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Israel Díaz
Barry University

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**Christian Religious Education in a Missionary Key:
Exploring the Border Between
the Kingdom of God and the Device Paradigm
in Latinx Communities**

Israel Díaz

Barry University

Introduction

The hasty shift to virtual instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic thrust Christian religious educators and students in Catholic schools into new modalities of teaching and learning, with minimal time to assess how these new modalities further evangelization. Consequently, if Christian religious education is to promote its aim of evangelization and faith formation of U.S. Latinx communities, we need to consider how digital technologies are furthering this aim through instructional practices and assessments.

In a study of low-income Latinx children in a mobile park in Silicon Valley, Claire Ji Hee Kim and Amado M. Padilla demonstrated the digital divide that exists between low-income students and their upper middle-class peers in a city in Silicon Valley.¹ The results of the study found that nine out of ten students indicated that they experienced distractions at home while participating in classes online; seven out of ten students indicated that they did not have adequate

¹ Claire Ji Hee Kim and Amado M. Padilla, “Technology for Educational Purposes Among Low-Income Latino Children Living in a Mobile Park in Silicon Valley: A Case Study Before and During COVID-19,” *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 42, no. 4 (November 2020): 507.

personal workspace for doing schoolwork; and nine out of ten reported that their internet connection was unstable, which interfered with their online learning.²

Beyond the issue of access to digital technologies by Latinx communities is the role of teachers' biased perception of the students' ability to transfer their experience of using digital technologies in their personal lives into using digital technologies in the classroom. Matthew H. Rafalow's research indicates that teachers in a predominantly Latinx middle school considered the "digital skills students gained through online play as neither assets nor threats, but rather, as irrelevant," since families of Latinx students are hard-working immigrants whose primary goal is to get a working-class job.³ For this reason, teachers consider Latinx students not to be gifted in technology and require that they be taught skills for "hands-on jobs," and think that any technology they learn is for such purposes.⁴

Additionally, there are questions regarding how digital technologies are promoting student learning. Ewelina Lacka and T.C. Wong conducted a study on the impact of virtual learning environments and social media on students' higher education outcomes. For this study, social media was defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0."⁵ The study demonstrated that the use of virtual learning environments in higher education promotes the perception among students of the

² Kim and Padilla, "Technology for Educational Purposes," 509.

³ Matthew H. Rafalow, "Digital Equality Requires More than Access," *Phi Delta Kappan* 102, no. 6 (March 1, 2021): 27.

⁴ Rafalow, "Digital Equality," 27.

⁵ Ewelina Lacka and T. C. Wong, "Examining the Impact of Digital Technologies on Students' Higher Education Outcomes: The Case of the Virtual Learning Environment and Social Media," *Studies in Higher Education* 46, no. 8 (2021): 1622.

relative importance of “Learning-Oriented Outcomes” and enhances students’ perception of “Cognitive Outcomes.”⁶ However, while social media can promote the importance of “Knowledge Transfer Outcomes,” it has the opposite effect on the relative importance of Learning-Oriented Outcomes and Cognitive Outcomes among students.⁷ The results of these recent studies draw attention to the importance of assessing whether and how the use of digital technologies in Christian religious education are furthering evangelization through instructional practices and assessments.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ 2020 *Directory for Catechesis* explicitly considers the close connections between evangelization, catechesis, and digital culture. The *Directory* states, “Catechesis participates accordingly to its own nature in the effort of evangelization, in order that the faith may be supported by an ongoing maturation and express itself in a way of life that must characterize the very being of the disciple of Christ.”⁸ For this reason, the *Directory* recognizes that “a closer look at the cultural context brings out the new problems with which the Church is being called to live . . . the phenomenon of digital culture . . . [and] the globalization of culture.”⁹ For “the introduction of digital tools and their use on a massive scale has caused profound and complex change on many levels with cultural and social

⁶ Lacka and Wong, “Examining the Impact of Digital Technologies,” 1627. Lacka and Wong define “Learning-Oriented Outcomes” as degrees, grades, employability potential, and career prospects deriving from education. “Cognitive Outcomes” include productivity outputs, such as subject knowledge and overall higher education experience.

⁷ Lacka and Wong, “Examining the Impact of Digital Technologies,” 1627. “Knowledge Transfer Outcomes” consist of project and team management skills, personal skills, and access to internships and network relationships.

⁸ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Directory of Catechesis* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2020), 1.

⁹ USCCB, *Directory of Catechesis*, 4.

‘consequences that are not yet entirely evident.’”¹⁰ Digital technologies are “not only a part of the existing cultures,” but are asserting themselves *as a new culture*.¹¹ Moreover, this digital culture is presenting “itself as the bearer of beliefs that have religious characteristics.”¹²

The concerns presented by the *Directory of Catechesis* and the case studies mentioned above offer perspectives on how the use of digital technologies may be shaping evangelization and faith formation efforts in Latinx communities in the United States. As Allan Figueroa Deck writes, “the challenge of the Hispanic [*sic*] presence is obviously a crucial matter for the vitality of the [Catholic] Church in the United States” as “what is at stake here is not a part of the U.S. Church,” but, given current demographics, the entire Church.¹³ Hosffman Ospino proposes the formulation of an analytical framework that can help all Catholics “to properly read our present experience and propose practical strategies to better address the needs of faith formation among Hispanic [*sic*] Catholics.”¹⁴ Such a framework “calls for a major overhaul of how we do ministry, how we evangelize, how we educate Christians in our communities, how we develop materials for faith formation, and how we prepare the next generation of leaders to serve

¹⁰ USCCB, *Directory of Catechesis*, 359.

¹¹ USCCB, *Directory of Catechesis*, 359.

¹² USCCB, *Directory of Catechesis*, 365.

¹³ Allan F. Deck, “A Latino Practical Theology: Mapping the Road Ahead,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 65 (2004): 294.

¹⁴ Hosffman Ospino, “Hispanic Ministry, Evangelization, and Faith Formation,” in *Hispanic Ministry in the 21st Century: Present and Future*, ed. Hosffman Ospino (Miami: Convivium, 2010), 59.

Catholics in our country.”¹⁵ At the core of evangelization is the question of how to evangelize Latinx communities through Christian religious education in a digital culture.

To address this question, this article will first juxtapose the border of the Kingdom of God and Albert Borgmann’s “device paradigm” to ascertain the implications of integrating digital technologies into Christian religious education and into its aim of evangelization and faith formation in Latinx communities. I will consider the post-conciliar theology of evangelization as articulated in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Redemptoris Missio*, and *Evangelii Gaudium* and Borgmann’s construal of technology as a type of culture. Given the aim of this juxtaposition, this article does not seek to add to the post-conciliar theology of evangelization, but rather to lay out its development in order to identify implications of Borgmann’s device paradigm for the Church’s mission. Additionally, I hope to exhibit the continuity of this post-conciliar theology of evangelization as developed by Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Francis. This analysis will also rely on the works of Allan Figueroa Deck and Hosffman Ospino to consider the implications of these two borders for evangelization and faith formation in Latinx communities. In view of this appraisal, this essay proposes a construal of Christian religious education in a missionary key that can further evangelization in today’s digital culture, particularly in Latinx communities. I will close by recommending Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz’s *lo cotidiano* and “Understanding by Design” (UbD) as reflective pedagogies that can help evangelization through Christian religious education.

¹⁵ Ospino, “Hispanic Ministry, Evangelization, and Faith Formation,” 60.

At the Border of the Kingdom of God

In the Decree on Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes* (1965), the Second Vatican Council asserted that to be church is to be missionary.¹⁶ The aim of the church's missionary efforts is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and to proclaim and make present the kingdom of God by saving and renewing "every creature" so that "all things may be restored in Christ."¹⁷ In this way, the church continues the work of Jesus, which is nothing less than the work of the Triune God working through Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the church.¹⁸ This calls the church to "a deep interior renewal" that generates a "vivid awareness" of its responsibility to evangelize and share in the missionary activity of the church to the nations.¹⁹ Hence, the church does not engage in mission as it were one activity among others, but rather mission "makes the church the church."²⁰ This conciliar theology of evangelization is further developed by Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Francis.

Evangelii Nuntiandi

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), Pope Paul VI elaborates on the character of the Church's missionary vocation. The exhortation states that "those who sincerely accept the Good News . . . gather together in Jesus' name in order to seek together the kingdom,

¹⁶ Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church (*Ad Gentes*), 2.

¹⁷ Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, 1.

¹⁸ Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, 2–4.

¹⁹ Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, 35.

²⁰ Stephen B. Bevans and Jeffrey Gros, *Evangelization and Religious Freedom: Ad Gentes, Dignitatis Humanae*, ed. Christopher M. Bellitto, Rediscovering Vatican II (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2009), 32.

build it up and live it . . . and to communicate and spread the Good News.”²¹ At the center of this proclamation is the salvation the kingdom of God offers, a salvation that brings “liberation from everything that oppresses [the human person] but which is above all liberation from sin and the Evil One.”²² Therefore, this proclamation of the gospel is a “service rendered to the Christian community and the whole world” in response to the people of today who are oppressed by fear, distress, confusion, and uncertainty.²³ This good news is proclaimed through two commands: put on the new self and be reconciled to God.²⁴ In this manner, the proclamation of the gospel is the remedy for society’s burdened condition as evangelization lightens the burden of the human community through renewal and reconciliation. Through these efforts the kingdom of God is present.

Paul VI emphasizes the importance of evangelizing both individuals and cultures, since the aim of evangelization is to bring “the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new.”²⁵ The task envisions the transformation of humanity via individual persons who are renewed by baptism and committed to living according to the gospel and transform society.²⁶

Consequently, the transformation of all strata of humanity is not limited to preaching the gospel in wider geographic areas or to greater numbers of people, but seeks to affect the human

²¹ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 13.

²² Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 9.

²³ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1–2.

²⁴ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 2.

²⁵ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18.

²⁶ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18.

person's "criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life which stand in contrast to the Word of God and the plan of salvation" in evangelizing "culture and cultures."²⁷ This transformation of culture, Paul VI stressed, involves human rights, family life, peace, justice, development, and liberation²⁸ as evangelization seeks "to purify and transform [culture] in light of the gospel so that it reflects authentic Christian values and becomes a suitable vehicle for the evangelization of persons individually and in groups."²⁹

For this reason, evangelization includes the preaching of the search for God through prayer and the encounter with Jesus Christ in the sacraments, but it is incomplete if it does not take into account "the interplay of the Gospel and of humanity's concrete personal and social life" and the rights and duties of every human being.³⁰ What matters is to evangelize the human person's culture and cultures, not in a decorative way, but in a vital way in the depth of the roots, always taking the person as one's starting-point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God.³¹ Therefore, the evangelization of individuals and cultures consists of a correlation between evangelization, personal transformation, and social justice that impacts all levels of society.

Redemptoris Missio

In his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), Pope John Paul II writes that the good news

²⁷ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 19–20.

²⁸ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 29.

²⁹ Avery Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium* (New York: Paulist, 2009), 68.

³⁰ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 28–29.

³¹ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20.

involves the establishment of the kingdom of God, which Jesus inaugurated and which is meant for all of humanity.³² The liberation and salvation the kingdom of God brings come to the human person in their physical and spiritual dimensions³³ and seek to transform human relationships.³⁴ However, a “soulless development,” where “religion as well as human values are in danger of being overwhelmed by consumerism,” cannot suffice.³⁵ Therefore, evangelization is not only concerned with the struggle against material poverty and underdevelopment, but also with the tendency to a moral and spiritual poverty caused by overdevelopment. Understood this way, “all forms of missionary activity” are a means of furthering human freedom by proclaiming Jesus Christ.³⁶

Evangelii Gaudium

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), Pope Francis writes that the acceptance of the first proclamation invites the person to receive God’s love and to love God in return through the desire to seek and protect the good of others.³⁷ In other words, redemption has a social dimension, as God redeems the individual person and the social relations that exist between persons.³⁸ Accordingly, “there is a risk of distorting the authentic and integral meaning of the mission of evangelization” if the social dimension of evangelization is not properly

³² John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, 13–14.

³³ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 14.

³⁴ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 15.

³⁵ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 59.

³⁶ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 39.

³⁷ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 178.

³⁸ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 178.

brought out.³⁹ Due to this risk, Francis advocates for a “missionary option” that will transform all dimensions of the church, where the church moves from conservation to missionary mode.⁴⁰ This missionary mode places all things in a missionary key and affects the way the message of the Gospel is communicated.⁴¹ Here two missionary activities are worth mentioning: inculturation and dialogue.

Evangelii Gaudium acknowledges that the human person is always situated in a culture.⁴² This suggests that the social dimension of the gospel requires that evangelization take account of the “unceasing interplay of the Gospel and [the human person’s] concrete life, both personal and social.”⁴³ This reality calls for inculturation. Francis explains that “once the Gospel has been inculturated in a people, in their process of transmitting their culture they also transmit the faith in ever new forms.”⁴⁴

Evangelii Gaudium also recognizes that “evangelization involves the path of dialogue.”⁴⁵ Through personal dialogue, a person speaks and shares their joys, hopes, concerns for loved ones, and other heartfelt needs, and it is only after personal dialogue that it is possible to bring up

³⁹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 176.

⁴⁰ Antonio M. Pernia, “A Missionary Church: Introduction and Chapter One of *Evangelii Gaudium*,” *International Review of Mission* 104, no. 2 (November 2015): 156.

⁴¹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 34.

⁴² Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 115.

⁴³ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 181.

⁴⁴ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 121.

⁴⁵ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 142.

the fundamental message of the personal love of God who offers salvation and friendship.⁴⁶ Noting the importance of dialogue to safeguard human development, Francis identifies three areas of dialogue where the church needs to be present to promote the common good: dialogue with states, dialogue with society—including dialogue with cultures and the sciences—and dialogue with other believers who are not part of the Catholic Church.⁴⁷

The Kingdom of God and Latinx Communities

As proposed earlier, the concerns presented by the *Directory of Catechesis* and the case studies mentioned call the Catholic Church—clergy, religious, and laity—to assess how the use of digital technologies is shaping evangelization and faith formation efforts in Latinx communities in the United States. This undertaking involves discerning the implications of the post-conciliar theology of evangelization for Christian religious education in these U.S. Latinx communities.

Allan Figueroa Deck proposes the post-conciliar theology of evangelization, with its emphasis on the values of the kingdom of God, as the conceptual framework for understanding the church's essential task in the U.S.⁴⁸ Deck reasons that the theology of correlation called for by Vatican II's teaching on evangelization "gives great importance to dialogue with cultures."⁴⁹ Consequently, evangelization is an ongoing process of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ by

⁴⁶ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 128.

⁴⁷ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 238.

⁴⁸ Allan F. Deck, "Evangelization as Conceptual Framework for the Church's Mission: The Case of U.S. Hispanics," in *Evangelizing America*, ed. Thomas P. Rausch (New York: Paulist, 2004), 86.

⁴⁹ Deck, "A Latino Practical Theology," 296.

means of inculturation and liberation.⁵⁰ Inculturation is “the appeal that the gospel makes to core values and meaning at the heart of a person’s and an entire people’s way of life.”⁵¹ It is an appeal that begins in the human heart of individuals but needs to radiate towards the family, the community, and the culture itself. Liberation is a living out of the gospel’s proclamation of loving God and neighbor as it makes the kingdom of God present in concrete form wherever sin and all its concrete, personal, structural, and systemic effects take place.⁵² It empowers the people to be aware of their plight and to act on behalf of their own justice.⁵³ In this sense, the members of the community become their own agents of individual and social change as their transformation flows from a heart that is centered on Jesus Christ’s reign of justice.

Evangelization as a conceptual framework for pastoral activity in the context of Latinx communities is developed by *Encuentro and Mission*⁵⁴ when it proposes “the New Evangelization as the overarching dimension grounding all commitments to ministry with Latino/a Catholics in the United States.”⁵⁵ As noted previously, Hosffman Ospino speaks to the implications of evangelization as the conceptual framework for ministry to Latinx communities when he writes that this framework calls for a major overhaul of how we do ministry, evangelize,

⁵⁰ Deck, “A Latino Practical Theology,” 283.

⁵¹ See Deck, “A Latino Practical Theology,” 293, quoting John Coleman, “Pastoral Strategies for Multicultural Parishes,” *Origins* 31 (January 10, 2002): 283.

⁵² Deck, “Evangelization as Conceptual Framework,” 95.

⁵³ See Allan Figueroa Deck, *The Second Wave: Hispanic Ministry and the Evangelization of Cultures* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 125–127.

⁵⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Encuentro and Mission: A Renewed Pastoral Framework for Hispanic Ministry* (USCCB: Washington, DC, 2003).

⁵⁵ Ospino, “Hispanic Ministry, Evangelization, and Faith Formation,” 76.

and educate Christians in our communities, as well as how we develop materials for faith formation and prepare leaders to serve Catholics in the U.S.

Ospino goes on to suggest that a clear understanding that we are a church in solidarity with those who are most in need—a church constantly involved in advocacy, conflict resolution, and social justice—is required for evangelization and faith formation initiatives among Latinx communities to reach a level of completion and effectiveness.⁵⁶ Accordingly, Ospino reasons that “faith formation frameworks only make full sense when understood as part of the larger context of evangelization.”⁵⁷

Conclusion

This schema of the post-conciliar theology of evangelization asserts that to be church is to be a community of missionary disciples who, in witnessing God’s love in Christ and proclaiming the gospel, offer a spirituality of healing and liberation in the physical and spiritual dimensions of people’s lives that are inherent to the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God transforms human relationships as liberation sets people free from all alienation and doubt, from slavery to sin, and from the power of death. In this way, the proclamation of the gospel is a service rendered by the Christian community to the world in response to the oppression of people by fear, distress, confusion, and uncertainty. This schema is to be the conceptual framework for Christian religious education, particularly to Latinx communities in the United States.

As the kingdom of God is present through the evangelization of individuals and cultures, it involves a correlation between evangelization, personal transformation, and social justice that impacts all levels of society. As the church identifies itself with the affliction of the marginalized

⁵⁶ Ospino, “Hispanic Ministry, Evangelization, and Faith Formation,” 75.

⁵⁷ Ospino, “Hispanic Ministry, Evangelization, and Faith Formation,” 78.

and strives for the transformation of dehumanizing structures, it recognizes that such transformation rests on the salvation and renewal of every creature restored in Christ. Therefore, this interdependence between the transformation of the individuals and the transformation of unjust structures is the key for the church's evangelization to be effective and relevant. The proclamation is made relevant insofar as it is centered on the transformation of the practical realities of quotidian life, or *lo cotidiano*, i.e., the "first horizon in which we have our experiences that are constitutive elements of our reality."⁵⁸ The proclamation is effective to the degree that it recognizes that the transformation of structures calls for the conversion of the individual who is restored in Christ. Consequently, the evangelization of individuals and cultures is pivotal in the proclamation of the gospel in Latinx communities in the United States.

At the Border of the Device Paradigm

The case studies mentioned in the first part of this article offer empirical data on the benefits and limitations of using digital technologies in education. However, the concerns regarding the use of digital technologies in Christian religious education extend beyond the implications of digital technologies on learning processes or questions about access, as significant as these are. The concern about digital technologies, as discerned by the *Directory of Catechesis*, includes the type of digital culture that the use of digital technologies is generating and the challenges to evangelization this culture presents. For instance, as mentioned earlier, the *Directory* warns of how digital tools shape and embody a new culture that is changing language, shaping mentalities, and restructuring hierarchies of values. While the internet and social networks create opportunities for dialogue, encounter, exchange between peoples, and access to

⁵⁸ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "Lo Cotidiano: A Key Element of Mujerista Theology," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 10, no 1 (August 2002): 8.

information and knowledge,⁵⁹ “digital media can [also] expose people to the risk of addiction, isolation, and gradual loss of contact with concrete reality . . . [as] digital spaces can create a distorted vision of reality, to the point of leading to the neglect of the inner life, visible in the loss of identity and . . . in progressive dehumanization and ever greater isolation within oneself.”⁶⁰

The *Directory* also warns that the economic interests operating in the digital world are “capable of exercising forms of control as subtle as they are invasive, creating mechanisms for the manipulation of consciences and of the democratic process.”⁶¹

Albert Borgmann’s work, *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology* considers the implications of digital culture in society and Christian faith. Borgmann reasons that as technology addresses the material challenges of poverty and oppression, the gospel’s prophetic voice—the good news of liberation to the poor and oppressed—is lost.⁶² Thus, he maintains that a contributing factor to the decline of Christian faith is the progress in technology.

The Device Paradigm

Borgmann construes technology as a “type of culture” characteristic of advanced societies.⁶³ For Borgmann, “contemporary life in technologically advanced countries exhibit[s] a

⁵⁹ USCCB, *Directory of Catechesis*, 360.

⁶⁰ USCCB, *Directory of Catechesis*, 361.

⁶¹ USCCB, *Directory of Catechesis*, 361.

⁶² Albert Borgmann, *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003), 7-8.

⁶³ Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 7.

repeated pattern” which he calls “the device paradigm.”⁶⁴ This device paradigm consists of the “distinctive pattern of division and connection of the commodity and machinery of the technological device.”⁶⁵ “Commodity” refers to the “distinctive surface appearance of technological items which reflect the commodious character and the tradable availability of such items.”⁶⁶ “Machinery” is the deep and concealed structure that makes the commodity possible.⁶⁷ As machinery is achieved by the transformative power of science, commodity owes a debt to science.⁶⁸ This debt to science suggests that the wellspring of technological power consists of controlling a phenomenon.⁶⁹ For this reason, Borgmann understands modern technology as the procurement and consumption of commodities⁷⁰ that aims at transparency and control,⁷¹ and that brings about a pattern of transformation taking place “from things to devices and the technological universe created by that transformation.”⁷² In this manner, the device paradigm embodies and promotes a new culture that, as noted by the *Directory*, is changing language,

⁶⁴ David Strong, Andrew Light, and Eric Higgs, *Technology and the Good Life?* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), 27, eBook Collection EBSCOhost.

⁶⁵ Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 18.

⁶⁶ Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 17

⁶⁷ Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 17.

⁶⁸ Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 18.

⁶⁹ Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 67.

⁷⁰ Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 22.

⁷¹ Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 66.

⁷² Strong, Light, and Higgs, *Technology and the Good Life*, 30.

shaping mentalities, and restructuring value hierarchies that are characterized by consumption, transparency, control, and the shift from things to devices.

Borgmann's understanding of technology as a type of culture characterized by the device paradigm makes it "extremely important to consider not just the appropriateness of this or that device in a specific context, but to consider people's typical use of them and the overall consequences of the use of devices by most people in the developed world."⁷³ In this way, "technology properly directs us to those concrete quotidian structures in which we act out our hopes and frustrations both inconspicuously and decisively."⁷⁴ However, as modern technology directs us to those quotidian structures, the question arises as to the standing that the device paradigm has in the collective awareness of society and its common order.⁷⁵ This question is crucial for considering the role of digital technologies in evangelization and Christian religious education, particularly as digital technologies can thwart evangelization by distorting visions of reality and promoting dehumanization and isolation.

The Hiddenness of the Device Paradigm

Borgmann believes that "the progress of technology . . . has had a numbing sameness for the last century," and that with it comes a resourceful stability and safety that conceal the limits of technology.⁷⁶ He attributes the inability to see the character and limits of technology to the paradox present in contemporary culture: Borgmann acknowledges that, while contemporary culture is extremely conscious of itself, contemporary modes of scientific and political discourse

⁷³ Strong, Light, and Higgs, *Technology and the Good Life*, 30.

⁷⁴ Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 14.

⁷⁵ Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 18.

⁷⁶ Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 18.

witness to how contemporary culture is ignorant of its essential character.⁷⁷ For example, natural science can be seen as a contemplative activity that promotes transparency by discovering the lawful order of reality; however, science is not valued for its contribution to a deep understanding of reality, but rather for the transformative power behind the knowledge acquired.⁷⁸ This transformative power rests on illuminating an “object or event by finding out how it is governed by scientific laws,” and in “controlling a phenomenon by varying some of its lawfully governed conditions.”⁷⁹ Therefore, while there is a hope for transparency, the value of scientific inquiry is not the transparency it offers but the control gained from scientific inquiry, a control that obscures transparency. The focus on the transformative power of science ignores the terminal area where “the use of manufactured goods and all economic efforts find their end and justification, i.e., the area of final consumption.”⁸⁰ The result of ignoring the essential character of society is that the quotidian structures of procurement and consumption of commodities and the search for transparency and control are overlooked.⁸¹ As long these quotidian structures are ignored, there remains a distorted or incomplete view of the character of today’s common order that frustrates evangelization and its aim of liberation through the transformation of individuals and unjust social structures.

The device paradigm, with its disregard for the essential character of society and transformation from things to devices, leads to “a life of distraction that is isolated from the

⁷⁷ Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 11.

⁷⁸ Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 13.

⁷⁹ Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 67.

⁸⁰ Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 13-14.

⁸¹ Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 14.

environment and from other people.”⁸² A thing “has an intelligible and accessible character and calls forth skilled and active human engagement.” It is a commanding reality.⁸³ A commanding reality “comes to the fore in any object that conveys ‘meaning through its own inherent qualities’ and through ‘the active contribution of the thing itself to the meaning process.’”⁸⁴ In contrast, a device can consist of mass-produced artifacts as well as commonly employed procedures that are “disposable, discontinuous with their larger context, and glamorous in their appeal.”⁸⁵ In sum, “a thing requires practice while a device invites consumption . . . Things constitute commanding reality, devices procure disposable reality.”⁸⁶ The abundance and availability that accompany disposable reality produce effortless and inconsequential consumption that brings about a loss of depth and disclosure of what once occupied the place of commanding reality.⁸⁷ This appraisal of the device paradigm obliges Christian religious educators to delve into the device paradigm’s implications for evangelization and for the forming of God’s people for mission.

The Device Paradigm and the Decline of Faith

The device paradigm—with its procurement and consumption of commodities, its aim at control and the concealment of quotidian structures, and its shift from commanding reality to disposable reality—lies at the root of the connection between the progress of technology and the

⁸² Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 30.

⁸³ Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 31.

⁸⁴ Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 28.

⁸⁵ Strong, Light, and Higgs, *Technology and the Good Life*, 22.

⁸⁶ Strong, Light, and Higgs, *Technology and the Good Life*, 31.

⁸⁷ Strong, Light, and Higgs, *Technology and the Good Life*, 86-87.

decline of faith, as the former makes the latter superfluous and irrelevant.⁸⁸ Borgmann proposes that “the indifference in contemporary culture to Christianity is, theologically speaking, a problem of grace,” i.e., a problem of God’s presence in our world.⁸⁹ This hiddenness of grace, Borgmann claims, is particularly true in the information age as technological innovation, and its focus on control, “systematically reduces” the “precinct of grace.”⁹⁰ This precinct of grace is the realm of contingency, or that which lies beyond prediction and control. In other words, as the rule of the device paradigm promotes control over contemplation, superficiality over depth, and consumption over transparency, it too can conceal the human ability to see our dependency on God and foster a misguided sense of self-reliance.

This is evocative of the narrative of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1–9. In that narrative, excessive pride results in humanity challenging the supremacy of God by seeking to overcome the boundaries ordained by God.⁹¹ In an analogous way, the device paradigm can inspire us to construct our technological Tower of Babel and diminish the precinct of grace. This loss of depth and disclosure can thwart the human ability to perceive God’s presence in the world and promote a misguided sense of self-reliance that, in isolating a person from their environment and from others, can propagate objectification and superficiality. This undermines the kingdom of God and the boundaries set by God to promote human flourishing. As a result, an unreflective use of digital technologies can get in the way of the task of Christian religious education, which

⁸⁸ Strong, Light, and Higgs, *Technology and the Good Life*, 7.

⁸⁹ Strong, Light, and Higgs, *Technology and the Good Life*, 65.

⁹⁰ Strong, Light, and Higgs, *Technology and the Good Life*, 65.

⁹¹ John S. Kselman, “Genesis,” in *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. James L. Mays and Joseph Blenkinsopp (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000), 90.

is to evangelize by bringing the people of God to lives where there is a unity between what they profess to believe and how they engage in the world.

The Device Paradigm and Latinx Communities in the U.S.

In his work *The Second Wave: Hispanic Ministry and the Evangelization of Cultures*, Deck reasons that an effective evangelization of Latinx communities in the United States cannot occur unless the gospel message is proclaimed in such a way changes take place in the personal and the social/structural dimensions of Latinx communities and the larger North American society.⁹² In other words, the target of evangelization “is not just individuals but entire cultures.”⁹³ Consequently, “inculturation or contextualization is in itself evangelization.”⁹⁴ This suggests that “the effective proclamation of the gospel occurs when the prevailing cultural values are critiqued and new more radical gospel values are proposed in place of them.”⁹⁵ Towards this end, the use of digital technologies in Christian religious education and faith formation in Latinx communities is to further the task of inculturation of and critical reflection on *lo cotidiano*.

Unfortunately, many Americans, including many Catholics, are uncomfortable with the cultural analysis and critiques vital for an understanding and acceptance of evangelization in the U.S. Catholic Church to be achieved.⁹⁶ Moreover, a reflection on the meaning of inculturation and liberation reveals a dichotomy that does not respect the proper balance between personal

⁹² Deck, *Second Wave*, 94.

⁹³ Deck, “A Latino Practical Theology,” 283.

⁹⁴ Stephen B. Bevans, “The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World,” *International Review of Mission* 103, no. 2 (November 2014): 302.

⁹⁵ Deck, *Second Wave*, 101.

⁹⁶ Deck, “Evangelization as Conceptual Framework,” 88.

conversion and social transformation of structures that *Evangelii Nuntiandi* maintains.⁹⁷ This dichotomy contributes to a division among pastoral agents.⁹⁸ On the one hand, some pastoral agents prefer an understanding of evangelization focused primarily on a change of heart. On the other, some have a preference for structural change. At the root of this dichotomy is the failure of Catholic social teaching to reach the laity in the pews by making explicit the link between faith and justice.⁹⁹ Deck suggests that for a theologically inspired pastoral action to be adequate, attention to reality at the “micro” level of persons, family, community, and locality, as well as the “macro” level of nation, continent, or developing world, is required.¹⁰⁰

Contributing to this challenging reality is the device paradigm, which can hinder the evangelization of cultures in Latinx communities and the United States through its pattern of transformation from commanding reality to disposable reality and its emphasis on control that obscures the transparency of quotidian structures. First, as Borgmann mentioned, the valuing of scientific inquiry for the control gained from such inquiry obscures the reality that consumption is the end and justification for manufactured goods and of economic efforts. The overlooking of these quotidian structures of procurement and consumption of commodities gets in the way of a genuine critique of culture needed to propose radical gospel values to transform unjust structures. Second, Borgmann’s remark that the device paradigm brings with it a loss of depth and a life of distraction isolated from the environment and from other people makes it difficult for the church to be in solidarity those who are in need—a solidarity that, as Ospino suggested, is required for

⁹⁷ Deck, *Second Wave*, 93.

⁹⁸ Deck, *Second Wave*, 93.

⁹⁹ Deck, “A Latino Practical Theology,” 284.

¹⁰⁰ Deck, “A Latino Practical Theology,” 279.

evangelization and faith formation initiatives among Latinx communities to be effective. Third and finally, the impact of the device paradigm is diminishing religious faith as the loss of depth and disclosure inhibit the human ability to perceive God's presence in the world and promote a misguided sense of self-reliance that seeks to overcome the boundaries ordained by God.

Conclusion

Borgmann's "device paradigm" calls attention to the significance of critically reflecting on how digital culture is hindering evangelization efforts in Latinx communities in the United States. The device paradigm, with its own rule and grammar of transforming things into devices and commanding reality into disposable reality, is characterized by a habit of effortless and inconsequential consumption that brings about a loss of depth and disclosure of what once occupied the place of commanding reality. In this way, the device paradigm creates new spaces that propagate objectification and superficiality and promotes a pattern that undermines the values of the kingdom of God—e.g., human rights, family life, peace, justice, development, and liberation.

Furthermore, the loss of depth and disclosure has the capacity to thwart the human ability to perceive God's grace in the world and to recognize our dependency on God and the boundaries set by God to promote human flourishing. It can also hinder evangelization in Latinx communities by obfuscating gospel values and practices that are the core of the conceptual framework for understanding the Church's evangelizing activity in the United States. This concern requires an articulation of Christian religious education in a missionary key that can address the challenges to evangelization and human flourishing posed by digital technologies—and contribute to effectively integrating digital technologies in Christian religious education in ways that further evangelization in Latinx communities.

Christian Religious Education in a Missionary Key

Rooted in the post-conciliar theology of evangelization, Christian religious education in a missionary key is intentional in developing and implementing programs that further evangelization by forming and informing the people of God to mission. This suggests that the content, resources, instructional strategies, assessments of and for Christian religious education must contribute to episodes¹⁰¹ of encounter, liberation, and transformation that make present the values of kingdom of God. This construal offers an approach for evangelization and the integration of digital technologies in Christian religious education in Latinx communities.

Christian Religious Education as Encounter

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis invites all Christians to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ or to the openness to letting Christ encounter them.¹⁰² Through this encounter, a person enjoys liberation from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness, loneliness, narrowness, and self-absorption. This liberation that allows the person to become more human and attain fullness of truth as the person becomes more sensitive to the needs of others.¹⁰³ It is an encounter that gives life a new horizon and decisive direction.¹⁰⁴ Accordingly, as the encounter and liberation in Christ affect a person's values, criteria for judgment, sources of inspiration, and lines of thought, the fruits of this encounter and liberation are to be evident in the transformation

¹⁰¹ The use of the word "episode" is a reference to Richard Osmer's definition of episode as an "incident or event that emerges from the flow of everyday life and evokes explicit attention and reflection." See Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 12.

¹⁰² Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 3.

¹⁰³ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 1 and 8-9.

¹⁰⁴ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 7.

of the individual that brings about the transformation of dehumanizing structures, for every tree is known by its fruit (Luke 6:44). Contributing to this culture of encounter is vital for Christian religious education in a missionary key, since the Church's evangelizing activity ensues from the encounter with an event, a person, and is not the result of an ethical choice or lofty idea¹⁰⁵ that runs the risk of limiting Christian religious education to a human project. Therefore, Christian religious education is to correlate evangelization, personal transformation, and social justice, as the interdependence between the transformation of individuals and the transformation of unjust structures resulting from a reconciling and liberating encounter with God's love in Christ is essential for the Church's missionary effort to be effective and relevant.

Christian Religious Education as Conscientization and Critical Correlation

Designing meaningful experiences of prayer, liturgical celebrations, retreats, and the sacramental life is essential if Christian religious education programs and resources are to further evangelization. Equally important is the consideration of how the content, resources, instructional strategies, and assessments of Christian religious education can promote episodes of encounter, liberation, and transformation by forming and informing of God's people to mission through a critical dialogue between the Christian religious tradition and a person's socio-historical-political context. This approach to Christian religious education relies on the conscientization of missionary disciples who commit to the human praxis of "action-reflection on the world" as they "take on a role as subjects making the world."¹⁰⁶ Likewise, the approach depends on clarifying the task of theology within religious instruction. Richard McBrien explains that theology is "the articulation . . . of the experience of God within human experience" and

¹⁰⁵ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 7.

¹⁰⁶ Paulo Freire, "Conscientisation," *Cross Currents* 24, no. 1 (March 1, 1974): 24-25.

therefore is the “process by which we bring our knowledge and understanding of God to the level of reflection and expression.”¹⁰⁷

For this reason, McBrien rightly asserts that the religious educator is also a theologian since “on the one hand, the religious educator must himself or herself critically investigate and understand what is to be communicated and, on the other hand, must attend to the methods, context, and effects of the communicative process.”¹⁰⁸ This task of theology is further illustrated by David Tracy’s method of critical correlation, which involves a correlation “between the Christian message (Scripture, doctrines, creeds, nonbiblical texts, events, images, persons, rituals) and the human situation.”¹⁰⁹ In this critical correlation the Christian message and the human condition are to be creatively reinterpreted.¹¹⁰ The result is a “pattern, or method, of mutually critical correlations between interpretations of situation and [Christ-]event as each reality influences (confronts, correlates, informs, transforms) the understanding of the other”¹¹¹

This task of theology assists the aim of Christian religious education by forming the people of God to “discern, respond to, and be transformed by the presence of God in their lives, and to work for the continuing transformation of the world in the light of this perception of God.”¹¹² This conceptualization of theology allows the modern interpreter to critically dialogue

¹⁰⁷ See Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, new ed. (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 40-1.

¹⁰⁸ McBrien, *Catholicism*, 57.

¹⁰⁹ McBrien, *Catholicism*, 23.

¹¹⁰ McBrien, *Catholicism*, 23.

¹¹¹ David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 406, quoted in McBrien, *Catholicism*, 23.

¹¹² McBrien, *Catholicism*, 57.

with the tradition through the hermeneutical lens of liberation in correlation with their own cultural context that originates in an encounter with God's reconciling love in Christ.

Furthermore, given the role of culture in critically interpreting the tradition, this method offers an opportunity for inculturation and the transformation of unjust social structures.

Christian Religious Education as Practical Theology

This appraisal of Christian religious education in a missionary key suggests that the content, resources, instructional strategies, and assessments must form the people of God in the practice of conscientization and the task of theology as critical correlation. This goal can be well served by forming missionary disciples in practical theology. The significance of this formations is evident in that practical theology entails "critical, theological reflection on the practices of the church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world."¹¹³ Hence, the locus of investigation for practical theology is not only the practices of the church and the experience of Christians, but also the practices of the world.¹¹⁴

The significance of practical theology for forming missionary disciples is also clear in missiologist Stephen Bevans' assertion that "missiology is practical theology," as through practical theology the people of God come to a right understanding and embodiment of trinitarian practice in order to participate more fully in the *missio Dei*.¹¹⁵ Practical theology is

¹¹³ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM, 2006), 6.

¹¹⁴ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 7.

¹¹⁵ Stephen Bevans, SVD, "Missiology as Practical Theology: Understanding and Embodying Mission as Trinitarian Practice," in *Invitation to Practical Theology: Catholic Voices and Visions*, ed. Claire E. Wolfteich (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2014), 254.

essential for Christian religious education in a missionary key, particularly as it promotes involvement in advocacy, conflict resolution, and social justice formed and informed by religious faith that are required for evangelization and faith formation initiatives among Latinx communities. This is what will help church communities to reach a level of completion and effectiveness in furthering encounter, transformation, and liberation.

Christian Religious Education as a Spirituality of Liberation

Since liberation is a constitutive dimension of evangelization, the practice of a spirituality of liberation is essential for Christian religious education in a missionary key. The need for a spirituality of liberation is grounded in the reality that “authentic conversion undergone by a persons and entire culture” must have “tangible results in the personal call to freedom as well as in culture and in the attainment of social, economic, and political justice.”¹¹⁶ In other words, Jesus’s identification of God’s will with compassion and care for the hungry, homeless, the imprisoned, the naked, and the outcast calls for an abandonment of a belief system that may hinder a person’s ability to identify with the marginalized: it demands a conversion of the lens through which a person interprets the world.¹¹⁷

In this way, liberation is a living out of the gospel’s proclamation of loving God and neighbor as it makes the kingdom of God present in a concrete form where liberation from sin and all its concrete, personal, structural, and systemic effects take place.¹¹⁸ This framing of Christian conversion through a spirituality of liberation is consistent with an agenda for Christian

¹¹⁶ Deck, “A Latino Practical Theology,” 284.

¹¹⁷ John J. Markey, *Moses in Pharaoh’s House: A Liberation Spirituality for North America* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2014), 11.

¹¹⁸ Deck, “Evangelization as Conceptual Framework,” 95.

religious education that promotes the post-conciliar theology of evangelization. By attending to the relationship between the transformation of the individual and its culmination in the transformation of unjust social structures, a spirituality of liberation anchors the process of meaning-making and nurturing of peoples' habits and behavior in a model of relationality that advocates for justice in human relationships. In this sense, the members of the community become their own agents of individual and social changes as their transformation flows from a heart that is centered on God's kingdom of justice.

Conclusion

If effective evangelization and faith formation of Latinx communities in the United States rest on proclaiming the gospel message in ways that fosters change in both the personal and the social/structural dimensions of Latinx communities and the larger North American society, then Christian religious education must be intentional in developing and implementing programs that contribute to episodes of encounter, liberation, and transformation that make present the values of kingdom of God. To this end, this construal of Christian religious education in a missionary key proposes a viable approach for evangelization and the integration of digital technologies in Christian religious education in Latinx communities through the delivery of content, resources, instructional strategies, and assessments that form the people of God in the practices of conscientization, in practical theology, and in a spirituality of liberation that are rooted in an encounter with God's reconciling love in Christ.

This approach also advances the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' pastoral plan in *Encuentro and Mission: A Renewed Pastoral Framework for Hispanic Ministry* by recognizing that evangelization "is an ongoing process of encountering Christ" and contributing to conversion, communion, and solidarity that seeks to affect every dimension of Christian life and

transforms every human situation.¹¹⁹ Christian religious education in a missionary key forms the People of God in Latinx communities to “move from being merely recipients of the Good News to being committed witnesses of it to those who need to experience its life-giving power.”¹²⁰ In this way, Christian religious education in a missionary key addresses the challenges presented by digital technologies for evangelization and human flourishing, and assists in effectively integrating digital technologies in furthering evangelization, particularly in Latinx communities.

Reflective Pedagogies for Christian Religious Education in a Missionary Key

While the integration of digital technologies into Christian religious education is not new, the rapid shift to virtual instruction due to COVID-19, and the new modalities of teaching and learning that result from it, have highlighted the need to assess how these modalities further evangelization through Christian religious education. The juxtaposition of the border of the kingdom of God and the border of the device paradigm reveals the potential of the device paradigm to undermine the kingdom of God and the boundaries set by God to promote human flourishing: An unreflective use of digital technologies can get in the way of Christian religious education’s efforts of evangelization. On this matter, the *Directory* explains, “catechesis, which cannot simply become digitalized, certainly needs to understand the power of this medium and to use all its potentialities and positive aspects.”¹²¹ Consequently, the “challenge of evangelization involves that of inculturation in the digital continent.”¹²² To this end, Christian religious

¹¹⁹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Encuentro and Mission: A Renewed Pastoral Framework for Hispanic Ministry* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2002), 6.

¹²⁰ USCCB, *Encuentro and Mission*, 7.

¹²¹ USCCB, *Directory of Catechesis*, 371.

¹²² USCCB, *Directory of Catechesis*, 372.

education in a missionary key calls on religious educators to employ reflective approaches when creating and employing content, resources, instructional strategies, and assessments, including in the ones in their use of digital technologies. Here I propose Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz's *lo cotidiano* and Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe's "Understanding by Design" as reflective approaches to furthering evangelization through Christian religious education in Latinx communities.

Lo Cotidiano

The lens of *lo cotidiano* can be an indispensable method for evangelization through Christian religious education in Latinx communities, and in the larger Catholic community, in a digital culture. Isasi-Díaz explains that *lo cotidiano* is both a "what" and a "how." As a what, *lo cotidiano* consists of the physical realities of the material world; as a how, *lo cotidiano* is the manner we relate to reality and how we understand and evaluate that reality and our relationship with it.¹²³ For this reason, *lo cotidiano* "situates our experiences."¹²⁴ *Lo cotidiano* also involves inherited practices, beliefs and habitual judgments in dealing with the everyday; however, *lo cotidiano* is not acritical, but rather a conscientized *cotidiano*.¹²⁵ *Lo cotidiano*, functions as a lens for which to interpret reality, a hermeneutic that makes visible the day-to-day oppression as it reveals clearly discriminatory practices and unmask those who benefit from them.¹²⁶ Thus, *lo cotidiano* has a triple dimension of knowing reality: (1) becoming aware/getting to

¹²³ Isasi-Díaz, "Lo Cotidiano," 8.

¹²⁴ Isasi-Díaz, "Lo Cotidiano," 8.

¹²⁵ Isasi-Díaz, "Lo Cotidiano," 8.

¹²⁶ Isasi-Díaz, "Lo Cotidiano," 12.

know reality, (2) taking responsibility for reality, and (3) transforming reality.¹²⁷ Accordingly, Isasi-Díaz argues that “structural changes have not come or lasted” because “structural change has not been seen as integrally related to *lo cotidiano*.”¹²⁸ Moreover, “unless the changes we struggle to bring about impact the organization and function of *lo cotidiano*, structural change will not happen, and, if it happens, it will not last.”¹²⁹

Therefore, *lo cotidiano*'s turns our missionary attention to the quotidian structures of procurement and consumption of the device paradigm that obscure the limits of digital culture and that thwart the possibility of critiquing the culture and promoting radical gospel values. *Lo cotidiano* also furthers human agency as a conscientized *cotidiano* moves the person to engage reality critically and bring about necessary transformation to bring about the salvation the kingdom of God offers—liberation. When considering a lesson or unit of instruction, *lo cotidiano* provides a hermeneutical framework for developing instructional goals and objectives, pedagogies, and assessments that can further evangelization; it also provides a framework to reflect on the influence of digital technologies in the classroom and in society at large.

Understanding by Design (UbD)

Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe describe Understanding by Design as “a way of thinking more purposefully and carefully about the nature of any design that has understanding as the goal.”¹³⁰ Building on the works of John Dewey and Benjamin Bloom, Wiggins and McTighe

¹²⁷ Isasi-Díaz, “Lo Cotidiano,” 13.

¹²⁸ Isasi-Díaz, “Lo Cotidiano,” 7.

¹²⁹ Isasi-Díaz, “Lo Cotidiano,” 7.

¹³⁰ Grant P. Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, 2nd ed., (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2005), 7.

suggest that “understanding is about making meaning of facts and transferring knowledge to other problems, tasks, and domains.”¹³¹ They argue that this approach to understanding and its accompanying modes of assessments call for a new strategy for lesson planning and curriculum mapping.

Wiggins and McTighe suggest that we must work backward in designing for understanding.¹³² Instead of starting from a huge database of content to be presented and then figuring out ways to transfer the content, Wiggins and McTighe argue that “we must first ask what the learning goal is; next what evidence will demonstrate that a student has achieved that goal; and then only at that point determine a learning task that will support the student in developing sufficient skills to provide such evidence.”¹³³ To do so, they suggest a three-stage approach to planning called “backward design,” or Understanding by Design.¹³⁴

The first stage consists of identifying the desired results; it asks what students should know, understand, and be able to do. It considers the desired goals, examines established content standards, and reviews curriculum expectations. In determining acceptable evidence to assess the desired results, stage two “encourages teachers and curriculum planners to first ‘think like an assessor’ [and] consider up front how they will determine if students have attained the desired understandings.”¹³⁵ This stage prompts the teacher to identify several methods of assessment for

¹³¹ Wiggins and McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, 46.

¹³² Mary E. Hess, *Engaging Technology in Theological Education: All That We Can't Leave Behind* (Lanham: Rowman et Littlefield, 2005), 41.

¹³³ Hess, *Engaging Technology*, 41.

¹³⁴ See Wiggins and McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, 17-19.

¹³⁵ Wiggins and McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, 18.

gathering evidence of desired understandings. Stage three involves the planning of learning experiences and instruction. Here teachers consider what facts, concepts, principles and processes, procedures, strategies students will need to perform effectively and achieve the desired results.

The potential of Understanding by Design (UbD) to contribute to the integration of digital technology into Christian religious education –and thus to evangelization more broadly— is evident in two ways. First, in calling the teacher to be mindful of their audience, UbD makes the people of God and their evangelizing activity the subject of the curriculum design and lesson instruction in Christian religious education. In other words, the origin and end of the curriculum is not the instruction of the content of religious faith, but the forming and informing of God’s people to mission.

Accordingly, when developing a unit of instruction, UbD first calls on religious educators to consider goals that, emerging from the unit, can contribute to episodes of encounter, liberation, and transformation that make present the values of kingdom of God. Once these goals are established, the religious educator creates the assessments. This is followed by determining the content, instructional activities, digital devices, and software applications to be used in the lessons that will help instill the practices of conscientization, practical theology, and a spirituality of liberation that are rooted in an encounter with God’s reconciling love in Christ. This approach requires religious educators to move away from “teaching the textbook” and instead to treat the textbook as a resource. Similarly, assessments that require students to memorize content are not considered the final assessment, but rather opportunities to scaffold learning towards performance and problem-solving assessments that engage students in critical thinking, synthesis, and creativity.

Second, in situating God’s people as the origin and end of curriculum, Understanding by Design promotes evangelization as a conceptual framework for Christian religious education by requiring religious educators to engage the digital culture of the people, *lo cotidiano*. As students today come “fluent in digital technologies, with ritual experiences shaped by television, and film, and with reflective patterns shaped more by sympathetic identification than philosophical argument,”¹³⁶ religious educators need to be conscious of the socialization students have already encountered if they are to speak in the languages with which they are most familiar.¹³⁷ Similarly, the integration of digital technologies into Christian religious education demands the appraisal of the use of a device in a special context, its typical use, and how the consequences of its use affects the process of meaning-making and serves as a resource of knowledge. This appraisal helps engage students in the hermeneutical practice of *lo cotidiano*. In this way, UbD can help to promote the evangelization of culture in Latinx communities in the United States.

Summary Conclusion

In response to the need to reflect on the shift to virtual instruction and its effect on religious education, this article has juxtaposed the border of the kingdom of God and Albert Borgmann’s device paradigm to ascertain implications of integrating digital technologies in Christian religious education and its aim of evangelization and faith formation in Latinx communities. This juxtaposition has shown that the device paradigm potentially undermines Christian religious education’s efforts to promote the kingdom of God and the boundaries set by God to promote human flourishing. An unreflective use of digital technologies can get in the way of Christian religious education’s efforts of evangelization. To address this concern, I have

¹³⁶ Hess, *Engaging Technology*, 46.

¹³⁷ Hess, *Engaging Technology*, 60.

proposed a construal of Christian religious education in a missionary key as an approach to evangelization and to integration of digital technologies in Christian religious education in Latinx communities. With the help of the reflective pedagogies in *lo cotidiano* and Understanding by Design (UbD), Latinx faith communities can further evangelization and faith formation in today's digital culture.