic purpose. This came from his growing sensitivity to silence, gaining more awareness of the urgency of service for the "good of souls" through the ministry of the word, including spiritual conversation.⁴²² During several weeks of the first companions' communal discernment in

420. From an interview with Leo Normet, "The Beginning is Silence," *Teater. Muusika. Kino* 7 (1988), 22, quoted in Jeffers Engelhardt, "Perspectives on Arvo Pärt after 1980," 35, in *Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt*. ed. Andrew Shenton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 29-48.

421. As José García de Castro Valdés stated, *Vita Christi* (The Life of Christ), which Ignatius read while recovering at Loyola, decreased a lot of his inner noise, made him listen to new and unknown inner voice as a gentle soft breeze and began to teach him a sense of consolation. "And the greatest consolation he used to receive was to look at the sky and the stars, which he did often and for a long time, because with this he used to feel in himself a great impetus towards serving Our Lord" (*Auto*, 11.) In *Vita Christi* we read: "Seek solitude and escape the hustle and bustle if you want to unite yourself with God [...]. Flee from too much speech and keep quiet." Ludolfo de Saxonía, *La vida de Cristo*, I, 217 cited in José García de Castro Valdés, "Silent God in a Wordy World. Silence in Ignatian Spirituality." *Theologica Xaveriana* 66, no. 181 (2016), 180.

422. García de Castro Valdés, "Silent God in a Wordy World", 182.

Rome in 1539—whether to go their own ways separately or to remain together in a religious congregation—silence played a vital role in guiding their spiritual conversation rooted in their prayer experience. Although the term “silence” is not used frequently in the documents of the Ignatian heritage,⁴²³ the *Constitutions* solemnly highlight the significance of silence in “The manner of reaching a decision in the election of a general”: “In the locked room all will keep silence until the General is elected, in such a manner that one does not speak with another about anything pertaining to the election.”⁴²⁴

As Michael Hansen states, Ignatian spiritual conversation begins and ends with silence. In the conversation, silence creates the sacred space for listening and speaking⁴²⁵ because it allows one to be more contemplative, simply to be in the here and now in the sacred presence of the other. It is the “better part” that Mary chose over Martha’s activity in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 10:38-42).⁴²⁶ Therefore, the silence of Ignatian spiritual conversation determines the overall quality of listening, speaking, and reflection, the other internal components of spiritual conversation.

Another aspect of background, reflection is the process of looking back on what one listened to and spoke in the conversation and recognizing the Holy Spirit as active in

423. García de Castro Valdés did some interesting research in the “silence about silence” section of his article “Silent God in a Wordy World. Silence in Ignatian Spirituality”, 187. “*Autobiography* mentions “silence” only twice (*Auto*, 44; 98), and the thorough indexes of the *Exercises*, as published in the lengthy volume no. 100 of *Monumenta historica Societatis iesu* (hereafter MHSI), only includes one entry, which refers to the water drop entering the sponge [*ex.* 335. 6]. In the *Spiritual Diary*, an impressive mystical text, there are no explicit references to “silence,” and only three are found in the *Const*, 249; 250; 702. Moreover, when we look at the indexes of the latest GC 31 to 35, we only find two entries: In GC 31 decree 19.8f “conditions of silence and retreat” and in GC 33 “times of solitude and silence” decree 1. 75.”

424. *Const*, 702.

425. Park, 100.

426. Michael Hansen, *The First Spiritual Exercises: Four Guided Retreats* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2013), 359.

it. This implies a time of discernment, paying attention to the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is active in the conversation within God's revelatory dimension. Thus, it is more important to be awed and moved by being attentive to one's heart in the movements of the good spirits who have been active in each participant in the conversation, rather than to be analyzing or evaluating the conversation's contents. As previously stated in the "The Rules of Discernment,"⁴²⁷ three guidelines can be given applying the general rules of discernment, especially the first and second week's discerning rules, and the presupposition in the Annotation 22, to the process of reflection in Ignatian spiritual conversation.

Firstly, it is "a description of the general strategy of conversation, which is curiously enough in the enemy's strategy as described in the *Spiritual Exercises* 314; 318; 325–329; 331–333 with the 'end' inverted."⁴²⁸ This rule means the disposition of discernment about the results or fruits of spiritual conversation must lead us in a better direction as moving from bad to worse or from good to better. We need awareness that, no matter how the process pleases us if the enemy comes to us, its end is always the destruction and ruin of our souls. Just as an enemy uses our means for its ultimate goal, we should also embrace using the standards in line with others' tastes while keeping our ultimate goal in mind.⁴²⁹

Secondly, it is the discernment rule that draws attention during the first week of the *Spiritual Exercises* 316–324, "the proper pedagogic behavior to be observed in

427. See Chapter III, 2.2.2.

428. Arana, 43.

429. Park, 101.

situations of consolation or desolation.”⁴³⁰ This involves the spiritual hermeneutics of interior movements of both oneself and the others in the beginning, middle, and end of the conversation as being also guided by the *Spiritual Exercises* 333. Here, the “movements” (in Spanish, *mociones*) mean the mode of God’s present activities in the spirit of each conversation participant.⁴³¹ These are interior sensations of a very diverse character that “arise quite spontaneously, i.e., feelings and thoughts, likes and dislikes towards intentions, things, persons, institutions.”⁴³² Through reflection on the conversation, we could understand and relish more interiorly how God speaks to us through our deep desires and invites us through those paths to Himself.⁴³³

Thirdly, in a more practical sense, it is helpful to note Ignatius’ wisdom referring to the presupposition in Annotation 22 of the *Spiritual Exercises*: “...It is necessary to suppose that every good Christian is more ready to put a good interpretation on another’s statement than to condemn it as false...”⁴³⁴ This presupposition is a recommended attitude for reflection as well as listening, often called the Ignatian “plus sign,” meaning, as much as possible, to put a positive interpretation on another’s statement⁴³⁵ and assume the best. When we are troubled by what someone says or does,

430. Arana, 43.

431. Park, 101.

432. Hans Zollner, “Making Life-Decisions According to the Ignatian Method of Discernment (Criteria),” *Review of Ignatian Spirituality*, 110 (November 2005): 108–9.

433. Cf. “For what fills and satisfies the soul consists, not in knowing much, but in our understanding the realities profoundly and in savoring them interiorly.” *SpEx*, 2.

434. *SpEx*, 22.

435. Kevin O’Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius in Daily Life* (Chicago, IL): Loyola Press, 2011), 43.

we do not just give them the benefit of the doubt but seek the best possible interpretation of the situation.⁴³⁶

When we consider the significant relevancy between silence and reflection and the culture of digital communication, it seems contradictory and even incompatible somehow at first glance. As discussed in detail in Chapter I, the networked self is exposed to unlimited connections and information-oriented digital devices and is showing symptoms of addiction⁴³⁷ amid the flood of information noise. Nevertheless, human communication essentially orients one toward the ultimate concern for human existence and the meaning of life. In many religious traditions, silence and reflection are considered “privileged states which help people to rediscover themselves and that Truth which gives meaning to all things”⁴³⁸ so that they have the potential to create an appropriate environment to overcome the vulnerabilities of digital communication cultures.

Silence is not merely a matter of religious traditions. Its significance has also been revealed by neuroscience. As Imke Kirste researched, our exhausted bodies and brains can only be regenerated by silence.⁴³⁹ Silence fosters the ability to be alone with

436. Jim Manney, *Ignatian Spirituality A to Z* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2017), 201.

437. “Psychologists estimate that as many as 5 to 10% of Americans meet the criteria for social media addiction today. Social media addiction is a behavioral addiction that is characterized as being overly concerned about social media, driven by an uncontrollable urge to log on to or use social media, and devoting so much time and effort to social media that it impairs other important life areas. “Social Media Addiction,” Substances Info, Addiction Center, last modified December 17, 2021, <https://www.addictioncenter.com/drugs/social-media-addiction>; The British Cambridge Dictionary selected “Nomophobia” as “the people’s word of 2018,” which is the abbreviation for “No mobile phone phobia.” Olivia Petter, “‘Nomophobia’ Crowned Word of 2018, But What Does It Mean?” *Independent*, accessed March 5, 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/nomophobia-word-of-the-year-2018-cambridge-dictionary-smartphone-anxiety-a8705106.html>.

438. Benedict XVI, “Silence and Word.”

439. Rtam, “The Sound of Silence in Today’s Digital Age,” *Illumination*, last modified May 26, 2020, <https://medium.com/illumination/the-sound-of-silence-in-todays-digital-age-63231f24467c/>. See

oneself not only to endure but also to appreciate a time of solitude. This solitude is not loneliness, according to Paul Tillich's insight.⁴⁴⁰ As Sherry Turkle pointed out, solitude is a social exercise in accepting others as they are.⁴⁴¹ At the same time, it can be a daydream that allows oneself to look further and more creatively as I am based on a more stable self.⁴⁴² The ability to relish solitude effectively corresponds to the vulnerability of the generation MZ's self-isolation—as both an isolation from others and a self-alienation amidst indiscriminate exposure to the digital environment.

Absolute external silence is valued as an essential condition for the Ignatian retreat. Still, the fundamental rejection of digital noise-circumstances during the conversation is neither realistically possible nor appropriate.⁴⁴³ This is because, as we have seen,⁴⁴⁴ Ignatian spirituality does not exclude contemporary culture but instead seeks to discover God's will in all things through participation in the culture and circumstances. The question here is how to grasp the proper balance in a conversational environment. Psychiatry experts suggest a “digital detox” in life, along with a self-

Imke Kirste et al., “Is Silence Golden? Effects of Auditory Stimuli and Their Absence on Adult Hippocampal Neurogenesis,” *Brain Structure and Function* 220, no. 2 (January 2013): 1221-1228, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00429-013-0679-3>.

440. “Language . . . has created the word ‘loneliness’ to express the pain of being alone. And it has created the word ‘solitude’ to express the glory of being alone.” Paul Tillich, *The Eternal Now* (New York: Scribner, 1963), 17–18.

441. “If we don’t know who we are when we are alone, we turn to other people to support our sense of self. This makes it impossible to fully experience others as who they are. We take what we need ‘from them in bits and pieces; it is as though we use them as spare parts to support our fragile selves.” Turkle, *Reclaiming*, 47.

442. Josie Glausiusz, “Devoted to Distraction,” *Psychology Today*, March 1, 2009, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200903/devoted-distraction>.

443. Park, 99.

444. See Chapter III, 2.1.1.

diagnosis regarding an addiction to digital devices.⁴⁴⁵ This demands checking our digital device patterns and practicing some recommendations,⁴⁴⁶ one by one. But most important is a dispositional attitude against the environmental tendency, or in the Ignatian term, *Agere Contra*, literally meaning “act against.” This implies an active and robust performance against the desire towards a disordered attachment.⁴⁴⁷ Digital technology, which makes everything possible with fingers or a mouse, has also reduced the willful human response-ability to resist temptation. As Jim Manney says, “*Agere contra* illustrates the vigilant assertiveness that permeates the Ignatian outlook by being alert for the next thing the Lord is calling you to do.”⁴⁴⁸ For example, when I am overwhelmed by temptation, I go beyond praying to remove it and practice the counter—virtue against it with all my will relying on the power of God’s grace. By practicing *Agere Contra*, we can attain the proper balance, learn how to dwell in a time of solitude, and cultivate our capacity to be in silence more appropriately.

445. In the following self-diagnosis of smartphone addiction, three to four positive responses constitute a risk of addiction, five to seven suspected problems, and eight or more, are considered addictive: (1) Without a smartphone, my hands shake, and I feel uneasy; (2) When I lose my smartphone, I feel like I lost my friend; (3) I use my smartphone for more than two hours a day; (4) There are more than thirty apps installed on smartphones and most of them are used; (5) I take my smartphone to the bathroom; (6) I check my smartphone first thing in the morning; (7) The speed of writing smartphone characters is faster than others; (8) When I hear the sound of my smartphone while eating, I run right away; (9) I regard smartphones as my No. 1 treasure; (10) I fall asleep while using my smartphone until I go to sleep. *Internet Addiction Prevention Center*, accessed March 3, 2022, <https://www.iapc.or.kr>.

446. Recommendation for Digital Detox in Life: (1) Delete unnecessary applications, powering off time; (2) Call rather than messenger, meet more than call; (3) Log out of your email account or turn off mobile messenger’s notifications function; (4) Increase the time we spend reading paper books; (5) Give the brain a break. “Spacing out;” (6) Do not take smartphones to bed. Gabrielle Golding, “Digital Detox for Lawyers: 5 Steps to Help You Switch Off,” *2015 Law Society Bulletin* 36 (2014), 30.

447. Park, 100.

448. Manney, 6.

Likewise, reflection as the internal component of Ignatian spiritual conversation is also demanded as a vital practice in the digital communication culture. Here, the three guidelines, as mentioned earlier, are applicable to the digital environment.

First, we need to keep in mind the end-inverted situation in digitalization. No matter how much digital technology has brought convenience and efficiency to humankind, research reports that human intellectual and linguistic abilities are degenerating. Experts are concerned that human-specific cognitive abilities, such as memory, evaluation, and discernment, are drastically in decline.⁴⁴⁹ The increase in the aforementioned “confirmation bias” among the old generation⁴⁵⁰ can be seen as an illustrative example of this end-inverted phenomenon’s vulnerability. Ignatian tradition points out that such a decline in rationality and cognitive biases hinder the decision-making process.⁴⁵¹ This process requires the capacity to distinguish and to select the means to implement one’s apparent goal. For this, Ignatius said that the person making the decision should be willing to pray, weigh factors carefully, achieve self-knowledge, and strive to be free of disordered affections. After all, Ignatian decision-making depends on (1) how we can perceive our ultimate goal: to love God and serve our neighbors; (2) to cultivate inner freedom, so-called *indifference* toward means. Therefore, the practice of reflection through Ignatian spiritual conversation is the path for reforming the

449. Seok-man Yoon, “Yoon Seok-manui inganhyoukmyoung:500nyun dui jiguen baboman namnunda, whe,” *Joins* 윤석만의 인간혁명:500년 뒤 지구엔 바보만 남는다, 왜, 중앙일보, [“Yoon Seok-man’s human revolution: 500 years later, there will be only fools left on Earth, why?”] January 11, 2018, <https://news.joins.com/article/22262967>.

450. See Chapter I, 1.2.

451. Manney, 55.

vulnerability of cognitive bias amidst digitalization by perceiving the goal and internalizing the proper disposition that guarantees a wise decision-making process.

Second, reflection helps us look at the movement of the conversation participant's heart from a deeper level. SNS reinforces self-presentation, rather than self-reflection, by excessively exposing and sharing.⁴⁵² The technology does not care about self's intimate, vulnerable feeling that is inevitably revealed in the process of reflection.⁴⁵³ This undermines the human's sensitivity to the profound cycle of spiritual consolation and desolation and rather inclines only toward self-complacency. Furthermore, the algorithmic (or quantified) self, which is formed by AI-based services, such as the "highlights collage," only looks to what it can track as data points in a time series rather than to history as it leaves traces in language.⁴⁵⁴ The meaning of human life is never calculated with statistical data, but rather, is penetrated by the insight when we have a clear awareness of our present life in the historical continuum with the past and a hopeful vision for the future.

Third, exercising the recognition of the "plus sign" according to the *Spiritual Exercises* 22 through reflection in spiritual conversation can be an effective remedy for the so-called "negativity bias."⁴⁵⁵ It is not merely an irresponsible attitude that says, "All is well that ends well." Instead, it forms the habit of mutual respect in the relationship between *I* and *Thou*. Reflection of the spiritual conversation based on the "plus sign" can lead to mutual interior growth and discovery of God's will in the spirit of humility and

452. Turkle, 81.

453. Ibid., 85.

454. Ibid., 90.

455. Park, 102.

fraternity, even if what conversation partners have spoken might include some fallacies or errors.

In summary, this section attempted a micro-interpretation of how networked selves, i.e., participants in spiritual conversation in a digital communication culture, can help inner healing and growth related to their vulnerability as intersubjective subjects in an *I-Thou* relationship. To this end, the spiritual conversation process was explored as a contemplative practice in the presence of the Holy Spirit (the transforming power of ultimate value), and its internal components were divided into the foreground (listening and speaking) and background (silence and reflection) and the examen of consciousness. In conclusion, I predicted that sincere participation in spiritual conversation could lead to the fusion of horizons between participants, which would bring about the growth of the participant's sociality and inner cognitive balance.

3.2. Ignatian Spiritual Conversation and Networked Religion

While the previous section suggested the healing process that networked selves exposed to digital vulnerability will be provided by participating in Ignatian spiritual conversation, this section seeks to interpret the implications of spiritual conversation in digital religious culture from a more macroscopic perspective. The immediate question is, "Will the tradition of Ignatian spiritual conversation be preserved and adapted in order to survive in the digital religious and spiritual environment?" To ask this more specifically refined question, what kind of favorable function can the Ignatian spiritual conversation provide in networked religion? Since no research project has been conducted with such direct awareness in the four spheres proposed in the digital map,⁴⁵⁶ this section seeks to

456. See Chapter I, 2.1.

discover the potential of harmonization of Ignatian spiritual conversation within the theoretical framework of digital religious discourse, and I will assert the practical applicability of digital Ignatian spiritual conversation by examining the significant correlation between them.

3.2.1. The transformative potential of a third space

As we have seen before,⁴⁵⁷ networked religion is evolving into a third space in integrated and dynamic interactivity rather than separating the spatiality of online and offline. When discussing the digital religious environment considered as a third space, the most crucial and controversial issue is “mediated presence.” The most general question in the discourse of spiritual conversation in the digital age is based on skepticism about whether digital medium can create an authentic conversation. This doubt is formed due to the common sense that communication presupposes face-to-face communication as more genuine and essential. On the contrary, non-face-to-face communication is merely its imitation, and the authenticity of communication is also considered relatively inferior.

In particular, Christianity, a religion of personal encounter, theologizes the image of face-to-face communication to the supreme level of ultimate salvation and unity with God, while at the same time believing in the presence mediated in Jesus Christ incarnated as the salvific mediator between God and humanity, and believes in the Bible and the Sacraments. Christians affirm and value the conversational encounter between God and humans through mediated presence.

The incarnation of the Word teaches us that the fullness of God’s presence is personal, relational, face-to-face. Yet, in his absence, the risen Lord continues to be present in mediated ways, such as through the communal sacramental celebration of the Church. For human communication, especially in pastoral and ministerial context, Christ as Perfect Communicator offers a multifaceted model of presences

457. See Chapter I, 2.

to emulate, ranging from the face-to-face presence of the incarnate Jesus Christ to the mediated, absent presence of the risen Lord that we experience as Church.⁴⁵⁸

This dimension of mediated presence encompasses a process of transformation, helping the engaged believers to internalize or structure the transcendent. The transformation has a multifaceted meaning and, depending on the disciplinary approach, can relate to a wide variety of phenomena in social, political, cultural, ecological, psychological, philosophical, and theological domains.⁴⁵⁹ In describing the common characteristics among these, we note the following. First, transformation implies a specific object or phenomenon that is transformed in that something changes over from its original realm into another.⁴⁶⁰ Second, it raises the question of how fundamental and sustainable the power of transformation is.⁴⁶¹ Third, most of the transformation phenomena are often revealed invisibly in the inner dynamism rather than being displayed visually.⁴⁶²

As Birgit Meyer pointed out, this process of transformation could be embodied by not only liturgical or ritual symbols in an exclusive denomination but also through all-inclusive human activities that engage the sensational forms, such as art, music, aural-visual media, spatial practices, dance performances, pilgrimage, clothing, and literature, etc. as integral parts of the religious experience.⁴⁶³

458. Zsupan-Zerome, 61.

459. Thomas Schlag, “The Transformative Potential of Religious-digital Communication—the Example of an Instagram Account as ‘Networked Theology,’” *Cursor_ Zeitschrift für explorative Theologie* (July 2021), 3, accessed March 10, 2022, <https://cursor.pubpub.org/pub/e4g3ohlx>.

460. *Ibid.*, 4.

461. *Ibid.*

462. *Ibid.*

463. Giulia Evolvi argues that digital technology can be applied to mediate elements of various sensational forms to help experience religious transformation in following three grounds: First, from our

Positing a distance between human beings and the transcendental, religion offers practices of mediation that bridge that distance and make it possible to experience—and from a more distanced perspective one could say: produce—the transcendental. Take for example the Catholic icon: though carved from wood, painted, and set up—thus obviously ‘human made’—, to the believing beholder (and possibly its maker) it appears as an embodiment of a sacred presence that can be experienced by contemplative gaze, prayer, or a kiss. In this perspective, the transcendental is not a self-revealing entity, but, on the contrary, always ‘affected’ or ‘formed’ by mediation processes, in that media and practices of mediation invoke the transcendental via particular sensational forms.⁴⁶⁴

Hence, this logic supports the argument that the fundamental and sustainable power of inner transformation induced by the tradition of Ignatian spiritual conversation can maximize the invisible experience of religiously mediated presence within the full range of creative and diverse digital media technologies encompassing human sensational forms. The current section focuses on not predicting the content of digital technologies that will promote the transformative potential of the third space, the networked religious environment in which spiritual conversation will occur. Instead, it attempts to interpret the practical application within the interaction and fusion between two horizons. The fusion of horizons between the tradition of Ignatian spiritual conversation and the new phenomenon of networked religion, that is, the possibility of a third space of mediated presence, will be proposed with referring to Campbell’s theoretical frame as follows.

digitalized lives, we are daily using and experiencing digital artifacts and devices themselves as material objects capable of embodying religious experiences. Second, digital media can shape religious experiences by providing a sacred gaze through visual image sensors. Third, it can help to form a religious identity through rematerializing. Giulia Evolvi, “Religion and the Internet: Digital Religion, (Hyper)mediated Spaces, and Materiality,” *Z Religion Ges Polit* (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41682-021-00087-9>.

464. Birgit Meyer, “Religious Sensations: Why Media, Aesthetics and Power Matter in the Study of Contemporary Religion,” *Vrije Universiteit* (2006), 13–14, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241889837_Religious_Sensations_Why_Media_Aesthetics_and_Power_Matter_in_the_Study_of_Contemporary_Religion.

3.2.2. Various paths of a third space

The five traits of networked religions classified by Campbell might be hints that Ignatian spiritual conversation will have diverse application in the digital age.

Firstly, the application within the “networked community.” What Campbell points out is that communities in networked religions no longer function as tightly bounded social structures, but rather as loose social networks with varying degrees of religious affiliation and commitment.⁴⁶⁵ The most comprehensible example is the cyber church. Providing the official link, promoting the intended interaction with the offline church, creates a third space to socialize and build personal connections with small or larger online communities. Participants are satisfied with allowing a higher level of autonomy over the individual social participation than in offline churches. The cyber-church is thus a good example of creating the potential for a personalized community experience that represents a networked community of varying depth and sense of belonging.⁴⁶⁶ As Zach W. Lambert reports, the COVID-19 pandemic has invigorated relationships and revitalized online faith communities.⁴⁶⁷ The deepest level of longing for a relationship is the same at all times, but its absence reveals more remarkably the desire for a relationship. “Our content is important, but our connection is imperative.”⁴⁶⁸ The connection that only the church community can give exists. Thus, the church should provide the opportunity for spiritual conversation among community members as an

465. Campbell, 68–69.

466. Ibid., 70.

467. Zach W Lambert, “Facilitating Deep Friendship Digitally When Analog Acquaintances are Gone 19,” 19, in *The Distanced Church: Reflections on Doing Church Online*, ed. Heidi A Campbell (Digital Religion Publication, 2020), [http:// www. digitalreligion.tamu.edu](http://www.digitalreligion.tamu.edu).

468. Ibid., 21.

effective pastoral tool and as an opportunity for connection, consolation and solidarity. Here, Ignatian spiritual conversation helps a network community internalize and promote a sense of belonging. Ignatian spiritual conversation among individuals in the community expresses and reflects the diverse and fluid needs of believers to fulfill the spirit of communion, the ecclesial essence, as a third space to experience new transformation.

Secondly, the application of “storied identity.” Religious identity within networked religion is not simply produced through online participation, nor is it a purely repetitive reproduction of the offline world. Individuals can select, assemble, and present their religious identity through a unique narrative from which meaning-making and commonality of religious experiences can be derived.⁴⁶⁹ When religious bloggers narrate their spiritual journeys, share their mission consciousness, and make prophetic proclamations on controversial social issues, they must go through a process of discerning reflection. Yet, the anonymity and transience of the online environment often leads to the increased insecurity of identity fragmentation, conflict of opinion between online influencers and offline authorities.⁴⁷⁰ As aforementioned,⁴⁷¹ spiritual conversation helps people discover the meaning of life and reconfirm their religious identity through interpretation of the journey of faith and reflection and realization of historical continuity. Here, Ignatian spiritual conversation realizes the integrated stability of online–offline identity by providing more authentic spiritual reflection and discernment. Furthermore, it

469. Campbell, 71.

470. Ibid., 73.

471. See Chapter III, 1.2.

promotes the mediated presence of networked religion as the third space through the authentic formation of one's unique religious identity.

Thirdly, the application by a “shifting authority.” As mentioned in the previous section,⁴⁷² disenchantment and resistance to hierarchical authoritarianism is a noticeable characteristic of networked religion. Campbell points out that a shift is taking place within traditional structures of religious power through the roles of new gatekeepers and authorities.⁴⁷³ For example, web administrators, designers, and online forum managers often represent new forms of religious authority unintentionally within religious institutions, creating unique challenges related to who does or should serve as a legitimate religious authority in the internet age.⁴⁷⁴ Moreover, religious teachings, traditionally proclaimed with institutional authority, now arise freely on the side of those who are not professionally or academically theologically legitimized, but are interpreted as such by the recipients themselves. In particular, in the area of religious sensibility and consolation and sympathy for specific social issues, in the horizon of everyday life of the participants, especially the lay people are exerting a more substantial transformative influence, rather than the clerical formats, such as the pulpit or the altar. Spiritual conversation fosters an inclusive and integrated dialogue between vertical established religious institutions and horizontal new individuals. This results in the transformational fruit shifting from the religious convention of external authority to the religious essence of spiritual self-emptiness. The tradition of Ignatian spiritual conversation also provides

472. See Chapter I, 2.2.

473. Campbell, 83.

474. Ibid., 76.

an integrated perspective on the “shifting authority” of networked religion. It practices sincere sharing of the meaning of everyday life based on sensitive reflection and discernment of God’s presence and activity. Furthermore, Ignatian spiritual conversation mediates the transformative power that can deepen the practice and reflection of faith in everyday life. If the participants in networked religion use and practice it appropriately, there will be no lack of regard for Ignatian spiritual conversation as a value of mediated presence cultivating a horizontal personal relationship rather than a hierarchical power relationship.

Fourthly, the application through a “convergent practice.” One of the new aspects of networked religion is that fluid online interaction and information serve as a hub for various religious practices through hyper-linked digital platform technology. Campbell argues that “convergent practice” reflects autonomous religious performance described as lived religion. Seemingly secular practices also implicitly include sacredness, further expanding awareness of objects that carry and mediate religiosity.⁴⁷⁵ This is frequently found among SBNR people. Through sharing new ideas and reinterpreting religious symbols, we create an experiential environment that can revitalize individualized spirituality, sometimes within a group, and in another way, individually.⁴⁷⁶

For example, after Michael Jackson’s death in 2009, various religious practices widely took place in a virtual space creating personal tributes and communal grief in which fans continued to commemorate and remember his soul.⁴⁷⁷ Hence, networked

475. Ibid., 76.

476. Ibid., 78.

477. Ibid.

religion can encourage convergent practices by allowing individuals to share personal life events, including spiritual experiences, and to co-create activities and narratives of religious significance. Moreover, the dazzling advances in artificial intelligence and deep learning technology can provide personalized new religious practices, which allow the creation of new forms of hybrid religion. Ignatian spiritual conversation can promote a sense of balance by transparent evaluation and interpretation of hybrid spiritual practices produced through “convergent practice,” and projecting community wisdom towards authentic and sound conversion. In other words, by facilitating a conversation between traditions rooted in communal wisdom and newly creative individualized spiritual practices, Ignatian spiritual conversation offers networked religions the potential to develop deep new spiritual practices. In this way, Ignatian spiritual conversation can overcome the ego-centric superficiality of SBNR warned about in the previous chapter⁴⁷⁸ and play a vital role of a catalyst for authentic spiritual practice leading participants’ transformation from self-satisfaction to the practice and devotion of altruistic love. Therefore, the convergent religious-spiritual practices of networked religions will be able to newly rediscover and maintain the mediated presence of digital platforms through creative application and experimentation of the communal wisdom of Ignatian spiritual conversation.

Fifthly, the application in a “multisite reality.” This refers to the digital environment’s potential as a third space within the conscious and unconscious interconnection of users’ online–offline worldviews. Assuming the internet can mediate and shape sacred concepts of time, space, and identity, religious actors use it as a

478. See Chapter I, 2.2.

conversational space allowing for interactions and negotiations between traditional and new sources and interpretations of religious belief.⁴⁷⁹ This characteristic is crucial for affirming and paying attention to the spatiality of the mediated presence of the digital environment. This is because “multisite reality” dramatically reveals the process by which sacred acts mediated by symbolic materiality offline are imprinted on people’s hearts, and this is again diffused and reproduced in online communication. Evolvi calls a religious process within this dialectical cyclic structure a “hyper-mediated space.”⁴⁸⁰ She features #NousSommesUnis (We Are United) or #NousSommesEnsemble (We Are Together), which has spread as a hashtag movement after the Paris attacks in 2015, a worldwide live broadcast of Pope Francis’ *Urbi et Orbi* in 2020 amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, and a Facebook page of an online funeral mass service for the souls of those who died of the pandemic at the Parish of Manerbio, as representative examples of countless digitally mediated presences.⁴⁸¹ In each of these cases, spiritual values, such as solidarity, consolation, peace, and hopeful sharing through the material mediation created by handwriting for peace and unity, the solemn sacramental presence of the Holy Eucharist, pictures and names of the deceased, and candles commemorating them are deeply felt with appreciation and gratitude of the participants.⁴⁸² Here, Ignatian spiritual conversation can be engaged as a hyper-mediated channel to freely open, encourage, and communicate the conscious and unconscious interconnection of the multifaceted events embracing stories of loss, wounds, and pain of the vulnerable, that take place in offline

479. Ibid., 80.

480. Evolvi, “Religion and the internet.”

481. Ibid.

482. Ibid.

life and the spiritual values that bloom within them. In other words, rather than being limited to either online or offline environments, Ignatian spiritual conversation can act as a bridge that helps the religious-spiritual worldviews of the two spaces interact. As such, Ignatian spiritual conversation will go beyond simply performing online as a substitute or complement to offline and appropriate this hyper-mediated space as a place for creative transformation. Networked religion as a “multisite reality” employing Ignatian spiritual conversation will become a third space to interpret and internalize transcendent spiritual experience in the existing three-dimensional world in the virtual reality world.

4. SUMMARY

This chapter analyzed the anthropological understanding of spiritual conversation and proposed a definition of it as a preliminary step to the theoretical and practical analysis of Ignatian spiritual conversion, which represents a participatory and advocatory spirituality. Having analyzed both conceptually and practically Ignatian spiritual conversation from Ignatius’ life and the early and recent Society by examining Ignatian sources, such as the *Autobiography*, *Spiritual Exercises*, *Constitutions*, *Letters*, and the documents of General Congregations, we found that in the Ignatian tradition, spiritual conversation is an essential and effective instrument of the apostolate for the ministry of the word, proclaiming the word in Christ’s salvific ministry through a genuine, personal relationship with God.

Moreover, this chapter discussed both micro and macroscopic perspectives, aiming at a constructive interpretation and practical application of Ignatian spiritual conversation analyzed in this chapter. This interpretation and application are applied to

the new subject of the culture of digital communication, the culture experienced by the networked self in the networked religious that was described in Chapter I.

First, from a microscopic point of view, I investigated the intrinsic value of Ignatian spiritual conversation. This is a constructive interpretation of the necessity of the practical application of Ignatian spiritual conversation in the digital age. This provides the answer for the question, “why should we do it?” Ignatian spiritual conversation is a fusion of horizons achieved by the conversation participants’ forming a personal relationship between *I* and *Thou* based on trust in the active work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Ignatian spiritual conversation’s contemplative foreground—listening and speaking—in respecting and accepting the ontological dignity of others will overcome the self-isolation of generation MZ and the social alienation of the older generation caused by the digital divide. In addition, the contemplative background—silence and reflection—in the revelatory presence of God will lead both generation MZ from self-alienation (loss of capacity for solitude) and the older generation from cognitive biases to understand each other and themselves more authentically and creatively. Therefore, Ignatian spiritual conversation should be actively encouraged and developed as a pastoral and remedial alternative to the vulnerability the networked self faces.

Second, from a macro perspective, I examined the possibility of a hermeneutic fusion of historical horizons encompassed by the contemporary application of Ignatian spiritual conversation. This is a constructive interpretation of the methods of practical application of Ignatian spiritual conversation in the digital age, that is, the approaches to “how to do it?” The universal human experience of religion is a story about the power of fundamental, sustainable, and invisible transformation through the mediated presence

underlying it is particularly emphasized in Christianity. This theological horizon leads to how much media technology guarantees mediated presence in networked religion. The tradition of Ignatian spiritual conversation facilitates, induces, and balances this mediated presence by interacting in various ways through the five traits of networked religion within the “networked community,” of the “storied identity,” by a “shifting authority,” through a “convergent practice,” and in a “multisite reality.” In other words, the practical application of Ignatian spiritual conversation can be interpreted as an activity with the potential to maximize the lived experience of mediated presence through the fusion of historical horizons as an integrated third space of online and offline networked religion.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to present a hopeful vision of healing and recovery through the practice of Ignatian spiritual conversation in the culture of digital communication. This is not merely naive optimism based on a utopia. While optimism operates exclusively within the scope of the *futurum* of what already exists and is known, hope involves the perspective of *adventus*, watching for promises.⁴⁸³ For this purpose, this study attempted to explore the practical implication of Ignatian spiritual conversation in the culture of digital communication through the hermeneutical method, which involves description of the phenomenon, critical analysis, and constructive interpretation. As a result, this study suggests that Ignatian spiritual conversation contains the remedial value of overcoming the vulnerability of the “networked self” and serves as a bridge that can integrate the wisdom of Ignatian spirituality and the lived experience of the sacredness in “networked religion.” Therefore, I conclude that Ignatian spiritual conversation has a transformative potential as a practical application in the context of digitalization.

Chapter I focused on observing the negative impact of digital technology on communication culture, namely the phenomenon of vulnerability, and depicting the reality of understanding spiritual conversation required for an authentic communication culture in the religious-spiritual realm. The observed phenomenon can be described as follows.

First, individuals who are overly dependent on digital connections and information, “networked selves,” reveal vulnerability to self-isolation and cognitive biases, especially the older generation and generation MZ. The representative side effects

483. Antje Jackelén, “Technology, Theology, and Spirituality in the Digital Age,” *Zygon* 56 no. 1 (March 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1111/ZYGO.12682>.

of digital communication culture are that excessive dependence on connections result in self-isolation and social alienation and that information saturation induce self-alienation and cognitive bias.

Second, more than thirty years have passed since the advent of the Internet, and a revolutionary change is underway in the realm of religion and spirituality. Traditional religions are shifting toward “networked religion” in community, identity, authority, religious practices, and modes of functioning. The spread and pervasiveness of SBNR spirituality advocate individualistic and non-institutional autonomy. Still, at the same time, there is also criticism that it is a superficial, self-contradictory culture that lacks deep understanding and integration of ultimate concerns and traditional communal wisdom.

Third, the problems of the “networked self” and “networked religion” observed above demand a pastoral approach as in-depth and awaken religious-spiritual care and practice to vulnerable individuals. For example, the statistical survey of the attitudes and practices of U.S. Christians and non-Christians toward spiritual conversation, conducted by the Barna Group in 2018, shows the current state of the spiritual conversation that has changed with the advent of the Internet age. Believers still recognize the importance of face-to-face communication despite the proliferation of non-face-to-face communication. Furthermore, the Church is given the mission of the times to encourage, educate, and create an appropriate pastoral environment for spiritual conversation for those who are vulnerable to digitalization, both the younger and the older generations.

Chapter II attempted to analyze an authentic conversation among various thematic domains such as anthropological, biblical, and theological sources to establish

the foundation for an interdisciplinary understanding of Christian/Ignatian spiritual conversation.

The first section about psychological counseling testified to three elements of the healing process: interiority, empathy, and ethicality, in which authentic conversation aims for remedial alternatives to the vulnerability of digitalization.

The second section, with Buber's philosophy of dialogue, defining all conversation participants as inter-relational beings, authentic conversation should qualitatively shift from an *I-It* to an *I-Thou* relationship. Ultimately, an intersubjective and reciprocal relationship between *I* and *Thou* in authentic conversation is ontologically grounded and oriented toward transcendence in the sacred relationship between *I* and the eternal *Thou*, thereby providing an anthropological justification for spiritual conversation.

The third section explored the biblical understanding of conversation. It proceeded in two dimensions. One concerns scripture's intrinsic dimension, which reveals a conversational nature through written structures and patterns, dynamic reforms of communal history, and interpretative views. The other is the content dimension. I sought to analyze scriptures that directly employed conversation or expressed an opinion about conversation. Both Old Testament and New Testament employ conversation as a genre emphasizing characters and storylines. Among them, the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in the Gospel of John can be considered as one of the most outstanding models of spiritual conversation. Firstly, an ordinary daily conversations is expanded to the horizon of ultimate concern for the salvation of souls within the process of mutual respect and authentic communication. Secondly, the three healing fruits of interiority, empathy, and ethicality, obtained through the process of the

conversation, reflect the participants' lived experiences and existential situations. Thirdly, the inevitable challenges of communication, such as biases and misunderstandings, are eventually overcome so that the participants reach a deep understanding of each other and arrive at truth in a genuine confrontation rather than avoidance. Therefore, since the Bible reflects the conversational relationship between God and humanity, it should also be read and interpreted from conversational perspectives within the ultimate concern of salvation. Practicing authentic conversation involves a mission of reconciliation between God and humans and a mission to spread the hope of Christ.

The fourth section explored the systematic theological understanding of conversation. God's *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing) is the creation of a relationship between the Creator and the creature. As the image of God, the human person is ultimately a participant in the conversation of the communion of the Triune God. In particular, the Paschal Mystery is an expression of the eternal Trinitarian conversation, with each other "being-in-and-towards-the-other." We can expand the analogical imaginary and hopeful horizon of "God's total self-giving, intimacy, co-indwelling, and communion through ultimate divine-human relationship."⁴⁸⁴ From the Christological perspective, God's salvific history has already been completed by "establishment of conversation" through creation and covenant - "disruption of conversation" through original sin - "the restoration of conversation" through the incarnation of Christ, the Mediator, and fullness of all Revelation itself. The Church in the world walks in the Holy Spirit through Christ on the path of "ongoing conversation" towards an ultimate face-to-face conversation with God.

484. Zsupan-Jerome, 51.

Chapter III sought to find the answer to the question, “What is Ignatian spiritual conversation?” For this purpose, I proposed a definition of spiritual conversation as a conscious communication between two or more spiritual persons. Then I examined the theoretical and practical dimensions of Ignatian spiritual conversation as revealed in the Ignatian tradition based on the interdisciplinary understanding discussed above. The results of analysis can be explained as follows.

Spiritual conversation, proposed as a healing practice and mission for an authentic culture of communication in the digital age, can be a more effective contemporary ministry of the word within the tradition of Ignatian spirituality due to its participatory and advocatory features. Various Ignatian sources such as the *Autobiography*, the *Spiritual Exercises*, the *Constitutions*, numerous letters, and the documents of General Congregations commonly reveal that spiritual conversation’s apostolic purpose is for the “good of souls.” As such, it essentially presupposes prayer and the examen of consciousness on “things of God (*cosas de Dios*),” as the lived experience of deep conversation with God. Based on intimate knowledge of Jesus, Ignatian spiritual conversation emphasizes an “art of intimacy” that finds God’s presence in daily life even more than in the forms of preaching or sermons. In addition, Ignatian spiritual conversation has distinctiveness. It pursues a reciprocal and autonomous relationship rather than a one-sided relationship between subjects and an open hermeneutic system in creative tension rather than a closed and fixed institution. In terms of practical convention and guidelines, Ignatian spiritual conversation encompasses both its free-informalities and strategically structured formalities. Especially in the latter, as Nadal points out, Jesuits actively engage in private and communal modes of spiritual

conversation through creative adaptation. In particular, more recently, the 36th General Congregation re-emphasizes the significance of spiritual conversation in the communal mode by redeclaring that the Society's apostolic mission flowed from a concrete "discerning community with open horizon."⁴⁸⁵ Lastly, Ignatius himself emphasized the attitude of mind before spiritual conversation, namely, "trust in God's grace and inner freedom" as the core of one's inner disposition, and investigated the "rules of empathy, discernment, and modesty." These rules are not absolute doctrines to be observed but provide a sound direction for cultivating the virtues of conversation today as a legacy of wisdom derived from numerous conversation experiences of the saint.

Moreover, Chapter III attempted a constructive interpretation for the practical application of Ignatian spiritual conversation in the culture of digital communication. From a microscopic view, Ignatian spiritual conversation is fundamentally a contemplative practice so that the transformative presence of the Holy Spirit between *I* and *Thou* takes the initiative and works. Conversation participants can experience the ontological dignity of mutual respect and acceptance in the dynamic interaction between foreground—attentive listening and intentional speaking—and background—sacred silence and discerning reflection. This experience of inner transformation provides sufficient grounds to suggest a remedial alternative to the vulnerability of "networked selves," the phenomenon of self-isolation and the cognitive bias of the generation MZ and older generation.

From a macroscopic view, Ignatian spiritual conversation offers a new and creative experience of spiritual transformation in a "third space" by mediated presence

485. GC 36, d. 1, no. 7.

integrating various phenomena and characteristics of “networked religion.” Firstly, it internalizes and promotes the connection, consolation, and solidarity of the ecclesial sense of belonging in the “networked community.” Secondly, it encourages reflection and discernment, helping a person to discover the meaning of life and reaffirm our “storied identity” through interpreting the journey of faith and the awareness of historical continuity. Thirdly, it responds to a “shifting authority,” leading to the transformation from hierarchical, external authorities to the religious essence as spiritual self-emptiness by engaging in horizontal human relationships. Fourthly, it leads to an inclusive conversation between traditions rooted in collective wisdom and uniquely personalized spiritual practices, embracing the new potential of “converged practices” while providing a dialectical opportunity to transform egocentric superficiality into the practice of altruistic love. Fifthly, it creates the emergence of a hyper-mediated space for transcendental spiritual experiences by providing a bridge that helps people living in “multisite reality” between offline and online. This will be strengthened more with an intersecting worldview in the era of the Metaverse based on WEB 3.0 soon.

This study seeks to present significant implications in both practical and theoretical realms in the study of Ignatian spiritual conversation.

In the practical realm, it evoked the dimension of intensive pastoral care through a more in-depth observation of the vulnerability of the “networked selves,” which have already been noted in my previous article, “The Value of Spiritual Conversation in the Digital Age.” Based on the results of earlier research, this study attempted to focus on the lived experience of people whose lives are exposed to vulnerability, particularly the older generation and generation MZ. Although the phenomenon of self-isolation and

reinforcement of cognitive biases is not exclusive to any specific age, it is helpful to concretely examine people's lived experience and to apply spiritual conversation as a remedial alternative. In this way, Ignatian spiritual conversation can be an effective apostolic tool for the pastoral care of souls living at the frontier of digitalization. It offers a hopeful vision based on human dignity and reconciling and healing the world in the current social reality that prevents an authentic communication, such as the prevalence of consumerism, narcissistic egoism, conflict in political polarization, and acceleration the era of post-truth. Furthermore, this study seeks to find the possibility of creative application of Ignatian spiritual conversation within "networked religion," the recent phenomenon of digital technology, in the religious-spiritual sphere. The pastoral frontier supported a positive view of the Ignatian spiritual conversation in "networked religion" as a third space that encourages an inner transformation through the mediated presence of lived religious-spiritual experiences beyond the dichotomous perception of online-offline reality. This approach will spark a discourse on the pastoral application of spiritual conversation in a new faith space in the soon-to-be-coming metaverse era.

In the theoretical realm, this study proposes an in-depth foundation for an interdisciplinary understanding of Christian/Ignatian spiritual conversation. Firstly, the healing aspects of psychological counseling and the relational and sacred aspects of Buber's philosophy of dialogue provide models supporting the humanistic dimension of Ignatian spiritual conversation. In short, it revealed that the scope of the "good of souls," the explicit purpose of Ignatian spiritual conversation, intersects with universal salvation for all humanity rather than exclusive denominations or closed traditions. Secondly, the conversational nature of the Bible revealed by the biblical exploration confirmed that the

horizon of truth encompassed by Ignatian spiritual conversation is not a dogmatic unilateralism or irresponsible relativism but a fusion of relational horizons through conversation. Thirdly, the research into such themes in systematic theology as Creation, Trinity, Christology, Ecclesiology, etc., supports the legitimacy of the practice of Ignatian spiritual conversation in one's faith journey within a divine-human relationship. In other words, life is rather a pilgrimage towards the horizon of intimate communion with God from the beginning of our existence to its end in the salvific history of conversation. People experience establishment, disruption, restoration, and ongoing continuation towards ultimate conversation with God.

Employing the hermeneutic approach, this study revealed the remedial value and potential of Ignatian spiritual conversation in the culture of digital communication that two generations who are vulnerable to digital technology will gain. However, it has limitations in that empirical proof through experimental process are lacking. The lack of such evidence can lead to the criticism that this study's thesis statement is a mere hypotheses or assumption. Research, experimentation, and qualitative analysis, particularly for vulnerable generational groups seem necessary to focus on the lived experience of online–offline integrated reality rather than a theoretical model. Therefore, interdisciplinary research in the study of spirituality, social psychology, behavioral sociology, neurosciences, neurology, media research, etc., can trace the power of sustainable and invisible inner transformation through spiritual conversation in the culture of digital communication so that they might be able to carry forward the claims of this study.

We live in an unpredictable era, but this study encourages the more creative and active practice of Ignatian spiritual conversation so that people can experience the transformative power of the Holy Spirit through the restoration of the authentic relationship of *I* and *Thou* within healing and reconciliation.

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