

Politics requires communication, not only icons

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Social media by definition are rooted in high technology. They offer icons, logos, and pretty paraphernalia to visually enliven our computer screens and sharing with friends.

I've recently become fond of an icon of a Snoopy look-alike that jumps into the air and whirls his puppy paws like spinning wheels below, his "beagalized" snout pointed high in the air with glee and his long ears flapping like flags in the wind. My Snoopy is so happy.

Icons such as this little fellow are both good and bad news. The good news is they flash instantly an emotion (happiness, sadness, even anger), or a common state of being (working, celebrating, feeling sleepy). The bad news is icons may pretend to do our thinking and commenting for us. They urge our passivity. Icons and caricatures on computer screens require no fine-tuned communicative ability, and may even discourage it.

I've used nearly 300 words to try to win readers who I assume are next to burned out now on the subject of the Ma-Xi Singapore Handshake last weekend. Consider that event, a special sort of Singapore Sling, speaking metaphorically. We have now arrived, you see, at the question of emotions and politics.

Of the thousands of words I swear I read to prepare for this column, the most poignant of them all were from a 30 year-old woman surnamed Su in Tainan that Benjamin Yeh quoted in the China Post on that very day of Ma-Xi (p. 16).

In response to Singapore, Yeh wrote of the "fomenting" of the "green-blue split" here locally. He pointed to the words of Su, "My family is open-minded, but the problem has affected relationships between some of my friends. They argue until they are red in the face, defending their political ideas or their favorite parties . . . The phenomenon is bad for Taiwan. It has led people not to look at issues in a rational manner . . ." Where to begin in tugging at Su's words?

Some of what I want to say has to do with a topic that my younger brother recently pushed me to contemplate anew, and that is "the C word," civility. Let's put dictionaries aside, and instead rely on personal human experience, both adjectives so important here.

Who among us has never had our personal feelings trampled upon by an enthusiast who happens to disagree with our views, say about art or religion or

(nasty word coming) politics? We have all felt attacked in a personal way on occasion because emotions were flying like Frisbees, the ones we've perhaps thrown ourselves, and the ones that were thrown at us. Throwing things back and forth is not an especially rational form of behavior.

"Human" is the other operative term. It is only normal, read "human," if you will, to feel strongly about a variety of subjects that affect us, our values, and the people we love.

I do not know how to continue today this analysis of emotion and politics, but in the time to come, I promise to try.

For now however, I am wishing those neat little computer-linked icons for social media, of which I spoke earlier, could come to the rescue. Alas, they cannot.

People everywhere (certainly at the top of the list the USA, China, and Taiwan) have a lot of work ahead. If we are to live together with a modicum of happiness now and in the future, we simply must learn the lessons of civility. For that to happen, we must dialogue. No cute little icons on a computer screen can do our listening and our talking for us. We cannot avoid the necessity of sharpening greatly indeed our skills to truly communicate.

My hero Pope Francis is trying to help us grasp, among other gems, the basic lesson of civility. To be civil means in part to allow others to be whoever they happen to be. Civility demands not that we act harshly against others who in some ways may be different than we are, but that we accept these people and respect them and their pain. Civility in some moments means to treat others as we would like ourselves to be treated. Civility means to choose to seek common ground with others, whether they are believers or non-believers, straight or gay, communist or democrat, or, here at home, blue or green, or any other color.

How I wish I had a nifty icon of my hero. If I did, I'd park that icon right here to end these words today. He however would be the first to say that icons cannot speak for us.

Nor can handshakes alone. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

Talking points

- 1) At this time, do China - Taiwan political relations seem important to you? Yes, no, or maybe? Or, I am not sure
- 2) This column asks readers to try to be rational in handling their political views. What does "rational" mean to you? Perhaps the opposite somehow is "emotional." Do you consider yourself generally a rational or an emotional type of person?
- 3) Is it a good idea for Taiwan college students to be interested in China-Taiwan current relations? If "Yes," why? If "No," why. If "Not sure," why?

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