

**Family and the digital cultural revolution**  
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1) The digital cultural revolution and impact on the family

The digital revolution is increasingly becoming faster and all-pervading, involving all stages of life and all the realities of human existence.

The family is deeply involved in this phenomenon, and sometimes appears at times to be almost overwhelmed by the development of the Internet and social networks.

There is a recent book by Tamara Erickson, entitled "The Cloud Generation, being a parent in times of smartphones and tablets", which deals with the current challenges in this field.

Today we witness this increasingly sizeable and sophisticated technological development, and technology has become the dominant paradigm of how we think and live, even in families.

In the Encyclical "*Laudato si*", Pope Francis states: "It can be said that many problems of today's world stem from the tendency, at times unconscious, to make the method and aims of science and technology an epistemological paradigm which shapes the lives of individuals and the workings of society. The effects of imposing this model on reality as a whole, human and social, are seen in the deterioration of the environment, but this is just one sign of a reductionism which affects every aspect of human and social life. We have to accept that technological products are not neutral, for they create a framework which ends up conditioning lifestyles and shaping social possibilities along the lines dictated by the interests of certain powerful groups. Decisions which may seem purely instrumental are in reality decisions about the kind of society we want to build. (107)

The idea of promoting a different cultural paradigm and employing technology as a mere instrument is nowadays inconceivable. The technological paradigm has become so dominant that it would be difficult to do without its resources and even more difficult to utilize them without being dominated by their internal logic. It has become countercultural to choose a lifestyle whose goals are even partly independent of technology, of its costs and its power to globalize and make us all the same. Technology tends to absorb everything into its ironclad logic, and those who are surrounded with technology "know full well that it moves forward in the final analysis neither for profit nor for the well-being of the human race", that "in the most radical sense of the term, power is its motive – a lordship over all". As a result, "man seizes hold of the naked elements of both nature and human nature". Our capacity to make decisions, a more genuine freedom and the space for each one's alternative creativity are diminished". (108)

The family is affected by this development in technological communications and the impact of the various digital age tools. These tools can provide benefits, offer opportunities for easier remote communication, etc.; but they can also pose problems, creating difficulties for a deeper communication, allow the invasion of many more ways of communicating which are difficult to evaluate, loss of privacy, etc.

In the Apostolic Exhortation "*Amoris Laetitia*", Pope Francis puts it this way: "The educational process that occurs between parents and children can be helped or hindered by the increasing sophistication of the communication and entertainment media. When well used, these media can be helpful for connecting family members who live apart from one another. Frequent contacts can help to overcome difficulties. Still it is clear that these media cannot replace the need for more personal

and direct dialogue that requires physical contact, or at least hearing the voice of the other person. We know that sometimes they can keep people apart rather than together, when at dinner time everyone is surfing on a mobile phone, or when one spouse falls asleep waiting for the other, who spends hours playing with an electronic device. This is also something that families have to discuss and resolve in ways which encourage interaction without imposing unrealistic prohibitions. In any event, we cannot ignore the risks that these new forms of communication pose for children and adolescents; at times they can foster apathy and disconnect from the real world. This "technological disconnect" exposes them more easily to the manipulation of those who would invade their intimacy with selfish interests, "(n. 278).

So the digital revolution can threaten the family: the decline in real dialogue to find only superficial interactions, escape into the virtual to escape from reality; the search for many "connections" to avoid creating real relationships; the illusion of being informed about society and the world without however gaining a deeper understanding of issues, losing one's privacy in the search for confirmation that one "exists" in the world.

Children and adolescents can be the main victims of this "revolution", without the criteria to limit, discern and manage these powerful means.

## 2) Perspectives of commitment and responsibility of families

Family, "a community of life and love", is challenged by the digital revolution. Drawing on Revelation and a Christian anthropological view, will help to identify ethical principles to be used as guidelines in addressing these challenges.

The Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God helps us understand the value of our human condition and physical condition, for which we are called to shape history based on true experiences that are rooted in our humanity and respectful of our bio-mental-spiritual nature.

The mystery of the Lord's Easter helps us to live love in the total surrender of oneself to overcoming all evil, all sin, be open to reconciliation overcoming every failure and even death itself.

Accordingly, embodied in history and redeemed by the Risen Lord, we can work together to achieve the full and integral development of the human person, the family, the whole of society, even in our relationship with the digital revolution.

A) Ethical responsibilities of spouses /parents then emerge; namely, commitment and attention to an authentic relationship. This implies, among other responsibilities:

-Care of dialogue, consisting of attention, listening, sharing.

The importance of verbal and non-verbal communication to a true experience of dialogue. The importance of time and space throughout the week for this experience and especially in moments of relaxation or celebrations .

Digital tools can help to speed-up communications and for certain "service" information, but they cannot replace or modify real "face to face" personal dialogue, which involves all one's senses.

All this calls for care, perseverance, wholesome habits.

-Frequent exchange of views and assessments which require study and discernment, both personal and on the part of the couple. It is not enough to receive information and news, one must develop analytical skills and judgment.

-Pay attention to privacy.

Not to put information on their life as a couple on the web, or certain family experiences and sensitive and confidential aspects of their family life.

It would be better to avoid Facebook, WhatsApp, and other forms of "pseudo friendships" which risk sacrificing so many elements of dignity, confidentiality, and privacy for an instant of fame.

#### B) Responsibility towards children:

-Educate children in mutual acceptance and a sense of community. This means fostering the experience of being a community capable of practical love, sharing time and space, being patient and knowing how to work together.

-Promote a healthy and balanced "reality" and "physicality", rather than "virtual" reality

There should be recognition of the importance of physical presence, of seeing, hearing, touching, sensing the presence of persons in the community of the family.

-The importance of the "body" as an expression of our humanity and the true stability of our relationships.

- The habit of dialogue, listening, discussing and evaluating: all these are "virtues" to be developed steadily over time.

- Help children to build a sense of responsibility in the exercise of freedom and management of feelings and willpower.

-Sense of "modesty" that not everything needs to be "shouted from the rooftops". Education in a sense of respect and prudence for their feelings, fears, hopes.

Be reserved about certain emotions and experiences, so as to be able to discern what to share and how to do so on the network. Many are not real friends.

-Educate in the real meaning of friendship, avoiding superficiality, an inadequate knowledge of the person, no real interaction between people.

-Avoid forms of violence, aggression and vulgarity in the way we communicate and share.

-Internet and social networks by developing "virtual only" knowledge and relationships, cannot replace the daily reality of real relationships.

This means encouraging "processes" of real communion where time is becoming a crucial element.

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Love in the Family*, Pope Francis says: "It is more important to start processes than to dominate spaces. If parents are obsessed with always knowing where their children are and controlling all their movements, they will seek only to dominate space. But this is no way to educate, strengthen, nor prepare their children to face challenges. What is most important is the ability lovingly to help them grow in freedom, maturity, overall discipline and real autonomy. Only in this way will children come to possess the wherewithal needed to fend for themselves and to act intelligently and prudently whenever they meet with difficulties. The real question, then, is not where our children are physically, or whom they are with at any given time, but rather where they are existentially, where they stand in terms of their convictions, goals, desires and dreams. The questions I would put to parents are these: "Do we seek to understand 'where' our children really are on their journey? Do we really know? And above all, do we want to know?". (N. 261)