

The Gospel in the time of Facebook

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Facebook, the most popular social network in the world, has several tools to maintain and enrich mutual friendship: this is well-known. However, in general, no one asks themselves how come the dynamics of relationships are exclusively based on positive feedback (thumbs up, sharing) and there are no instant options for disapproval. Is it not possible that the creators of the network allowed themselves to be inspired by the more traditional, but for all intents and purposes, very modern principle of not treating others in a way that one would not like to be treated.

Is it possible that our "friendships" are deemed to be so fragile so that they succumb to merely receiving negative feedback? Why, for example, is one "notified" only when your or other's friendship is requested, but not when it is unexpectedly severed?

The system, conceived this way, has really good reasons for its being. Reasons, which are inspired precisely from reciprocal consent, in order to spread optimism through the use of the means and therefore exercise an even greater and positive influence on all of us, essentially to increase one's own economic power. What would happen to the crowded social network if all of its users suddenly began to be publically notified when they lost friends? A loss which is clearly declared unilaterally.

It takes two people to create a friendship, while the will of a single person is sufficient to cancel one. This is likely to happen, because of the compulsive use of these platforms which otherwise trigger collective commotion, nourished by mutual jealousy, unresolved conflicts, small dormant rivalries ready to explode with a chain of retaliations: hateful posts, requests for mutual clarification by friends in common, revenge of enmity to those who have cancelled friends in common and so on.

Luckily, this violence is symbolic. But seeing as how everyone, sooner or later, exits the virtual world and enters the real world, these effects could soon be tangible. However in this uncontrollable vicious vortex of mutual disrepute – summed up in tiny (but potentially lethal) "thumbs down" – a mass desertion from these small virtual altars could take place. This would not happen as a form of protest to the above-mentioned, only imagined options of mutual dissatisfaction, but precisely, maybe, for the

unexpected psychological unsustainability of the medium.

In fact, this essentially could become the collective place to let off the steam of hatred and resentment which all lasting friendships, maybe even more so for these lasting friendships, inevitably pull out of. The programmers of Facebook — a system which connects hundreds of millions of people all over the world — well-instructed and "educated" by the administrators and creators who created this system, think well of inspiring the heart of their "friending" machine to the oldest recipe for a healthy economy: spreading as much optimism as possible.

Maybe it is a coincidence, but it all corresponds to the oldest principle which humanity has known:

loving our neighbor. "So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and prophets" (Matthew 7:12). And to render the Gospel teaching more effective, those behind Facebook thought well not to include instruments to allow temptation. In other words: long live friendship for everyone!

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