

We are here reflecting on the topic proposed by the Holy Father *Pope Leo XIV* in the *Message for the 60th World Day of Social Communications* entitled: **Preserving Human Voices and Faces.**

It is a wonderful message, that calls all of us to think deeply, not only about what is happening with technological innovations but, above all, about the new “social geography” in which the human being finds himself today.

This is the point: we are not facing a simple further development of technology, but rather a *cultural change*, a new “situational reality” for each of us, which especially affects one of the fundamental aspects of being a “person,” that is “relationships.” Contemporary reality modifies our relationship both with ourselves (through a changed perception of time, space, and presence, and therefore of the moral act), and with others, even to the point of affecting our relationship with God.

Such a profound change!

Transforms our “situational geography,” is not appearing for the first time in human history. On the contrary, every time an epochal *arte-factum* has emerged in human activity - that is, something made by human hands that has produced an essential change in the relationship with creation -, the human being has experienced a “shock”, that has led him to rethink and redraw his position in the world, both with others and with himself. Think of what, for example, the control of fire, agriculture, the wheel, writing, bronze, iron, paper have meant... It has always been a constantly changing world under our feet, a world that had to be rethought, understood, learned, and managed.

More recently, in the eighteenth century, the Industrial Revolution set us on the path on which we now find ourselves. Yet, while at that time the impact touched very concrete situations of human labor driven by physical force, today this “new Industrial Revolution” touches something much deeper: thought itself. Today we see that the technological revolution has placed itself in what we thought, perhaps in an too simplistic way, to be a uniquely human prerogative. And it is, but not as simply as we believed. Before this moment, no one thought that “speaking” could be done by machines; today it is totally normal to hear a machine speaking. Certainly, it does not know what it is saying, but it says it. This becomes even more critical when we are faced with the creation of texts or works of art, or many other things we believed only we could do. But no: today machines do them, and sometimes, technically speaking, even better than we do.

For this reason, we are plunged into the marvelous and challenging world of Christian anthropology, which must respond to our position within this new “situational geography.” It is a matter of overcoming simplifications that remove us from reality and prevent us from managing it - or indeed, from mastering change - so that we ourselves may continue to guide the thread of history. This is not only and merely technical or moral formation; it is anthropological formation, means holistic approach!, from which both development and use must be shaped.

In this process, I allow myself to highlight something that particularly moves me about how God guides His Church. Indeed, when Leo XIV explains why he chose the name Leo, he says (I quote): “*Pope Leo XIII, with the historic Encyclical Rerum*

Novarum, addressed the social question in the context of the first great Industrial Revolution. Today the Church offers everyone her patrimony of Social Doctrine in order to respond to another industrial revolution and to developments in artificial intelligence, which pose new challenges for the defense of human dignity, justice, and labor” (end of quote). Think how beautiful that is!: the Pope wishes to show how much - and how deeply - he has understood the intensity and depth of the contemporary moment, to the point of embodying it in his name. AI is not merely a technology; it is our culture.

Therefore, it is important to understand, at the foundation of every line of thought, that technology is never neutral - never, ever. No matter how often we hear it said that “technology is neither good nor bad, that it is neutral and depends on how it is used”, it is not so. By the very fact of being an arte-factum, that is, as we said, something made by the human being, it is born with an intention. Like every human work, it comes into being with an intention, and this intention, remain in the reality and intrinsically carries a moral value, whether good or bad. Its use then adds, posteriorly, a new moral value, confirming or altering the original intention.¹ That is why it is so important to embrace the moment we are living in, finding the keys to humanity, our position in the new “existential geography”, knowing who we are and what we do, in order to continue governing history from its center.

To concluding, I would like to share with you, very briefly, four keys for interpreting and reflecting the Holy Father’s message, which you know well, and which can help us understand the axes to manage this cultural change. I do so using four sentences from the message itself:

1. *“The challenge is not technological, but anthropological”*
2. *“The question is not what machines can or will be able to do, but what we can and will be able to achieve”*
3. *“The task laid before us is not to stop digital innovation, but rather to guide it.”*
4. *“Three pillars: responsibility, cooperation, and education,”* with a strategic key: *“the well-being of their own children.”*

Within these four sentences we can see the four pillars of the message at work. First, the center of the issue is not technological but anthropological, the roll of human beings in this story. Second, our position within the new “situational geography”: what and how we can do with the use of these systems. Third, we cannot and must not stop innovation, but must step into the arena - everyone, in every possible way - to govern change. Fourth, we must become aware that this “guidance of change” can only take place through *responsibility, cooperation, and education*. Finally, the certain way to do this well is to think about what is good for *“our own children.”*

¹ The typical example of the hammer, which is often said to be neutral, clearly is not so, because it was created for kinetic force to be released violently, always producing the “breaking” of something (the nail breaks the wall, or the shell of the nut is broken). The intention of the one who uses it adds *what* he wants to break, whether a nut or someone’s head. However, this intention comes after the hammer’s invention, whose purpose is to take advantage of an increase in kinetic energy through leverage in order to release it in a single blow.