

THE CARDINALS' FORUM
@ Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary
September 7, 2021



on **“The Social Media Magisterium”:**
Where Popularity & Reliability Collide!

introduction by

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I, too, welcome you who are here in person and you who are watching online to this opening academic event for the new year of formation. We call this discussion series “The Cardinals’ Forum” in reference to the first endowed faculty chairs here at the Seminary, which were named in honor of two distinguished prelates in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Recently, we added a non-cardinal to the list of endowed professors. And, as you can see, tonight I have ceded my “chair” to one of our seminarians!

Whether you are joining us in-person or via livestream, we are glad that you are “following” us as we talk this evening about the growing phenomenon of “following” online preachers and teachers -- what we are calling **“the social media magisterium.”**

If you recognize the names of Fr. Mike Schmitz or Fr. James Altman, Bishop Barron or Archbishop Viganó, or Taylor Marshall or Michael Voris or Matthew Kelly or a host of others ... or if you’re familiar with Word on Fire or LifeSite News or Church Militant or Ascension Presents or any other media outlet channeling supposedly Catholic views ... then you know what our topic is all about!

What you may not know is how pervasive and persuasive these personalities and platforms have become. Increasingly, these digital digests serve as “go to” sources by which the Catholic faithful hear about Church news and gain an understanding of Church teaching. Due to the vast reach of social media, these online pulpits now proffer a “*de facto* shadow formation” in the faith for those who subscribe to their posts and share them with others.

- But what authority can we ascribe to online preachers and teachers?
- Is the steady stream of their viewpoints a reliable account of Catholic thought ... or just a popular perspective that resonates with so many of their followers?
- How can we all share one faith when so many disparate, and often divisive, voices claim to speak for the Church and what it believes?

These are just some of the questions that we hope to address in our gathering this evening. Here’s how it’s going to work:

First, our panelists will each offer a few ... *a few!* ... thoughts on the subject from their respective areas of experience.

Following their *five-minute* presentations, we will allot about 45 minutes to the audience to pose some more ideas or raise some questions. Our purpose is not to advocate for (or against) any position or personality or program. Instead, we want to advance the discussion about how the Church teaches and learns the faith in today’s world of digital communications, a world where, more and more, “the Church of the internet is the Church of reality” (J.D. FLYNN). We will conclude with a final word and a final blessing.

So, with that little introduction, let us begin ...

Our first presenter is not a seminary professor ... at least not yet! But for this evening he has taken over my seat as the Cardinal Foley Chair. I invited him to do so because he was selected to participate in a year-long, national program in Church Communications Ecology at the University of Notre Dame, where he presented his final project on the very topic we are discussing this evening. Please welcome **Deacon Matthew Kuna ...**

Our next speaker holds the *John Cardinal Krol Chair of Moral Theology*, a faculty position he inaugurated back in 1990 and returned to in 2019 after retiring as President of the National Catholic Bioethics Center. Please welcome **Dr. John Haas ...**

Our third panelist holds the *Lucille M. Francesco Chair in Sacred Music*. His work fosters the study and practice of Gregorian chant and sacred polyphony as these promote the Church's long-standing vision of liturgical music. Please welcome **Dr. Nathan Knutson ...**

Finally, we are delighted to hear from an alumnus of this Seminary -- who now happens to be its boss! Besides having more than 21,000 followers on his own social media, he now shepherds nearly 1.3 million Catholics in the archdiocese of Philadelphia. Please welcome **Archbishop Nelson Pérez.**

(for the discussion)

With thanks to each of the panelists, I would like now to open the floor for discussion. For the sake of the livestream, I ask you to use the microphone located in the side aisle. You are welcome to raise a specific question in relation to what you have just heard or offer a pertinent comment about this subject. Please be clear and succinct, so that we may hear from as many people as we can in the allotted time.

(for the closing)

Now it is my responsibility to bring this forum to a close! But first, let me invite our Archbishop to offer a final word on tonight's discussion. ...

Thank you, Archbishop. Thank you, panelists. And thanks to all of you for participating in what I hope has been an informative and insightful forum.

I invite us all to pray for the guidance and grace of the Holy Spirit, especially as we begin another year of formation at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary ... that even in our digital communications, we might grow together in the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic faith" that we profess.

And now I invite our Seminary's Rector, Bishop Timothy Senior, to conclude our evening together by offering a Benediction.

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