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COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN VALUES IN FSC SCHOOLS

"Harrod's New Year Sale" announced the full page ad in the Sunday edition of "The New York Times" on 30 December 1984. Imagine, a London department store seeking customers from a metropolitan area of the United States, and successfully enticing them to cross the Atlantic and convert their dollars into pounds! Our world has become smaller, our interaction more varied, and our interdependence more obvious. Awareness of these evolutionary processes is growing.

Our belief in the brotherhood and sisterhood we share as baptized Christians is reinforced by the realization and affirmation of these trends towards a more unified world. To strengthen these bonds it is necessary that the flow of information among the parts be smooth and accurate. It is through such communication that understanding flourishes and the connectedness of the human family becomes more apparent. The technology afforded by computers has the potential to assist us in managing and sharing information with speed and clarity. It can bring us closer together. The significance of this impact must be conveyed to our students.

The era ushered in by the industrial revolution has passed. We are on the threshold of a new age. And while we herald the advances in the processing of information brought to us by computer technology, we must be on guard against the possibility of an analytic and antiseptic anonymity. A human person is not reducible to an identification number! The dignity of each individual as a unique creature of God must remain in focus. Respect for life is a value we must continually model for our students.

Furthermore, provision must be made to safeguard the privacy of individuals whose files in data banks contain personal and confidential information. Unauthorized access and clandestine tampering of such files are unethical acts whose immorality should be clear to our students.

Among the educational needs of our time, then, is the importance of educating our students to be aware of and attentive to the uses and abuses of the computer in our society. Several aspects of this issue are referred to above. It is important too, however, to consider the role computers play in the microcosm of society that is our school or classroom. How is this contemporary technology utilized locally?

It is imperative that the computer in the classroom be perceived as a tool. The advantages of its prodigious memory and lightning speed make it particularly helpful in a variety of school settings and decidedly inappropriate in others. There is need for discretion in assessing its practicality for a given situation.

Frequently it is advantageous to determine the relationship between the computer and the student. Is the computer the master and the student the slave? That is, does the machine lead the person through a series of rigidly prescribed steps? Or, is the student the master and the computer the slave? That is, does the operator instruct the computer how to proceed? The tendency seems to be that the former model is frequently employed in remedial situations, for example, with drill and practice type software. The latter scenario is more often seen in

enrichment activities, for example with the study of programming languages. In a school, such as one staffed by the Brothers, where concern for the individual is a hallmark of the education offered, it is important to be sensitive to the self image a student might develop based on his/her role vis-à-vis a computer. Again, it is important to reinforce the dignity of the individual.

In the section of the Brother's Rule devoted to Apostolic Work it states that "To accomplish their mission the Brothers constantly adapt their educational activities to the needs of the Church and the world" (Chapter 9, Section j). Certainly both the Church and the world would be served by increased openness in communication and deeper awareness of the sacredness of the individual. These Christian values can be espoused through the new and captivating forum presented by computer technology. Our challenge as educators is to read this message from this sign of our times.

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