



This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Submitted: Jun. 2, 2025; Accepted: Nov. 20, 2025; Published: Jan. 1, 2026

DOI: 10.62461/JIT112026

## Ferdinand Ulrich's Concept of Being: Reimagining Catholic Purpose in the Age of Social Media

*Jhoven Isaac Taguitag*

Department of Religion,  
School of Teacher Education and Liberal Arts,  
Saint Louis University, Philippines  
[vhenisaac02@gmail.com](mailto:vhenisaac02@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*Ferdinand Ulrich's concept of Being explores and describes Being as a gift rooted in God's love. This paper explores how Ulrich's philosophy can be a guide for Catholics in finding meaning and deeper purpose in today's era driven by social media. Today's social media has caused negative effects on the lives of many, which can sometimes lead to inappropriate and misleading content, narcissism on social media, and social media addiction. Such issues arising from social media destroy authentic human existence and purpose, as well as one's Catholic values. Ulrich's conception of Being as God's gift of love offers a perspective on how one can recognize and understand the true meaning of being a Catholic amidst such challenges arising from social media. His teachings remind one that existence is meant to lead to one's true Being. By applying Ulrich's concepts, Catholics can approach social media with values rooted in love and charity rather than prioritizing selfish motives and an unauthentic way of living. Drawing from Ulrich's concept of Being as God's gift of love, this paper argues for a renewed Catholic perspective that encourages authentic connection, self-giving, and the transcending of self-centered and materialistic tendencies steered by social media. As such, the paper takes a philosophical-theological interpretative approach in using Ulrich's metaphysics as a lens to reimagine and reframe the Catholic Purpose in engaging with social media.*

**Keywords:** *social media, being, likeness of divine goodness, Catholic purpose*

## 1. Introduction

In our contemporary era, different advancements have already infiltrated different societies. That is why many people now live in a period dominated by technological advancements. These technological advances have a great impact on the lives of many, wherein they have transformed almost every aspect of daily living. From the way people work, travel, and communicate to the way they enjoy different kinds of entertainment, technology has played a big role in the changes in society. In the continuous development of technology in modern society, social media was developed.

Over the years, social media has developed at a rapid pace, resulting in the emergence of various social networking sites. It began with the simple text messaging, calling, chat, and email phenomenon, but then later, social media evolved into different platforms together with the development of the internet. With the rapid development of social media, much of society today is integrated into engagement with and immersion in social media. Social media can be defined as a tool of technology that connects users with ideas and other users in a virtual manner (Boyd and Ellison 2007). Boyd and Ellison further note that social media allows users to have human interaction with each other through a virtual community. As such, the age of social media shows the characteristics of virtual connectivity, an abundance of information, and interactive engagement with people around the globe. Indeed, social media has helped allot in the development of communication and social interaction, and even in many aspects of society. Though the emergence and development of social media have been very helpful to many people and to modern society, it has still posed challenges and undesirable effects.

Due to the emergence and development of social media, the Catholic Church recognizes its importance as well as the challenges posed by it. The Church sees these media as “gifts of God” which, in accordance with His providential design, unite men in brotherhood and so help them to cooperate with His plan for their salvation (*Communio et Progressio* 1971, 2). The Church recognizes that social media, as a gift from God, can be a powerful tool and has the potential to help in spreading God’s love to people. On the other hand, the Church also recognizes the risk that social media can threaten and undermine the Catholic Purpose. The Catholic Church also plays an important role in reminding and guiding different people, especially Catholics, about the proper utilization of social media. *Inter Mirifica* (1963), a Vatican II decree on the media of social communications, emphasized that the Church recognizes that these media, if properly utilized, can be of great service to mankind, since they greatly contribute to men’s entertainment and instruction as well as to the spread and support of the Kingdom of God. *Inter Mirifica* is still relevant especially in our time dominated by social media. This decree is both a warning and a message meant to

wake Catholics up to find authentic meaning and purpose in the age of social media. Hence, there is a need to address the challenges and problems posed by social media by reimagining one's Catholic Purpose.

## **2. The Catholic Purpose in the Age of Social Media**

The Catechism for Filipino Catholics (1997, 691) strongly emphasizes that “each of us is called to ‘image’ God in a unique way.” In a simple sense, the Catholic Purpose is to radiate God's image and likeness here on earth, just as Jesus did. The very model of such purpose is patterned after Jesus' life. As Catholics, it is one's duty and responsibility to follow Jesus' examples, especially in the challenges of today. As social media rapidly continues to change the world, its dangers and challenges pose a threat to one's Catholic Purpose. Thus, it is essential to look back and understand what “Catholic Purpose” truly is.

### **2.1. The Catholic Purpose**

The human person, in essence, is tasked to find meaning in his/her existence. From this view, the human person is not simply understood as a being that exists, rather, the human person is a being that exists for a purpose. On the one hand, one sees the point that the human person is an embodied spirit: a being that is analogically between the metaphysical (spirit/soul) and material (body). The human person understood in this way implies that we are the only beings who questions ourselves and the world around us. The human person as an embodied spirit, takes into account the Catholic Doctrine that pertains to man as composed of body and soul. The human person in a special manner has always been taken seriously, and for Catholics taking seriously the human person means taking seriously the Creator God who became incarnate in the humanity of Jesus (Gula 1989, 79). The human person is an embodied spirit journeying towards God. Endowed with a body and soul, intellect and will, the human person has the capacity to sense and interact on a higher level with the sensible world and even question one's own existence. This composition is the basic understanding of the human person and is further expounded in the human person's purpose in life. For this reason, the human person continually asks himself/herself about the meaning and purpose of his/her life.

The Catholic Church explains that “God calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength” (CCC 1994, 9, 1). This entails what being a Catholic really is. For the Church, the Catholic Purpose is anchored to the Being of every person—that is, ‘being the image and likeness of God’. Catholics ultimately view their Being in relation to their faith. In contrast, the source of the Catholic Purpose also flows from their Being: to know, to love, and to serve God is to reach the fullness of truly becoming God's image and likeness here on earth.

It is the duty of every Catholic to understand their true and real purpose as the image and likeness of God no matter what the challenges of the world may be.

## **2.2. The Age of Social Media**

Social media was made possible through the internet and has become part of contemporary society. Through it, communication has been made faster and easier. According to Siddiqui and Singh (2016) social media are computer tools that allow people to share or exchange information, ideas, images, videos, and even more with each other through a particular network. Social media is a visual communication method in which topics are created, shared, and exchanged by users, allowing them to interact with each other through text messages, images, videos, and private messages, to which other users can respond and participate (Ahmed 2023). Such definitions of social media point out to its purpose which is social connection and communication. Social media allows users and those who engage in it to create connections with other people either locally or globally. In the continuous development of social media, it results in the progress of communication, education, business, and other aspects of society. Regardless of such results, there is an underlying downside to social media.

### *2.2.1. On virtual connectivity*

Social media allows people to stay connected in an online world regardless of geographical distance or other obstacles (Pellegrino et al. 2022). The emergence of social media has made great contributions to society around the world, making people virtually connect with one another. Elsayed (2021, 3) states that “social media is a virtual place where communication takes place through the means of dialogue, chat, comment, photography.” Due to social media, information is easily relayed, content sharing is pervasive, and communication is globalized. Over the past 15 years, people have become intertwined with a multitude of social media platforms (Lohmann and Zagheni 2023). Due to various social media platforms, many people have already become accustomed to the use of social media. Social network sites (SNSs) such as MySpace and Facebook have attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily practices (Boyd and Ellison 2007, 210). Many social media platforms have become a source of virtual connectivity among different people. As such, social media has made a great contribution to expanding communication, entertainment, and information across the globe.

Although social media has made great contributions to connecting people virtually, it also has its downsides. Since there is no longer geographical boundaries in the usage of social media, there is easier access to different content in different social media platforms. According to Pang (2022, 556) “exposure to the internet and social media can absorb a lot of negative knowledge and guidance.” Regardless of how social media attempts to create a safer virtual world for as

many people as possible, the issue remains that negative and inappropriate content is still accessible. Due to such issues, many people are prone to content (images, videos, comments, ideas) that can be harmful to their own well-being.

### 2.2.2. *On social media addiction and narcissism*

Another prominent characteristic of the age of social media is social media addiction. Many people can get addicted to the use of social media through the different social media platforms or Social Networking Sites (SNS). Social networking sites or platforms like Facebook, MySpace, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, etc. have attracted millions of people from all over the world in which many have integrated and are addicted to using them in their daily lives (Noori et al. 2023). As social media homogeneous communication has caught the world by storm, users' fingers and thumbs bounce on handheld keyboards with heads faced downward (Langmia and Tyree 2017, 2). Many people have been overly exposed and enticed to the usage of different social media platforms to the extent that it has already become a form of addiction. According to Aslan and Polat (2024), spending more than three hours on social media platforms can lead to social media addiction, culminating in low mental health that affects work and academic productivity. It is understandable that the utilization of social media nowadays is normal, but the act of excessive use of social media results in negative implications. These social media platforms offer a variety of services ranging from entertainment to business, news and sports, and many other types of content. The content that these platforms offer is the reason why people keep on engaging themselves in them, which can also result in non-stop engagement and consume a lot of the users' time. "Social media has been a clever trick to get people talking, clicking and typing without end. The addictive side of social media cannot be denied." (Lovink 2016, 30). The case of social media addiction is indeed very evident nowadays. Just looking at people spending almost every hour scrolling, clicking and typing gives the impression that many have already fallen into social media addiction. Such addiction to social media happens to anyone, and it can be experienced by children, teenagers, adults, and even older people. Watkins (2009) emphasizes that "teens are not the only ones drawn to the world of social media or the practice of using the Web to share their lives with peers. Starting around 2006, the presence of adults in digital spaces like Facebook began to increase sharply." Indeed, addiction to social media can happen to anyone, and people from different age brackets can fall into such addiction.

Further research on social media also suggests that narcissism is also a factor that leads to social media addiction. Alarcon and Sarabia (2012) state that "most contemporary studies refer to narcissism as a relatively broad behavioral trait domain, expressed by, among others, self-centered grandiosity, arrogance, manipulateness, and similar features." Narcissism can be viewed as overemphasizing self-qualities, achievements, wealth, and power. As such, narcissism has

something to do with overbolstering one's ego. Moving further, over emphasis of such things are now accessible through social media. Examples of such are excessive bragging of wealth in Instagram or excessive posting of selfies on Facebook while emphasizing bodily features. Social media applications may serve as ideal social arenas for individuals who appreciate and are attracted to engaging in ego-enhancing activities as they enable individuals to bolster their egos on the basis of instant feedback from potentially large numbers of other individuals (Andreassen et al. 2017). Individuals high in narcissism are more likely to be influenced by social media addiction (Alarcon and Sarabia 2016). As social media has been an open ground for diversified socialization, people with narcissistic tendencies have more means to engage themselves in activities that allow them to brag and overbolster their egos. Moreover, narcissistic people tend to take advantage of various social media platforms to overgratify themselves and spend excessive time on social media, resulting in social media addiction. Thus, social media addiction also influences the continual promotion of narcissistic traits in people.

### 3. Ulrich's Concept of Being

Ferdinand Ulrich is known for his profound philosophical work on the interpretation of Being as a gift. The core of his philosophy is the concept of the "necessary sense of being" which he emphasizes in his work, *Homo Abyssus: The Drama of the Question of Being*. Ulrich contextualized the question of Being into a drama, and this was excellently explained by Hans Urs von Balthasar. According to Balthasar, where else is it better to grasp God's action than on the stage of existence itself, a stage that God freely inhabits as the chief actor, signalling the move from drama to "theo-drama" (Lett 2023, 17). Theo-drama is a portrayal of the interaction between the Creator and creation, of the action of God on the stage of creation, and the movement of creation toward God. In this theo-drama, Ulrich emphasizes that the human person, as a creation of God, has received the gift of love—Being. Receiving such a gift of love reflects the purpose of the human person, which is to return to God. Understanding Being is an essential part of understanding such purpose.

#### 3.1. The Contradiction and Dilemma in Understanding Being

The question of Being in Ulrich's speculative unfolding seems to be a difficult task. But at a time when the human person hardly understands the true meaning of being human, Ulrich reminds us that we must not give up on our metaphysical task of recognizing our origin—God. In order to recognize such, one starts with Being. Beginning with the speculative unfolding of Being, a question arises: "How can the human person think of Being when he himself is within Being?" There is

a dilemma in that the human person is always already in Being, and yet one does not have a direct experience of Being. Ulrich (2018) additionally mentions, “to be sure, we do make our ‘beginning’ in being. Nevertheless, the reason we do so is to unmask this being in its ‘pseudo-subsistence’ and thus to see through the contradiction that had been elevated into the basic substance of speculative thought.” We begin in Being and thus come to the different dilemmas posed by Being, such as the contradiction seen in the vicious circle (endlessly questioning Being) and the temptations of thought (hypostasizing Being). The contradiction of positing Being as our beginning tends to create a problem in thought. How can we begin with Being if it is to be the goal in itself? It seems to be confusing, but then Ulrich (2018) states that “we overcome the contradiction if we assess it correctly through reason.” For Ulrich, the contradiction of beginning with Being and ending with Being itself is just part of the speculative unfolding of Being. It is a dilemma, wherein the human person gets confused, and yet it is part of the process of understanding Being. The danger of such a dilemma in understanding Being is that it could lead the human person to the temptation of hypostasizing Being. This means that there is the tendency for the human person to misunderstand Being, resulting in defining and understanding Being the wrong way. That is why in this dilemma, without proper direction, the human person can end up in temptation. Through the use of reason, the human person can properly understand such a dilemma and escape from it.

The moment that the human person has overcome the dilemma of understanding Being, he/she comes to understand Being in a new light, that is, understanding Being as the “Likeness of Divine Goodness,” also known as the *similitudo divinae bonitatis*, which Ulrich grounds on St. Thomas Aquinas (Lopez 2019). But then another temptation arises: when the Likeness of Divine Goodness is misunderstood, it results in seeing Being as an imitation of God. Being is not merely a copy of the image of God nor is it God Himself. In the human person’s limited capacity to think and reason, the temptation arises to think that Being as the Likeness of Divine Goodness is equated with or is an imitation of God. Being, as the Likeness of Divine Goodness, is a pure mediation between God and creatures, as the likeness of God’s absolute generosity. God gives Being totally and freely, and Being, as self-emptying, does not cling to itself in likeness to its origin, God. The temptation to misunderstand Being and God, can only be overcome through focusing one’s thought on the Likeness of Divine Goodness. This means seeing it as a gift, as a sharing in God’s divine generosity instead of viewing it separately.

When the human person ends up with the dilemma and temptation of understanding Being the wrong way, there is a tendency for Being to be understood as a mere metaphysical concept that does not really have any meaning in the world. In such a case, the truth of Being as a gift and as the Likeness of Divine Goodness is covered up and never really understood by the human person. Furthermore, misunderstanding Being could also lead to misunderstanding God as well. Ulrich

critically warns that questioning and understanding Being has the tendency of keeping us away from the truth. Furthermore, knowing such danger must not impede one from knowing the truth about Being, but should all the more make one take up the responsibility to delve deeper into understanding Being. Taking the responsibility to delve deeper into Being, one understands that the human person has the metaphysical task of questioning and understanding Being.

### **3.2. Being as a Gift—The Likeness of Divine Goodness**

Moving further, Being as the Likeness of Divine Goodness is also considered by Ulrich as pure mediation that reflects the infinite loving presence of God. It is from this understanding that the radical movement of thought finds its way, and is able to attain an encounter with God, Himself, hidden ‘in’ being, at the very same time that it comes to a thoughtful agreement with the world of created things (Ulrich 2018). This understanding of Being is considered a radical movement to emphasize that one must ground his/her speculative unfolding of Being in relation to existing beings. The human person relates to and understands Being from other beings. In such an encounter with other beings, the human person encounters God, who reveals Himself and also hides Himself in beings. But then another temptation arises if such understanding is not guided properly, and that is the temptation to understand God by mere logic and analogy. To make it clear, Ulrich does not point to mere reduction from God to creation, or from creation to creatures, rather Ulrich warns us to check one’s approach to understanding once again the relationship between God and creation, and between creation and creatures. One should not interpret God through creatures, since, as part of creation, creatures are already a manifestation of God’s goodness. In this sense, one realizes the difference between one’s Being and the existence of God, and one also realizes the ontological difference set forth. The human person cannot separate himself/herself from other members of creation. Likewise, one cannot separate one’s Being from the Creator—God.

For Ulrich, Being is grounded in the light of Divine Goodness, and the human person is drawn to it, for it continuously calls him/her towards itself and towards God. Ulrich calls us back again to the notion that the human person, as part of creation, shares in the Divine Goodness of God. The human person shares in this Divine Goodness through the mediation of Being. Rachel Coleman (2019) states that the necessary sense of being—that is, the inner dynamism that ultimately makes being what it is—comes from Being’s origin and that of which it is the likeness, God, who is love. As part of creation, the human person radiates the Likeness of Divine Goodness through one’s Being, a product of God’s love. The necessary sense of Being ultimately springs forth from God’s love, and as such, the very nature of Being is drawn towards God, who is its origin. Since the human person has been bestowed with the gift of Being, he/she should be drawn towards God. Allowing oneself not to be drawn to God is disobedience to the

call of Being, which is the call towards God. Such disobedience to the call of Being is also a denial of God's gift of love. Martin Beiler (2019, 51) states that "only through God's presence in us through his communication of being can we think and want at all." God's presence in the human person through his communication of Being speaks of having freewill and intellect. The nature of the gift of freewill and intellect shares the same nature as Being, which is goodness. On the other hand, the nature of these gifts could also be abused, which leads to the act of misusing such gifts. It is then the duty of the human person to cherish the gifts bestowed upon him/her, and to make use of such gifts to elevate one's Being towards God.

### 3.3. Being as a Gift to be Given

In *Homo Abyssus*, Ulrich (2018) ultimately posits the Perfect Being as Jesus Christ—the Incarnate Word. Jesus' incarnation sums up the wholeness of God's gift of being as love and as Divine Goodness. As discussed earlier, Being as itself is the Likeness of Divine Goodness, but Jesus becoming flesh is the fullness of Divine Goodness. Jesus' Incarnation culminates the perfection of Being, which the human person is trying to achieve. Ulrich emphasizes that only through Jesus do we fully come to understand our true being—for He is the Perfect Being, the perfect Divine Goodness. Thus, the human person can only reach God by understanding and going through the Perfect Being—Jesus. Through Jesus, the human person is able to move forward to his/her original beginning, who is God.

When one patterns his/her own being after the Perfect Being, one understands and realizes his/her purpose. Ulrich (2018, 70) points out that "being must give itself up, and it must do so unreservedly." This was expounded by Coleman (2018, 192) when she stated, "being, in a certain sense, is to be an arrow that never points to itself, but rather always simultaneously pointing in two directions: back to its origin and forward to subsistent beings." One's being was never meant to be fully focused on the self, rather it was meant to focus on God and to others. That is why Ulrich (2018, 30) always emphasizes "being is fullness given away." This was greatly exemplified in the person of Jesus. His life, passion, and death are the perfect example and demonstration of one's true being. He showed how one should radiate God's gift into this world. To radiate God's gift into the world is to freely give it to others, just as Jesus did.

Being as a gift is meant to be given as well to other beings. Being's essence is a gift, and at the same time, Being's purpose is to be given. Marine De La Tour (2019, 30) mentions that "Being is really given, and this gift is fruitful." As one's being is given by God as a gift, it follows that this gift should also be given in order to fulfil its purpose of truly becoming fruitful. As such, Being, as a gift of God's love and generosity, must also be diffused to others as a reflection of God's love and generosity.

## 4. Reimagining the Catholic Purpose in the Age of Social Media

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains that the purpose of the human person is to know, to love, and to serve God. This has been taught as the primary doctrine in understanding the Catholic Purpose. It is a sad reality that many Catholics tend to forget such simple Catholic doctrine. This is somehow a side effect of the negative implications of the Age of Social Media. That is why the Church continuously reminds her members to look back and examine themselves in order to assess whether they are still being true to their own identity and purpose.

### 4.1. The Challenges of the Age of Social Media on the Catholic Purpose

The rapid rise of social media in recent years has sparked concerns about its associated risks and challenges. First is the danger of being exposed to inappropriate and misleading content due to virtual connectivity. Second is the risk of the promotion of narcissism due to the wide access to open social media platforms. Third is the danger of social media addiction. The Church is no stranger to these dangers and challenges brought about by social media. That is why the Church is also aware that even her members are prone to fall into the dangers of social media. In the Pontifical Council for Social Communication document *Church and Internet* (2002, 4), it stated that “the world of social communications may at times seem at odds with the Christian message.” Social media has contents, ideologies, and domains that are not always in line with the message of Christ. This also points to potential harm that social media can inflict on Catholics.

John Paul II’s message on the 35th World Communications Day, entitled “Preach from the Housetops”: The Gospel in the Age of Global Communication” (2001), had already foreseen such a problem when he mentioned that “the world of the media can sometimes seem indifferent and even hostile to Christian faith and morality. In such a view, what matters is not the truth but ‘the story’; if something is newsworthy or entertaining, the temptation to set aside considerations of truth becomes almost irresistible.” His words somehow resonate with what is happening in social media nowadays. In the current social media trend, the truth is already undermined, and entertainment and personal satisfaction are prioritized. Moreover, *Dilexit Nos* (2024) states that “in contemporary society, people risk losing their centre, the centre of their very selves.” Pope Francis’ words also pertain to the potential harm that social media can do, and in particular, the negative effects of social media on how Catholics live their lives. When Catholics fall prey to the dangers of social media, they tend to forget their own being and purpose as Catholics. The Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, in *Let Your Speech Always Be Gracious* (2024), also adds that the design of the platforms and the algorithms that dictate their performance can play on the worst of our human tendencies, leading to online environments that violate the core Christian values of truth and human

dignity. Exposure to inappropriate and misleading content on social media may lead Catholics to gradually drift from their Christian values. Pope Francis (2018), in his message during the 52nd World Communications Day, warns that “in today’s fast-changing world of communications and digital systems, we are witnessing the spread of what has come to be known as fake news.” The Holy Father recognizes that the utilization of social media has also become a medium for the spread of fake news and misinformation. When Catholics are bombarded with rapid feeds of fake news and misinformation, the truth is obscured. When such unfortunate things happen to Catholics, then their Catholic Purpose is somehow distorted and even misled.

Going further, Catholics are also facing the challenge of increased narcissism on social media platforms. Individuals with narcissistic traits use social media excessively because these online platforms may fulfill a need for affiliation and confirm the sense of an idealized self (Andreassen et al. 2017). Since social media has been widely open to people, narcissistic individuals have taken advantage of social media as a means to bolster their own egocentric qualities. The Australian Episcopal Conference (2019) states that “social media provide a perfect platform for a range of behaviours that are offensive to human dignity.” The increased narcissism bolstered by social media platforms is indeed offensive to human dignity. Furthermore, examples of narcissism on social media do not only encourage Catholics to have a negative mindset, but they also encourage a sense of insensitivity towards the situation of other people. Hence, the danger of social media poses a threat to Catholics because it may also bolster their narcissistic tendencies. On the one hand, such danger can also encourage other Catholics to develop narcissistic tendencies through social media platform content. Narcissism aggravated by social media develops a sort of negative behavior and offensive action that can undermine or compromise the dignity of others. When this happens, Catholics engaged in narcissism and social media addiction tend to decline in terms of morality. This is one of the worst things that can happen to a Catholic—to slowly lose the sense of morality. This is clearly a violation of being a Catholic—and, in a deeper sense, a loss of the authentic Catholic Purpose.

Lastly, the Catholic Purpose is challenged by the continued rise of social media addiction. Andreassen and Pallesen (2014) define social media addiction as “being overly concerned about SNSs (Social Networking Sites), being driven by a strong motivation to log on to or use SNSs, and devoting so much time and effort to SNSs that it impairs other social activities, studies/job, interpersonal relationships, and/or psychological health and well-being.” Social media addiction negatively affects many aspects of a person’s life. In this sense, social media affects the purpose and existence of a person. Since addiction to social media has made its way into people’s lives, many Catholics have also fallen prey to social media addiction. The Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (2024) says that while social media’s speed and reach exponentially increase the potential good it can do, they also increase

the potential harm it can do. Social media addiction has been one of the challenges that Catholics are facing. There is a danger that some Catholics may also be enticed by social media and slowly become addicted to it. This leads to the violation and destruction of the essence of being a Catholic, which in turn results in the loss of one's Catholic Purpose. Furthermore, social media can also give the illusion of creating bridges between people when it is in fact tearing apart our common life (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops 2024). This is what happens to one's being when one falls into social media addiction. The very essence of social media as communication is destroyed, and thus social media becomes a pitfall rather than a bridge for genuine communication. Pope Francis' Encyclical *Dilexit Nos* (2024) mentions, "I dream of a communication that can help us in recognizing the dignity of each human being, and in working together to care for our common home." Such a dream conveys how Catholics should understand and utilize social media in the light of their own true purpose.

#### **4.2. Reimagining the Catholic Purpose in the Lens of Ulrich's Concept of Being**

Going back to Ulrich's concept of Being, one understands that Being is the Likeness of Divine Goodness. It is clear that when Catholics fall into the dangers of social media (exposure to inappropriate content, narcissism in social media, and addiction), the Likeness of Divine Goodness is tainted and sometimes distorted. In this sense, the movement of one's Being towards God is thwarted. Furthermore, Stefan Oster (2019) cites Ulrich's ideas and says that "God is not only the first cause of his creation, He also gives to creation the capacity to be a cause itself, the *causa secunda*." Ulrich has adopted this idea from Thomas Aquinas; it explains that God causes the existence of the human person by pouring out the gift of Being. As a result, the human person also shares such qualities and has the capability to create a cause for many things. In a specific sense, the human person, as a creation, also becomes a 'co-creator' of God in the world. The human person, as co-creator, has been given the highest capacity of becoming a cause in the world. Thus, the human person, as God's co-creator in the world, must take up the responsibility to empty his/her own Being to other beings, to the world, and to God. In light of this, Catholics are considered co-creators of God in the world. As co-creators, Catholics have the necessary task to create a better world, which can direct his/her own being and other beings toward God. Furthermore, as co-creators of God, Catholics must learn to properly communicate their Being out of love for God and for the rest of creation. When Catholics understand their role as co-creators, they also understand their necessary sense of Being, and that is to become a gift, just as God gifted Being as a manifestation of His love to us.

Ulrich's concept of Being sheds light on the true meaning of the Catholic Purpose. Since Being is a gift of love from God, in return it is every Catholic's

responsibility to radiate such a gift. The Catechism sums this up: “God who created man out of love also calls him to love” (CCC 1994, 1604, 375). This is the very essence of the Catholic Purpose. Just as God has given one’s Being as a gift of love, so Catholics are given the duty to do likewise. In this age of social media, the Being of every Catholic is challenged to respond accordingly and appropriately. Firstly, there is the challenge of being exposed to inappropriate and misleading content on social media platforms. Such a challenge can impede Catholics from understanding their own Being as a gift. Since some content in social media platforms is inappropriate and misleading, it can become a factor in the distortion of understanding one’s Being as a gift. When this happens, social media can become a factor in the distortion of understanding Being as a gift. Ulrich points this out in the dilemma of understanding Being. When Catholics are too engrossed with inappropriate and misleading information coming from social media, then there is the tendency to understand Being in a subjective and preferential way. Understanding Being in this way impedes Catholics in their metaphysical task of going back to their Origin. For Ulrich, the concept of Being is fundamentally a philosophy of communication and of dialogue (Beiler 2019, 43). In Ulrich’s philosophy, Being is the means of mediation between the human person and God. It is through Being that one communicates with God, and it is through Being that God’s grace is established toward us. If Catholics’ understanding of Being is misled by various factors due to social media, then there is a risk of having a distorted understanding. In this sense, Being as the fundamental communication with God is impeded and severed. In order to prevent such a thing from happening, the Church continuously reminds Catholics regarding the proper and careful use of social media.

Second, there is the challenge of rising narcissism due to the wide access to open social media platforms and the challenge of addiction. The very concept of narcissism and addiction is the opposite of Ulrich’s concept of Being as a gift and as a gift to be given. For Ulrich, “being must surrender itself so that beings can come to be” (Coleman 2019, 192). Being, in its essence, must radiate God’s image and likeness to other beings. In this context, Catholics are expected to freely and wholeheartedly share God’s gift of love with other people. If narcissism and addiction prevail in Catholics’ use of social media, then the gift of Being is not shared nor is it diffused to other people. *The Church and Internet* (2002, 2) emphasizes that “the media of social communication must contribute greatly to the enlargement and enrichment of men’s minds and to the propagation and consolidation of the kingdom of God.” The Church greatly emphasizes that social media must be used in ways that benefit humankind and promote the propagation of God’s Kingdom on earth. As such, it should be clear that the Catholic Purpose, in response to one’s Being, is to radiate God’s Image and Likeness to other people and not destroy such image.

In John Paul II’s message on the 35th World Communications Day, entitled “Preach from the Houseltops: The Gospel in the Age of Global

Communication” (2001), he strongly encourages Catholics not to be afraid to throw open the doors of social communications to Christ, so that his Good News may be heard from the housetops of the world! John Paul II’s message is also, in essence, anchored in Ulrich’s idea of the ‘Perfect Being’—Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word. The call of Being imbibed in every Catholic and every person is to turn towards God. But this is only possible by encountering the Perfect Being, our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the perfect embodiment of Being as love and as a gift. His incarnation into the world is the greatest act of Being’s emptying of oneself, radiating the splendour of Divine Goodness. Jesus’ Incarnation shows the fullness of God’s love to humankind. As Catholics and as followers of Christ, it is our task to align our whole Being towards love. It is our task to reciprocate God’s love by fulfilling our Catholic Purpose in truly loving, serving, and knowing God.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper examines the role of understanding one’s Catholic Purpose in this age of social media through the lens of Ulrich’s concept of Being. Catholics are called to delve deeper into their Being by understanding that their Being is God’s gift of love that is given and meant to be shared. In this sense, Being is also seen as sharing in the Likeness of Divine Goodness.

Today, the Catholic purpose is facing significant challenges brought about by social media. Inappropriate and misleading contents, narcissism and social media addiction have negatively impacted Catholics, in a sense that many have slowly forgotten their identity and purpose as Catholics. Being exposed to inappropriate and misleading contents, indulging in social media narcissism and addiction is a clear violation of Ulrich’s concept of Being, which can lead to destructive implications in one’s Catholic Purpose. When Catholics fall prey into inappropriate and misleading contents, to narcissism in social media, and to social media addiction, then their Being become distorted which turns them slowly away from God. Moreover, when Catholics fail to properly utilize social media, it affects their own purpose and being as Catholics.

Today, the Catholic Purpose is facing significant challenges brought about by social media. Inappropriate and misleading content, narcissism, and social media addiction have negatively impacted Catholics, in the sense that many have slowly forgotten their identity and purpose as Catholics. Being exposed to inappropriate and misleading content, indulging in social media narcissism, and falling into addiction are clear violations of Ulrich’s concept of Being, which can lead to destructive implications for one’s Catholic Purpose. When Catholics fall prey to inappropriate and misleading content, to narcissism in social media, and to social media addiction, then their Being becomes distorted, which turns them

slowly away from God. Moreover, when Catholics fail to properly utilize social media, it affects their own purpose and Being as Catholics.

In conclusion, Ulrich's concept of Being is a reminder for Catholics to reimagine their purpose by turning toward their Being and reassessing their own Being. Catholics are also called to anchor themselves in Jesus, the Perfect Being, in order to be guided in facing the challenges of social media. Ultimately, in this age of social media, reimagining the Catholic Purpose is to pattern our Being after Jesus—the Perfect Being.

## REFERENCES

- Ahmed, Jaafar Omer. "Social Media Psychology and Mental Health." *ProQuest* 30, no. 1 (December 1, 2023): 91. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43045-023-00362-w>.
- Alarcón, Renato D., and Silvana Sarabia. "Debates on the Narcissism Conundrum." *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 200, no. 1 (January 2012): 16–25. <https://doi.org/10.1097/nmd.0b013e31823e6795>.
- Andreassen, Cecilie Schou. "Online Social Network Site Addiction: A Comprehensive Review." *Current Addiction Reports* 2, no. 2 (April 11, 2015): 175–84. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40429-015-0056-9>.
- Andreassen, Cecilie Schou, Ståle Pallesen, and Mark D. Griffiths. "The Relationship between Addictive Use of Social Media, Narcissism, and Self-Esteem: Findings from a Large National Survey." *Addictive Behaviors* 64, no. 0306-4603 (January 2017): 287–93. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2016.03.006>.
- Aslan, Imran, and Hatice Polat. "Investigating Social Media Addiction and Impact of Social Media Addiction, Loneliness, Depression, Life Satisfaction and Problem-Solving Skills on Academic Self-Efficacy and Academic Success among University Students." *Frontiers in Public Health* 12 (July 8, 2024). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1359691>.
- Australian Episcopal Conference. *Making It Real: Genuine Human Encounter in Our Digital World*. Canberra: Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2019.
- Bieler, Martin. "Ferdinand Ulrich's 'Metaphysics as Reenactment.'" *Communio: International Catholic Review* 46, no. 1 (March 2019): 41–72. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cmm.2019.a933591>.
- Boers, Elroy, Mohammad H. Afzali, Nicola Newton, and Patricia Conrod. "Association of Screen Time and Depression in Adolescence." *JAMA Pediatrics* 173, no. 9 (September 1, 2019): 853–59. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.1759>.
- Boyd, Danah M., and Nicole B. Ellison. "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13, no. 1 (2007): 210–30. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x>.
- Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. *Catechism for Filipino Catholics: New Edition*. Manila: Words and Life Publications, 1997. Catholic Church. *Catechism of the*

- Catholic Church: Definitive Edition, Based on the Latin "Editio Typica"* by Pope John Paul II. Manila: Word and Life Publications, 1994.
- Coleman, Rachel M. "Thinking the 'Nothing' of Being: Ferdinand Ulrich on Transnihilation." *Communio: International Catholic Review* 46, no. 1 (March 2019): 182–98.  
<https://doi.org/10.1353/cmm.2019.a933596>.
- Craig, Watkins. *The Young and the Digital: What the Migration to Social-Network Sites, Games, and Anytime, Anywhere Media Means for Our Future*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2010.
- De la tour, Marine. "The Light of the Gift in Homo Abyssus." *International Catholic Review* 46, no. 1 (March 1, 2019): 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cmm.2019.a933590>.
- Elsayed, Walaa. "The Negative Effects of Social Media on the Social Identity of Adolescents from the Perspective of Social Work." *Heliyon* 7, no. 2 (February 21, 2021).  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e06327>.
- Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. "Let Your Speech Always Be Gracious": Pastoral Letter on the Use of Social Media. Ottawa: Concacan Inc., 2024.
- Francis. "Dilexit Nos." Vatican.va, October 4, 2024. <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/20241024-enciclica-dilexit-nos.html>.
- Francis. Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 53<sup>rd</sup> World Communications Day: "We Are Members One of Another" (Eph 4,25). From Social Network Communities to the Human Community' | Francis." www.vatican.va, January 24, 2019. [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190124\\_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20190124_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html).
- Francis. Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for World Communications Day—"the Truth Will Set You Free" (Jn 8:32). Fake News and Journalism for Peace." www.vatican.va, January 24, 2018. [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco\\_20180124\\_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20180124_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html).
- Francis. "Message of the Holy Father for the 59th World Day of Social Communications." Vatican.va, January 2025.  
<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2025/01/24/250124a.html>.
- Gula, Richard M. *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality*. New York: Paulist Press, 1989.
- John Paul II. "35th World Communications Day, 2001 - 'Preach from the Housetops': The Gospel in the Age of Global Communication." www.vatican.va, May 27, 2001.  
[https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/communications/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_20010124\\_world-communications-day.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_20010124_world-communications-day.html).
- Langmia, Kehbama, and Tia C. M. Tyree, eds. *Social Media: Culture and Identity*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017.
- Lett, Jacob. *Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theology of Representation*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2023.
- Lohmann, Sophie, and Emilio Zagheni. "Diversity of Social Media Use: Self-Selection Explains Associations between Using Many Platforms and Well-Being." *PLOS*

- Digital Health* 2, no. 7 (July 13, 2023): e0000292. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pdig.0000292>.
- López, Antonio. "Receiving the Gift of Being: Ferdinand Ulrich and the Work of the John Paul II Institute." *Communio: International Catholic Review* 46, no. 1 (March 2019): 7–10. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cmm.2019.a933588>.
- Lovink, Geert. *Social Media Abyss*. Cambridge: John Wiley & Sons, 2016.
- Noori, Noorillai, Ajmal Sayes, and Gulaqa Anwari. "The Negative Impact of Social Media on Youth's Social Lives." *International Journal of Humanities Education and Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (August 28, 2023). <https://doi.org/10.55227/ijhess.v3i1.613>.
- Order of the Second Vatican Council. "Communio et Progressio." [www.vatican.va](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_23051971_communio_en.html), May 23, 1971. [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/pccs/documents/rc\\_pc\\_pccs\\_doc\\_23051971\\_communio\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_23051971_communio_en.html).
- Oster, Stefan. "Freely to Give: Ferdinand Ulrich as Teacher and Spiritual Father." *International Catholic Review* 46, no. 1 (March 1, 2019): 11–26. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cmm.2019.a933589>.
- Pang, Huizhong. "The Negative Impact of Social Media on People's Lives." *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 631, no. 2352-5398 (January 17, 2022). <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220105.102>.
- Paul VI. "Inter Mirifica." [www.vatican.va](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19631204_inter-mirifica_en.html), December 4, 1963. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19631204\\_inter-mirifica\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19631204_inter-mirifica_en.html).
- Pellegrino, Alfonso, Alessandro Stasi, and Veera Bhatiasavi. "Research Trends in Social Media Addiction and Problematic Social Media Use: A Bibliometric Analysis." *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 13, no. 1017506 (November 10, 2022). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2022.1017506>.
- Pontifical Council for Social Communications. "The Church and Internet." [Vatican.va](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20020228_church-internet_en.html#), 2018. [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/pccs/documents/rc\\_pc\\_pccs\\_doc\\_20020228\\_church-internet\\_en.html#](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20020228_church-internet_en.html#).
- Siddiqui, Shabnoor, and Tajinder Singh. "Social Media Its Impact with Positive and Negative Aspects." *International Journal of Computer Applications Technology and Research* 5, no. 2 (2016): 71–75. <https://jogamayadevicollege.ac.in/uploads/1586197536.pdf>.
- Ulrich, Ferdinand, DC Schindler, Martin Bieler, and John Paul. *Homo Abyssus: The Drama of the Question of Being*. Washington, D.C.: Humanum Academic Press, Baltimore, Md, 2018.