

Kosher cellphones and the pope's message of Internet silence

Sr. Rose Pacatte | Jan. 27, 2012 NCR Today

[Although it is last year's news](#) [1], I only heard about kosher cellphones today while listening to NPR on the way to an appointment.

I was not able to locate the story on NPR's site, but if I recall well, the story told of the Orthodox Jewish rabbis in the UK who were concerned about the lack of modesty that cellphones can promote among young people in particular because of cameras, Internet access and texting.

The answer? A basic model for cellphones with no "smart" technology. According to the story, cellphone providers didn't think there would be a market so they decided not to produce one, leaving it to those who buy the cellphones to figure out how to disarm the phones and adjust software. This gave rise to enterprise. One man in the U.K. has sold 20,000 modified phones, including to Muslims in Saudi Arabia who share the same concerns about modesty. Other customers like the basic version because they are just easier to use.

Although Pope Benedict XVI's Message for 46th World Communication Day (May 20) was released officially Tuesday on the feast of St. Francis de Sales, patron of the Catholic press, [it was actually posted several months ago](#) [2]: "Silence and Word: Path of Evangelization."

About the noisy world of communication, and Internet communication specifically, the Pope says: "It is necessary to develop an appropriate environment, a kind of 'eco-system' that maintains a just equilibrium between silence, words, images and sounds."

He also recommends deeper reflection about media messages and an analytical approach to them leading to "even more active communication, requiring sensitivity and a capacity to listen that often makes manifest the true measure and nature of the relationships involved. When messages and information are plentiful, silence becomes essential if we are to distinguish what is important from what is insignificant or secondary."

In some ways, the rabbis and the pope are calling for the same thing: reflection, choices, action. The rabbis have a point: Smartphones can be used irresponsibly. The rabbis, however, think they will preserve modesty through control, whereas the pope, in a refreshing approach to a real concern for parents especially, promotes media mindfulness and the authentic communication that silence engenders.

The pope ends his message by connecting communication and evangelization: "Word and silence: learning to communicate is learning to listen and contemplate as well as speak ... both silence and word are essential elements, integral to the Church's work of communication for the sake of a renewed proclamation of Christ in today's world."

Works for me.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/05/09/us-israel-kosher-phones-idUSTRE7483WI20110509>

[2] http://www.pccs.va/pccs/documenti/gmcs/documenti/html/eng/gmcs/46_gmcs_eng.htm