

Good reads for grasping digital culture

by Sister Angela Ann Zukowski, MSHH

HAMLET'S BLACKBERRY: A PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY FOR BUILDING A GOOD LIFE IN THE DIGITAL AGE, by William Powers

—Powers summons us to reflect upon what he calls the conundrum of connectedness. Our computers and mobile devices can be wonderful tools, but they also impose burdens, making it harder to focus, do our best work, establish stronger relationships and find depth and meaning in our lives. Powers delves into the past and illustrates how new technologies have always brought the mix of excitement and stress that we feel today. Drawing on seven historical figures, he shows that digital connectedness serves us best when it is balanced by its opposite, disconnectedness.



BORN DIGITAL, by John Palfrey and Urs Gasser—This book can especially guide us in our vocation ministry. Digital natives, the authors tell us, are different kind of people. They think of the world as a canvas to paint with words, sights, sounds, video, music, Web pages. Multimedia means using multiple modalities to communicate with “friends.” They study, work, write and interact with each other in ways that are very different from earlier generations. They read blogs rather than newspapers. They meet each other online, and their research is igoogole.com, or wiki.com. They are more likely to send an instant message than pick up a phone. They connect to one another by a common culture.



The authors acknowledge their contribution is only the beginning of the conversation concerning the future opportunities and challenges associated with the Internet as a social space. The debate over the promises, limits and potential of an escalating global network is in an embryonic phase. What better entry point than now for religious communities to exercise their wisdom and insight within this new missionary territory?

THE FACEBOOK EFFECT, by David Kirkpatrick — This book offers the inside story of how Facebook is connecting the world. The author chronicles the successes and missteps, offering a complete assessment of the company. When TIME named Mark Zuckerberg Person of the Year for 2010, the editors wrote: “Facebook has shown a peculiar durability. It continues to grow and expand in services linking over 600 million users. In a single day, about a billion new pieces of content are posted on Facebook. It is the connective tissue for nearly a tenth of the planet. It is the third largest country on earth.” Many vocation directors are using Facebook, striving to cultivate a robust vocation presence online. The significance of Kirkpatrick’s book is the insight one gleans for how innovators are entering the digital culture, influencing the character, identity, presence, behavior, language and means of communication in order to nurture a new sense of global community. The new, cyber world-order is democratic, dynamic, evolutionary, sophisticated and full of complex networking systems.



LIFE ON THE SCREEN: IDENTITY IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET, by Sherry Turkle—This book predicted that we would see eroding boundaries between the real and the virtual, the animate and the inanimate, the unity and the multiple self in the future. Ten years before the emergence of social networking, Turkle foretold the impending change in the way children and teens would come to distinguish between their real life (RL) and their screen life (SL) Internet personas. Her prediction is today’s reality.



Therefore, religious women and men need to ensure that our presence is vigorously reflected within this “place,” capturing the religious and spiritual imagination of the “cyberzens.” On the Internet faith is being shaped and defined by a new collective spirit. ■