

New Evangelization, New Technologies. Evangelization in the Digital Age

Nova evangelització, noves tecnologies. L'evangelització en l'era digital

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In the Industrial Revolution, the steam engine was the main technical means of production and the underlying paradigm was mechanics. The contemporary model of production is electronically manipulated, processed and encoded information.

Cultural change, essentially marked by information technology and communications, is not accidental, something which only touches man peripherally. The mutations that are the direct result of technological development have an effect on the person, on all persons, institutions, on the dynamics of dialogue, on families and communities, on how we educate, changing the way we think, feel, see and interact with reality, with others and with God.

We must take into account man's new reality so we can continue to transmit the truth about man and the Gospel message to people today, using this new language, this new way of thinking and of seeing the world, life and history. This new culture is not simply an acquisition

A la Revolució Industrial, el mitjà tècnic central era la màquina a vapor i el paradigma subjacent era mecanicista. El model en l'era digital és la informació, electrònicament manipulada i processada.

El canvi cultural, essencialment marcat per les tecnologies de la informació i la comunicació, no és una cosa accidental, que toca a l'home només de manera tangencial. Les mutacions, que resulten del desenvolupament tecnològic, actuen sobre la persona, de institucions, els dinàmismes de diàleg, la configuració de les famílies, les comunitats i l'educació, i canvien la manera de pensar, de sentir, de veure i d'interaccionar amb la realitat, amb els altres i amb Déu.

Cal tenir en compte la nova realitat de l'home per continuar transmetent la veritat de l'home i l'Evangeli a l'home d'avui, amb el seu nou llenguatge i manera de pensar i de concebre el món, la vida i la història. La nova cultura no és una simple adquisició de tecnologies, sinó un veritable canvi cultural.

of technology, but real cultural change. Like the Apostles in the very beginning, we too are at the beginning of a “new history”; like them, we are custodians of the Lord’s missionary command, missionaries of “the Digital Culture”.

Key words: *culture, mission, challenge, formation, changing.*

Com els apòstols a l’inici, també nosaltres avui ens trobem com a l’inici d’una “nova història”; aleshores, com ells, som dipositaris del mandat missioner del Senyor, missioners de la “cultura digital”.

Paraules clau: *cultura, missió, desafiament, formació, canvi.*

“This question of ‘how to evangelize’ is permanently relevant, because the methods of evangelizing vary according to the different circumstances of time, place and culture, and because they thereby present a certain challenge to our capacity for discovery and adaptation.

On us particularly... rests the responsibility for reshaping with boldness and wisdom, but in complete fidelity to the content of evangelization, the means that are most suitable and effective for communicating the Gospel message to the men and women of our times.”

(Evangelii Nuntiandi, 40)

A KEY FOR CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

At this current moment in history we are in the midst of a global, globalized and globalizing crisis. Not only does this crisis reach every corner of the earth in “real time”, it is also generated in a dislocated form, with immediate global consequences.

The weak axes upon which the global balance of power had hinged —maintaining some semblance of stability— are changing, and it is difficult to predict what the new global coexistence will be, with the emergence of new powers, the resurgence of old ones and the weakening of others.

The paradigm hitherto in force has expired without a new one having emerged and we are all asking endless questions in an attempt to understand what will happen next, starting with peace and the economy, which are the visible phenomena, but which are rooted in a much deeper crisis that demands an ethical and anthropological analysis.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to present some points of reflection to help us go beyond an analysis seen purely through the lens of the “Technological Age”, in order to arrive at the truth of our cultural context, which is developing within a “Digital Era”. This outlook is essentially different, for while the first focuses on technology and our fascination with it, the second on focuses on the use of technology in the development of our lifestyles and culture, but within this context the technological instrument tends to disappear, to camouflage itself, to hide in a reality which, though silent, is almost omnipresent.

Hence the aim of directing our thinking towards discovering the key elements of the digital age, in order to enter into this cultural process, with the necessary wisdom and prudence, and the courage to take on the challenges it may present.

An important point in discovering the keys to understanding this new culture will be in the schematic presentation of the thought of Pope Benedict XVI. This paper is not an attempt to analyze Magisterium, but to present the essential points that can enlighten and guide our reflection and analysis.

It is essential for the Church to overcome the practical / technical / phenomenological vision by looking at the philosophical and theological foundations that are the basis of cultural processes. Our goal is to try to offer insights into understanding the process of digital culture through the paradigm shift and the new culture’s *hot points* which present their own challenges.

“CHANGE”

One of the axes around which contemporary global culture rotates is “change”. Society, institutions, companies, models, communities, and people change. This capacity *to and for* change is one of the key parameters used today to judge the suitability of a person for a job, a company’s ability to grow, the quality of technology or research. A person or institution’s “plasticity” or adaptability, to change and adjust to new situations (or to generate them) now forms the condition for their evaluation and recognition.

The question arises as to the meaning of “change” as a principle; its value, when and where it originates and the form of society it is leading us towards. At times, change takes place without any specific criterion or final objective. Sometimes it seems that the only objective is change for change’s sake; to “improve”, “update”, “progress”... without defining the exact content of these concepts, which forces an “uncritical” acceptance, as they are *assumed* to be “unequivocally good”, therefore, anyone who voices any opposition or criticism is “condemned” from the outset.

As a result, a critical objective judgment and adequate discernment is required to judge the positive and negative elements and processes that arise. When faced with change, two attitudes present themselves: either *ignore the change or become involved* (Rendón, 2005: 11). The first is neophobia, resistance to change, fear of the new, reluctance to embrace innovations, paralysis, seeing the changing environment as a threat (Owen, 2001). The second, becoming involved in the process of change, if done with the necessary critical judgment, is a creative response that involves learning and innovation (Schumpeter, 1968). It is a journey

of transformation (Deming, 1998) and adaptation to a new reality, where change is seen as an opportunity (Drucker, 1999).

The ability to welcome and elaborate these changes as they present themselves is seen as the deciding factor in a society/institution's ability to project itself into the future and towards new horizons. Likewise, an inability to comprehend these new coordinates, to adapt to change, to have the intelligence to incorporate the new elements with the old, can prevent future progress.

TOWARDS A NEW “MODEL”

Digital progress invades everything, occupying almost every aspect of human life and activity. Technoscience is not just my computer, the technologies that I know ... but communication on every level; it is nanotechnology of healthcare, it is the biotechnology of our babies, it is smart environments, it is neuroscience experimentation beyond the boundaries of our imagination.

Kevin Kelly (director of Wired Magazine) said:

It was once very easy to ignore technology because it did not penetrate the areas of our lives we have always really cared about: our networks of friendship, writing, painting, cultural arts, relationships, self-identity, civil organizations, the nature of work, the acquisition of wealth, and power. But with the steady advent of technology into the networks of communication and transportation, technology has completely overwhelmed these social areas. Our social space has been invaded by the telegraph, the phonograph, the telephone, the photograph, the television, the airplane and car, then by the computer, and the internet, and now by the web. Technology has become our culture, our culture technology. Technology is no longer outside, no longer alien, no longer at the periphery. It is at the center of our lives. (Kelly, 1998).

It is therefore a transversal reality, so it is no longer just something for IT experts but a *social phenomenon* that concerns us all, and relates everything in an interdisciplinary manner. It is not a unique phenomenon but a *multifaceted reality*. This reality encompasses the various aspects of human life, then, that cannot be treated simply as “information technology” and made only for “IT experts”.

Even a superficial observation of the realities of human life clearly reveals how the presence of this “new model” is “transversal”: in the global economy, in matters of war, in international organizations, in all matters relating to energy and global warming, business organization, scientific research and university development, the pedagogical model, the flow of information, the dynamics of the media, political systems, the financial system ... But it can also be observed in the everyday dynamics of tourism, family relations and friendships, our management of presence and distance, social participation, media coverage, sexual life, emotional life, leisure time, sports life, the world of personal information, financial well being... even in the supermarket, the bank or payment of taxes...

This notwithstanding, some very complex issues remain. These have many different and often contradictory elements that can be grouped together in binomials or, even better, in dichotomies: *privacy vs. security; intimacy vs. services; rights vs. duties; property vs. free; recognition vs. copyright; roaming vs. controls; mine vs. our*

... and the list goes on and on. With whatever we want, the principle remains the same: what I want and what I get, compared to the cost of getting it. This new “digital paradigm” in many respects, especially regarding the relational sphere, configures, conforms, models, powers and limits our society and our culture.

Thus, these “technologies” present challenges that require us to *rethink* our concepts of *privacy*. While on the one hand we are presented with the privacy of our data and our lives as an essential reality, on the other we have related services with data offered as a bonus for our work and our lives (e.g. services related GPS or security services).

Another issue is that you cannot disregard information by the mere fact that it is contained in a computerized format, which means *re-thinking* the criteria of “signature”, “presence”, “document”, etc. The transition of this reality to the digital era breaks into human life and activity, bringing not only the service it offers, but also its share of problems.

Another issue is how we use technology. This invites us to *re-think when and how* we should use its benefits. The important thing is to know *when, how and why* to use technology and what technology. Questions which we can answer by asking about the needs of users and the services we should offer. It is then important to know *who our users are, what our service is* because there is no universal *recipe*. The worth of a “technology” is proven when the *service responds to the need*.

Thus, we can see how the “model” which we were accustomed to—a model based on so-called “analogics”, on mere concrete reality—is completed, overcome or modified by digital reality, which needs to be understood as such, and not only in comparison with the previous model.

HOW DID WE ARRIVE AT THIS MODEL? FROM THE INDUSTRIAL TO THE DIGITAL ERA, A PARADIGM SHIFT

The model of the industrial age (Taylor, Weber, Ford) was appropriate to the context and historical period, with rigid models dictated by the goals of those organizations. The new organizational model (Google, Amazon, Apple) brings with it new concepts of directorship and hierarchy according to which the opinion of individual members is valid, in which they are recognized as creative and autonomous in their decisions, in which innovation is key to survival. In the *digital age* the organizations’ interests coexist with those of employees, and there is great motivation, creativity and openness, where all ideas are welcome, fluid communication and a sense of belonging.

In the Industrial Revolution, the central technical means of production was the steam engine and the underlying paradigm was mechanics. The contemporary model of production is electronically manipulated, processed and encoded information. Previously, the paradigm for business was based on a rational, formal, calculated administration, articulated as a complex physical mechanism with segmented, hierarchical and sequential processes on a grand scale; now there is a new form of production, a new concept of management and administration. The computer enables decentralized production in various production units, and forms of work that are integrated and network based, in a certain

sense, in equal cooperation. The concepts of mass production and the economy of scale have been exceeded. New business concepts such as “total quality” have emerged. The social structure of the Industrial Revolution was dictated by the employer and the worker. Now, the management of information is an added factor to the pre-existing ones of production, capital and labor. A new ruling class has emerged: the techno-bureaucrats, based on technology and knowledge.

MAIN FEATURES OF THE NEW PARADIGM

- The world is no longer seen as a great machine, consisting of causal and mechanically linked gears, but as a combination of elements that are interrelated by complex and paradoxical energy processes with a new holistic approach.
- There is no concept of a separation between subject and object in the manner of positivism; body / mind, in the manner of Cartesian philosophy.
- Man is part of the ecosystem, not living off nature but dependent upon it and thus must establish a relationship of coexistence.
- The recognition of sexual otherness assumes parity and equal opportunities for all, without distinction or discrimination.
- Progress is not something permanent, cumulative and linear. The dynamics of society are not linear but complex and dynamic.
- Moral relativism becomes more complex with the autonomous development of genetic engineering, microbiology and nanotechnologies.
- Time and space as understood according to relativistic and quantum physics cease to be absolute, impacting all social processes.
- Post-Enlightenment Anthropology rediscovers that man is not only a rational being, but also a sentient being, resulting in a more holistic view of man.

WHAT DOES NOT CHANGE

However, if on the one hand, “everything changes” on the other, it does not, because its validity and integrity remain intact: God’s truth, goodness, love and the truth of man himself (Cfr. GS 22). These remain.

That said, change questions the truth (Benedict XVI, 2008), and above all man’s ability to know the truth questions issues already peacefully accepted, such as the new realities that science and technology have presented not only about the way we think but our everyday lives. This requires us to “re-learn” and “re-think” the Message of Jesus, valid for all times and all men, but which needs to be presented in a manner that can be understood and accepted by people today.

Certainly cultural change, essentially marked by information technology and communications, are not accidental, which only peripherally touch man (McLuhan, 1997). Mutations that are the direct result of technological development (Soukup, 1991), have an effect on the person, on all persons, institutions, on the dynamics of dialogue, on families and communities, on how we educate, changing the way we think, feel, see and interact with reality, with others and with God (Panteghini, 1995).

In a sense the problem is to discover the extent to which men and their community have changed and, therefore, how the disciplines that aim to address these arguments—including philosophy, theology and law—must take into account the new reality of man so they can continue to transmit (*tradere*) the truth about man and the Gospel message (CEI, 2004) to people today, with their new language and way of thinking and seeing the world, life and history.

And if the technologies of communication and information affect our notions of space, time, identity, the cognitive and relational aspects of the human person (PCCS, 1992); biomedical technologies and nanotechnologies question us about the value of the human person, his birth, his death, the value of the body and the very “meaning of life”.

It is a total revolution in which every person and all people, like it or not, are involved and integrated into this reality (Delgado, 1997).

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF DIGITAL CULTURE

One of the driving forces that makes such a global phenomenon possible is the new and vast capillary flow of communications.

“Digital” is a phenomenon that is not merely “technical”, understood as something that we use to do something “better” than before; it is not just a “means to make the activity we were doing easier”, it is a means that “does something different than before”. We are facing a “cultural” phenomenon, where technology does things “better” than before, it does things “differently” than before and does “new things” that were not done before. But not only this! The people who could do none of these things before, now can do them and can even do things better... I am speaking of young people and children (digital natives); they are the true protagonists of this culture; before the elders taught the youth; today it is the young people who “introduce” this culture to adults. Therefore, it is not simply a question of operating an appliance, but of having a different relationship with the world of information and education, the world of research and relations, and even about the concept of time, space, presence, identity and moral behavior.

We are now faced with a fluid, complex and multifaceted communication system. Blogs and social networks are spaces for encounter and important discussion, essential in weaving social fabric. A growing amount of information technology has increased popular participation in the dynamics of communication, passing from a scheme of “users / receivers” to “users / producers”.

Features of this *culture* that merit attention include:

It is **Multimedial**, not only textual or discursive. It includes audiovisual narratives, photographs, text, music, hypertext, icons, etc. The contents go well beyond rational - textual discourse.

It can be **ubiquitous** and even intrusive, because it reaches users through social media and increasingly through portable personal media.

It is **dynamic**; any content can be shared, transformed, multiplied. Media can connect and communicate with each other creating a shared space (the “Mediasphere”).

It is *connective*; the user is no longer a passive recipient, but also transmits; contacts in personal or collective shared spaces multiply exponentially.

It is *a-synchronous and de-localized*; the categories of time and space are reduced and less significant in content sharing. Language is no longer an impediment.

It creates a *connected* society, where being linked or not becomes the condition that offers the possibility of social participation and collective cultural creation.

It is *encyclopedic*; the almost infinite existing databases contain archives of knowledge that were unattainable until today, and which serve to advance scientific and cultural research.

It is the case that *reliability is not taken for granted*. Everything is there but not everything is good or true. We must learn to choose, we must learn a new form of critical analysis of what we find.

It is *informal*; it puts everyone on the same level when it comes to dialogue. The person with most credibility is able to create and review.

It offers the possibility of *dialogue* between people of different generations and cultures.

It implies a *culture of familiarity* with ever evolving *electronic tools*. It involves a physical interaction with them.

It creates new types of relationships between people, real *relationships*, even at a distance. However there is a danger of multiple personalities through *avatars*, or of falsifying one's identity.

It is not a universal evil. Internet should not be distinguished from other previously existing cultural processes, which can also find room for growth in the worldwide web.

It may be simplistic to reduce the impact of these technologies to the question "Are they good or bad?" with the obvious response: *they are neither good nor bad, it depends on the use made of them*. To which we must add, without invalidating either the question or answer, that as we have seen, the phenomenon is far more complex, in terms of the quantity and quality factors and the intensity with which man is involved. This phenomenon must be understood, analyzed, studied to avoid an over-simplification of the problem, to avoid giving "no response" to contemporary culture and to provide some clarity in how to recognize, interpret, manage and live with it.

Technologies, and all that they generate, should be analyzed and valued in their relation to truth, love and their shared value.

This context presents us with another challenge: man's dependence on these instruments. On the one hand it is normal that a change of this nature, which is a new synthesis of man's history and life, should have a great impact. But then, the greatness of the human being can transcend any dependency on an instrument. So it is not surprising that companies today have a certain degree of dependence on electricity, telephones, running water, the computer, because they are elements that help them carry out their daily tasks. What is not acceptable is that the essential aspects of being human —love, thought, human relations, our relationship with the transcendent— should be imprisoned or lost as a result of these new technologies and their internal logic and dynamism.

THE CHURCH AND THE “DIGITAL CULTURE”

In reflecting on the thought of the Church regarding its action in the digital age, we must first outline the *crux of the cultural change and where it is going*, underscoring its parameters, its coordinates, the axes on which it turns, *its potential* and at the same time its limitations and risks.

We must follow the flows and dynamics of “the network” understood as a complex articulated technotronic (using all types, manners and methods of electronic technology) and anthropological entity. The network prioritizes services of products and technologies that are invisible (the more invisible the more developed) to the users that use them, and which intermingle, disappear within everyday reality, where “communicability” is the core value.

Thus, education does not begin with “teaching” but with “learning”. Knowing this “new world”, analyzing it, learning its language and its keys, focuses efforts on the importance of training, to avoid a trivialization of the phenomenon and encourage a greater awareness of the reality of its dimensions and complexity. Therefore, a systematic and scientific study that takes one “from phenomenon to the foundation” is essential in order to discover the practical keys to understanding such an extensive and holistic phenomenon.

This holistic training should aim to prepare qualified men and women for a changing world, flexible, creative men and women, aware of the historical moment in which they are living. Above all, men and women who are neither individualistic nor isolated, given that the intrinsic fabric of mankind, powered by the “network”, is communicative. It is not just a question of replacing the computer with a tablet or phone or a *smartphone*; rather of establishing dynamic communications with the keys, sensitivities and potential of the digital culture.

The Church is duty bound to question this new culture, because it touches its very nature and mission. If the key phrase “woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Cor 9:16), is to be believed, then it must be done “within” a particular culture and not removed from it.

Thus, “the problem is not that the Church communicates. For the Church communication is not *optional*, it is its very mission. From the theological point of view, the Church is born and lives thanks to God who has communicated in Christ. It has been willed by Christ as a sacrament of communion of men with God and each other. Its essential mission therefore is to communicate the Good News” (Corgnali, 1995).

So contemporary culture is not a “problem”, but an opportunity, and a challenge for the Church: to bring the Gospel to the ends of the world, fulfilling the missionary command of the Lord today.

SEEN THROUGH THE MAGISTERIUM OF BENEDICT XVI

Although Pope Benedict’s Magisterium does not enter into the specifics of the argument in a broad or systematic manner, as it did with other subjects, it is a mi-

lestone that not only incorporates the teaching of John Paul II, but takes further steps which, unfortunately, have not yet been fully understood.

In fact, the theological perspective, which is the foundation of all of Pope Benedict XVI's teaching on communication, opens up the horizon of new technologies and communication to "mission" as the locus where man is to be encountered, and because they are truly "new". This places us at the beginning of a new chapter in history.

Below are some of the main points of Benedict XVI's teaching, listed in four decalogues, outlining the essential guidelines to help our reflections.

10 FEATURES OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS

1. Communication is rooted in human nature, it is not the consequence of technological developments.
2. It responds to the fundamental desire of people to enter into a relationship with others.
3. When we open ourselves to others, we are fulfilling our deepest aspirations and become more human.
4. Communication is part of the "anthropological question"; the constitutive dimension of man and his truth are at stake.
5. In communication, it is the person him or herself who gives, therefore, neither the person nor what he or she communicates is "indifferent".
6. Thus communication becomes a dimension of the social fabric as it unites people.
7. Social communication is not a "neutral" activity in so far as it begins with one person and is directed towards another person.
8. The value of truth is not based on "popularity"... It must be given in its integrity; it cannot be undermined to make it acceptable.
9. Silence helps us to obtain a better knowledge of ourselves: Who am I? What do I know? What should I do? What can I hope for?
10. Silence and speech are two moments of communication that must be balanced, alternated and integrated

10 FEATURES OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

1. Technology raises new questions: the changing role of the media, facilitating communication, communion and cooperation.
2. Technologies are not only changing the way we communicate, but communication itself. They affect and shape culture.
3. The digital environment is not a parallel world; it is part of the daily reality of all relationships as well as social, economic, political and religious developments.
4. Transmission of information means entering into a social network where knowledge is shared. Transmission is sharing.
5. Influence throughout society; it is a good destined for all individuals and should not be limited to only a few.

6. The distinction between the producer and the consumer is relativized. Information is created in an interactive dynamic.
7. New forms of interpersonal relationships affect the image one has of oneself (identity, space, etc.).
8. The worldwide web is the new agora of encounter, questions and answers. Search engines are the place of advice.
9. A new way of disseminating information and knowledge is born; a new way of learning and thinking, with new opportunities.
10. Social networks are the result of human interaction and reshape the dynamics of communication and relationships.

10 FEATURES OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNICATION

1. Use of the new technologies not just “to be present”, but because the Lord must reach minds and hearts even when we do not speak of Him.
2. The Christian style of presence implies a consistent witness in our digital profile and how we communicate our choices and preferences.
3. Three necessary steps: education of the person, participation in social life and interpersonal dialogue.
4. Education for the media requires training in values and in the responsible exercise of freedom.
5. Through friendships we grow and develop, this should also be considered on the web, without impairing the value of our presence.
6. Proclamation should increase in line with the multiplicity of media and be more discerning, intense and effective.
7. The fruitfulness of proclamation comes from Christ, not the effectiveness of the media, as some would suppose.
8. A virtual presence implies being authentic, true to oneself and not giving in to the artificial construction of a virtual profile.
9. God speaks without words; the urgency to communicate what we have seen and heard is born from contemplation.
10. One way to witness is being open and available to others, answering their questions with respect.

10 RISKS IN THE “DIGITAL AGE”

1. “Only” using media to be present, considering the internet a space that we “must” occupy.
2. Transmitting partial truths or modifying them completely in order to be accepted. Modifying one’s profile to fit standards.
3. Media make new forms of evil possible; they can become megaphones of materialism and relativism. New types of social marginalization
4. There is a tendency towards a cultural leveling and a conditioning and manipulation of personal freedom.
5. Technology has the ability to change reality, create events. It can maintain a univocal hermeneutics of history.

6. Not everything that is technically possible is also ethically permissible, because not everything centers on human dignity.
7. The immediacy of communication does not necessarily translate into production, cooperation and communion in society.
8. Not hesitating to resort to transgression, vulgarity, violence, manipulation of the truth to get a greater audience.
9. Obsessive virtuality isolates the person, interrupting his or her real social interaction and alters the patterns of rest and silence.
10. New questions regarding relationships: Who is my neighbor? Is there a risk of being less present in everyday life? Can we lose ourselves in a non-real reality?

5 URGENT REQUIREMENTS

1. Media enhance the connection, communication and understanding between individuals and communities, so a qualified presence is necessary.
2. We are all users and at times operators of social communications, so we all should be interested.
3. Virtual relationships can strengthen unity among people, nations and cultures, so we must use them to humanize and evangelize.
4. We need to ensure fidelity to reality, so education for media operators is key.
5. There are many risks in the use of virtualization, so education in values and freedom is required.

EDUCATION AND “DIGITAL CULTURE”

The life of the Church always involves communication, given that homilies, catechesis, preaching and teaching are all forms of communication; and everybody is a user of various media.

This is why education must be a priority. It is important to know the anthropological and theological foundations of communications. We must understand the basic cultural keys of this technology, overcoming any contempt or disdain for technology.

Digital media is a dramatically collective phenomenon (some would say *connective*, community phenomenon) in constant development.

Some key points for the education of the person:

The importance of silence: in the media society silence is imperative. This allows us to better understand the value of words and meaning of what is being communicated.

The value of freedom: Man must be fully educated to use his freedom to live and act for the greater good. People should be educated to use their freedom in the exercise of their responsibilities and loyalty when making a choice between options.

Listening: Internet offers many opportunities for dialogue with others. Unfortunately, this is not always a good thing and quite often can be malicious. But on the internet you will always find someone with whom to share a few

words and spend time. We should dedicate enough time to sharing, to listening and knowing how “to be present” creating spaces for dialogue, friendship and healthy affective exchanges.

Learning how to make the best of our free time: leisure is often considered as “a waste of time”. Free time should be used to further interpersonal relationships, friendship, rest, sports, art... Extreme fatigue, the burden of everyday problems and hyperactivity can lead to (mental or somatic) illnesses or hidden side-effects.

Time management: It is crucial to be disciplined in life, much more so in a reality that can engulf not only all our available time, but also our person. Self-control is essential in the “virtual world”.

Creating spaces for encounter, the virtual world also helps in research, study, collaboration: The Internet offers all kinds of spaces to meet, share and discuss. We must promote initiatives for personal encounter. Diagnostic solutions are not enough

“DIGITAL” INCULTURATION

When we examine the “digital generation” we see that the technologies are both hidden and transparent, they dilute themselves in reality (Saint-Exupéry, 2000), but leave their mark on logic, not only in their use, but in the very structure of thought and on the dynamics of communication. *It is an internal structure of cognitive linking that connotes a way and means to communicate.* That means, young people “are not always on some device” rather they “relate to reality through devices” and do not perceive this, as we do when we see them. But even if the devices are “transparent”, without doubt they will also have left their mark not only with regard to the logic with which they are used, but also on the structure of thought and the very dynamics of communication.

So when young people use technotronic devices, they are not just using a mere instrument, as we would understand and use it. We belong to different generations, for whom computers and the Internet are useful in so far as they help us to write our documents better and send them everywhere. Nor do younger generations ponder the use of such devices as a metaphysical, moral and existential problem, as we would, posing many questions: “Are they good or bad?” “Should we have our own resources or use the existing ones?”, “Do we spend too much time on technology? For digital natives technologies exist and are used in the same way as we use the car and electricity. For them, the value of the technology is its relational value.

We are astounded by phenomena such as *YouTube, Facebook, Wikipedia, Google, Twitter*, but these are not only “media” phenomena nor a reality of “content” as we have become used to analyzing them thus far. *Media and content* merge into one reality, and this is how new generations understand, experience and use them. For them there is no dualistic approach, nor is there a clear boundary between one thing and another, just the content which is created with the logic and language of the chosen medium.

In his various messages for the World Day for Social Communications, Benedict XVI spoke of a “digital generation” of a “digital world”, “digital time”, “digital continent”. Therefore, if there is a new world, a new generation, a new time, a new continent... there is also a new evangelization! And this calls us to be aware that we have to send new missionaries to a “new world”, missionaries of the digital era, culture, of that world, generation, continent, and time. This implies, as was the case for all missionaries, learning new languages, new customs, inserting ourselves into new environments, having to translate the Gospel so it may be known and experienced, as was the case in China, in the Americas... and is now the case on the “Virtual Continent”...

But this is also a *challenge*, because, if we do not garner an *in depth understanding* of this, if we reduce it to a “cultural veneer”, we cannot evangelize the “new world” and the Gospel will be outside it... In fact, if we fail to understand that new technologies have their own languages and their own methodologies, their own dynamics and logic, we encounter a simple transposition of content from one medium to another; thus, without using their own language, the content will be not understood and, consequently, will be lost. Radio has audio resources, television incorporates the world of images, color and movement, Internet groups all of this together and gives them interaction, immediacy, universality, and erases their spatio-temporal linkage. “Being in the digital age” does not mean simply posting your Sunday homily on the Internet without understanding the new language.

So, if we have a “new culture”, we are also faced with a consistent and necessary “inculturation” which involves understanding the new cultural framework in order to introduce the Gospel. Therefore we must take note of the fact that this “new culture” has no boundaries, no race, “no space” and “no time”; instead electronic codes, global thinking, hypertext, multitasking and multithreading proliferate, a new type of man.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this article, we embarked on an analysis of contemporary society, working out the fundamental elements that drive it, in order to be able, as Church, to face the challenges of the new evangelization in the Digital Era.

In these few pages we have undertaken a journey that —synthetic and schematic as it might be— has shown us some of the essential aspects which constitute the new culture and its dynamics. It is not our intention to offer an exhaustive analysis, and we do not intend to draw conclusions which could make us think that the subject can be exhaustingly dealt with by the analysis in question. On the contrary: our conclusions are intended as reflections which open our mind to the understanding that, with all these new and better technologies, the reality in which we live and operate, is not the same as it was before. It is a new culture, a new reality, in which man operates, and precisely for this reason it is necessary that this new culture should be better known and evangelized. The very process of evangelization itself implies the “Incarnation of the Word” in this new reality. As Pope Benedict said:

In the early life of the Church, the great Apostles and their disciples brought the Good News of Jesus to the Greek and Roman world. Just as, at that time, a fruitful evangelization required that careful attention be given to understanding the culture and customs of those pagan peoples so that the truth of the gospel would touch their hearts and minds, so also today, the proclamation of Christ in the world of new technologies requires a profound knowledge of this world if the technologies are to serve our mission adequately (Benedict XVI, 2009).

“As it was then... it is now”, like the Apostles in the beginning, we too are at the beginning of a “*new history*” (Benedict XVI, 2010) “depositories of the missionary command of the Lord, we will be missionaries of “the digital Culture “ on the “Digital Continent” for “digital natives and immigrants”.

But to be missionaries, we have to be disciples. It may be a paradox, but in the culture of communications our first task is to be quiet and listen -in profound contemplation of the Divine Mystery.

In prayer and in reflective silence, everyone finds the Lord and finds himself. With Him we truly find the “synthesis of opposites” where “tensions of the opposing forces of life” find their true balance. Virtuality or reality, computer or presence, screen or book, network or encounter, gathering or meeting, physical body or avatar, name or nickname... these and other questions are answered in silence. It is not a matter of contrapositions, it is a matter of balances, or better still: of new syntheses.

The “digital age” is not without risk. Therefore there is an urgent need for the education of the whole person, now more than ever, and especially the clear and specific education in the conscious and responsible use of freedom itself. Firewalls and filters must not “write” the history of man, but they may help in the decision and choice for freedom lived with sacrifice, perseverance and love. Man must receive an integral human education; he must be taught to use personal freedom for the good of all, responsible and faithful to choices he makes and options he takes.

But take care. It is not a question of using technology because “you have to use it”, much less using something “new” simply because it is the latest trend or most fashionable. The cultural elements, as we have seen, that need to be taken up and “marked” by the Gospel must be able to answer the questions: What? When? How much? How? Why? Who? For whom? Where? Not all technology, not all places, not for all people, not for all things... It is critical judgment that determines *the service we offer*, what can and should determine the opportunity of what we do, so that there can be a genuine inculturation of the Gospel in this reality.

If we fail to embark on this cultural and missionary transition we, as Church, risk creating new “peripheries of human existence”, as Pope Francis pointed out. Thus, the Holy Father invites us to leave the places which are familiar and convenient to us behind and enter the peripheries of human existence instead. If we do not want to create peripheries of human existence in this new culture, we must, as Church, change “our culture”, our vision and our actions regarding the Digital Era.

Thus, we are left with the challenge of having to reconsider what significance the Church has in this new culture, and how we can see and pursue it. The world is here, and the digital culture has an independent life, regardless of whether we

embrace or ignore it. Only if we evangelize it, can Jesus make his entrance. But let us leave the final word to Pope Francis who said:

It is not enough to be passers-by on the digital highways, simply “connected”; connections need to grow into true encounters. We cannot live apart, closed in on ourselves. We need to love and to be loved. We need tenderness. Media strategies do not ensure beauty, goodness and truth in communication. The world of media also has to be concerned with humanity; it too is called to show tenderness. The digital world can be an environment rich in humanity; a network not of wires but of people. The impartiality of media is merely an appearance; only those who go out of themselves in their communication can become a true point of reference for others. Personal engagement is the basis of the trustworthiness of a communicator. Christian witness, thanks to the internet, can thereby reach the peripheries of human existence (Francis, 2014).

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