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in the heart of
Contemporaneity

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Dossier



02

Humanity has been called to face a crisis of global magnitude, unprecedented, with the appearance of Covid-19. A crisis that highlighted a global vulnerability. They seem to be times of exceptionality, but they are not, because they reveal a reality that has always been there, but dormant, ignored, and that now lays bare social inequalities, economic power, the fragility of the health system, the exponential growth of poverty, lack of respect for human rights, inattention to ecology and education.

Despite this, solidarity has broadened and has saved and continues to save life. A solidarity founded on an evangelical experience that conceives life as a precious gift, as self-giving, as love made by the saving gestures of Jesus, the Father's missionary.

Humanity has lived a Lenten season woven by the cry of those who suffer the most in the world. It was invited to touch the wounds of the Crucified One in the wounds of the many affected by various social, political, economic, and moral diseases. Yet the Crucified Christ is the Risen Christ. In Him, full life illumines humanity, supports it in its mission of closeness in the paradoxical condition of social distancing. And how great is the pain of distance and the desire to meet, to feel close! *The lockdown* amplified it. And so a new proxemic of relationships was inaugurated that makes us reflect on the identity of spaces and re-signify them. *How to restore meaning to everyday places, how to weave relationships marked by interiority, from genuine welcome without self-interests, to a love of solidarity. How can we reinvent ourselves to be close?*

Editorial

In missionary out-reach

"Jesus, *seeing* the crowds, felt compassion for them, because they were tired and exhausted" (Mt 9:36). The closeness of Jesus became a 'look', a mild and tender gaze that touched everyone's heart in the multitude. His gaze reinvents the 'proxemic' of reciprocity, of being close to a moving heart, which lets itself be touched by the pain of others. In the bodily distance in which humanity has been asked to live, others can be reached with a fraternal, supportive gaze that brings consolation and hope.

There is a need to educate oneself to look, to contemplate the other as a dwelling place of God, respected in their most intimate mystery, as a masterpiece of God. There is a need to learn from the Trinitarian gaze to reinvigorate the bond with others, in the true sense of belonging, of a new way of being a community, founded on faith because "*where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them*" (Mt 18:20). And guarded by the love of the Father, wrapped in the light of the Spirit, and embraced by the presence of Jesus, we will face this time of radical change by weaving a new humanity, a genuine contemporary history, to undertake a process of concrete conversion, which brings out an ethos of communion, solidarity of coexistence, respect for all the creatures of our Common Home. *In this grieving heart of contemporaneity, what new challenges can we take on with the generative force of the Salesian charism, what new vision of community, what good wine to generate hope?*

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Paths of Hope

DOSSIER



The times of Covid-19 are unprecedented times for everyone. Some important points of reference that for many constitute the daily agenda have been lost: work and professional commitment, school commitment, sharing of places and physical spaces, interaction and social contact, religious celebrations. The Pandemic has generated personal, affective, psychological, and relational implications on a background of social, political, cultural, economic 'crisis' that affects everyone. What will save us! It will be fraternity that will bring us out of this unexpected time, to make sense of the experience we are living, to open new horizons, so that unity and hope will grow.

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In these dramatic days one is surprised by the salvific power of suffering, by the miracle of a new, sudden love which, like a dramatic and providential pain, is redeeming a frightened and wounded world, which returns to life, which returns to exalt the reasons for existence and hope. Suffering as a consequence of the restrictions of fundamental freedoms, of inalienable goods such as health, work or affection of a family member or friend, the pain of infected elderly and young people or of doctors, health workers, and volunteers who have offered in a spirit of service, their life as well, all this has awakened consciences, inspired a new yearning for inner life, revealed a new desire for unity.

And it will be precisely the wise gaze of faith, charity, and hope that will make individual and collective aspirations more just and true, to rethink what gives value and quality to life, to light the hearts that "affection fills with amazement".

“

A world without love is like a dead world. There always come a time in which we are tired of the prisons, of work, and of courage, to ask the face of a creature and a heart the affection that fills us with marvel (Albert Camus *The Plague*. Bompiani 1947).

”

Writer,

philosopher, essayist, journalist

and actor, **Albert Camus** was born in Algeria. In

1957 he received the Nobel Prize for Literature with this motivation: "for his important literary production, which with clarity and honesty illuminates the problems of human conscience in our times."

In the novel *The Plague*, he tells of the city of Oran in Algeria, a fairly anonymous place, with few attractions, yet densely populated by two hundred thousand men and women unaware of the tragedy that is about to hit them with the plague. The purpose of the novel is to grasp the social and psychological aspects of those who not only have to measure themselves against death every day, but who are forced to live in a regime of semi-freedom, which demeans and provokes sudden and inconsistent reactions. In this context, religious faith, the inability to remain alone, the conviction that, despite everything, one must do one's duty, end up becoming the true protagonists of the plot, in contrast to fear, indifference, and selfishness. *The Plague* is a timeless work, always current, because in fact human nature, called to express itself by a dramatic reality, manifests itself in different forms, and here is the beauty of the work, significant today, as it will be a hundred, two hundred years from now, and beyond.

“

Hope means recognizing that there is always a possibility, that we can always change course and we can always do something and give more.

”

■ A light in the tunnel

“Work is the context of this multifaceted personal development, where many dimensions of life are brought into play: creativity, projection into the future, the development of skills, the exercise of values, communication with others, the attitude of worship. Therefore the social reality of today’s world, beyond the interests of companies and an economic rationality, requires that ‘the goal of access to work [...] for all’ should continue to be pursued as a priority”(cf. *Laudato Si* n.127).

Work is at the heart of Pope Francis’ Magisterium: the three ‘T’ - *earth*, *technology* and *work*, represent today more than ever an agenda for placing work at the center of everyone’s concerns. The Covid-19 Pandemic put the economic sector, including agriculture, into crisis in a few weeks. But nature continues its unstoppable course. With it, the land also reveals an increasing productive capacity. It is precisely the fertility of the land that allows many people, left without work, to find their own employment on farms that are short of labor. And this is how we rediscover a sector that seemed to belong to the past, to the ‘humble’ of the earth.

“*It was manna from heaven!*” For Giulia, 23 years old, who as a child was fascinated by

the crops on her grandfather’s horse farm, but who had given in because the children were not interested in taking it over, it was a surprising and proactive opportunity. She who has always continued to cultivate a passion for the land, after finding work at a travel agency, returned to unemployment with the arrival of the virus, because the agency closed. She tried hard to find another job. And so the announcement on the Internet of the request for workers for the harvesting of strawberries, apricots, and peaches gave her hope and satisfaction again.

At the time of Covid-19, a sector was rediscovered, agriculture, which seemed to belong to a backward, pre-industrial and pre-technological past.

Agriculture is today a modern industry in which skills, commitment, and flexibility are required. Returning to agriculture does not mean returning to the ‘hoe’, to picking fruit from the trees. It was the pandemic in action that made technology the strongest ally of companies in the agricultural sector. From drones and sensors, in

the midst of potatoes and tomatoes, to reduce the need for the farmer to move and ensure the good growth of the crop, up to the robots for milking in the stables.

This is the profile of the 3.0 farmer who works the land with intelligent machines that increase productivity, create sustainable agriculture with water and energy savings.

There are many young *high-tech* farmers: they use the web and technology. One in four has a degree, while eight out of 10 are used to traveling and going abroad, a feature that helps them to enter new markets and send their products around the world. One in four agricultural entrepreneurs under 35 are women. They show a particular preference for environmental protection and attention to society: from food and environmental education activities with schools to agritourism and agrisilvopastoral services, from educational farms to rural *pet-therapy* itineraries, to



“
For those responsible, the
ultimate question is not: how
can I heroically manage this
business, but: what will the life
of the coming generation be
(D. Bonhoeffer).
”

educational gardens (see UN survey of the National
Farmers' Association - *Coldiretti*).

This is the time when we must “take care of each other
as sisters and brothers”, and also propose courageous
and innovative solutions. We need new approaches to the
world of agriculture. *Lockdowns*, quarantines around the world
have significantly changed everyone's habits. If you think, for
example, of *smart-working* or the reduction of travel and transfers
and, consequently, of polluting emissions. These behaviors are
a warning urging us to find new ways to change work habits
and increase agricultural realities, for greater efficiency and a
reduction of waste. The experience lived can prove essential
to change the future approach and make it less harmful to the
environment.

■ An antivirus communication

“I intend to tell a hundred stories, or tales or
parables or histories as we wish to call them, told
in ten days by an honest brigade of seven women
and three young people in the time of the plague,
and some songs by the aforementioned women
sung to their delight” (Boccaccio, *Il Decameron*. 1348).
This is how Boccaccio described the symptoms
of the plague that hit Florence and the whole of
Europe in 1348. The *lockdown* of the 14th century
had already intuited that the best way not to die
of the plague was not to get it and, therefore,
isolation was necessary to avoid infection. To
start again you need another path, another story,
another way of telling, remembering, building -
narrating it - the future.

■ Life becomes history

Memory is life and life becomes history in
the 2020 *lockdown* generated by the Covid-19
Pandemic. In 188 countries around the world,
life truly becomes history, passing
through the ‘door’ of death. An
endless chain of mourning,
one after the other, with
the help of the Army
to transport coffins
elsewhere in search of
a place to collect the
ashes.

Soldiers in uniform for
a mission of peace, for
a new humanity, also
torn by the pain and
deep sense of pity with
which they accompanied
their sad ‘load’. Behind
them, nothing ... The whole
world knows this ‘story’, and
for the whole world this is the
Story, and it is well known that within
this Story there are the stories of the dead
of family and friends. Each is a story. And then
there are also the stories of those who took care
of them - doctors, nurses, volunteers - who
without ever giving up, spent all their energy
to keep those men and women, those fathers

“
Every story can be ransomed,
redeemed by sharing a smile
that becomes a story (Paolo
Ruffini, Prefect of the Dicastery
for Communication of the Holy
See).
”

and mothers, those grandparents and those
children, tied to the thread of life. And there are
also the stories of those who found themselves
managing systems, structures, and situations
that proved fragile in the face of the destructive
force of the virus. They did what they could,
between slowness, delays, misunderstandings,
inadequacies, sometimes even inability, but they
acted, and in many cases they did well.

In short, a world of stories told not only by
newspapers, TV, and radio, but by each one
of us, on Internet, on social media (through
messages, photographs, videos...), talking with
the neighbor, even if only from one balcony to
another. We are the story, and it is these stories
that will serve to pass on the life and the memory
of this time of resilience, solidarity, and hope.

There is a need for patience and discernment
so as not to lose the thread “among the many
lacerations of today”, stories “that bring to light
the truth of who we are, even in the
ignored heroism of everyday life”.

And everyone today has at
least one to tell.

Sharing is the invitation
to tell your experience,
to listen to the one you
meet, to weave a new,
redemptive story. A
direction in which
to start again in this
time of suffering
due to the
coronavirus. A
moment in which
we are called to
rethink life, to
draw up a balance
sheet, to bless
digital civilization
for the sharing it
has allowed, and for the
distances it has canceled. At

the same time “it helps to understand that
everyone is part of a bigger story and one that
can look to the future with hope if we really take
care of each other as sisters and brothers.”

Being twenty years old at the time of Coronavirus

is a podcast edited by Professor Rodolfo Sacchettini and by the students of the Audio Documentary Course of the Triennium in Media Design and Multimedia Arts NABA. Every Thursday for five weeks, an issue is released, each of which includes 10 episodes lasting two to three minutes each for a total of about two hours.

Between fears and uncertainties, boredom and dreams, and also a great desire to understand and be together, a group of twenty-year-olds tells of their quarantine in a multi-voiced sound diary, which is also the cross-section of a generation. From the sudden closure of the red areas to the return home, from the intimate and private voice of the young to the news that comes from family, friends, and the media, in a few minutes each episode collects stories and thoughts, sounds and music.

Rodolfo Sacchettini, the teacher who guided the students in this project, encouraging them to tell their stories, is a curator and theater and radio critic.

Recounting the ecology and the sciences of the Earth

During the *lockdown* I did something I had dreamed of for some time: I experienced ecological education. It was not easy. Convince a child to see you now as a parent, now as a teacher. However, working with an eight year old and a nine year old girl (my young daughter and her best friend) I am discovering that the dream is not ridiculous. I do not speak of ecology as an isolated matter, but of an even more substantial thing, that is, *Ecology* and the *Earth Sciences* put at the heart of education, since they are at the heart of life. We started by building a giant picture consisting of fifteen A4-sized panels. Each panel represents a habitat, from the mountains to the deep ocean, and on each we have attached images of the flora and fauna that inhabit it. The picture thus becomes the platform from which we start to explore the processes of each ecosystem and of the Earth as a whole. Ecosystems in turn are like keys to opening other doors. An example: the ecology of the rainforest pushes you to investigate photosynthesis, organic chemistry, atoms and molecules, and hence the carbon cycle, fossil fuels, energy, and electricity.

As far as possible, I let the girls guide me on this journey. Given the circularity of the systems of the Earth, it doesn't matter where you start, as long as you end up doing the complete tour. As on many previous occasions, I was struck again by the natural affinity of children with the living world: the stories that Earth has to tell are fascinating in themselves.

Today perhaps we have the opportunity to rethink teaching from top to bottom. Scottish school authorities have suggested that the best way to get children back to school would be to take lessons outdoors, because this allows for physical distancing. A solution that lends itself to immersion in the living world.

This is the time to start from scratch. Let's take advantage of it to change the way we see ourselves and our place on Earth. As the ecologist Aldo Leopold wrote, "one of the disadvantages of ecological education is that it makes you live alone in a world of wounds. The damage we have inflicted on Earth remains largely invisible to the layperson." It is true, but if everyone has an ecological education, we will not live alone and the world will not be made only of wounds (from *International* n.1359).



■ Transformative resilience

If there is anything that we have been able to learn all this time, it is that “nobody saves themselves”. “Now, while we are thinking about a slow and tiring recovery from the pandemic, this danger insinuates itself: to forget who is left behind. This time reminds us that we are all fragile, all the same, all precious. What is happening, therefore, shakes us up inside: it is time to remove the inequalities, to heal the injustice that undermines the life of all of humanity!” (Pope Francis, *Homily*, on Divine Mercy Sunday celebrated in Holy Spirit Church in Sassia in Rome).

In this time it is not enough to be resilient and many have manifested it. A *transformative* resilience is needed, capable of transfiguring life and pursuing a different, multidimensional, and international well-being. These are emergencies that cannot be managed or resolved by individual countries, because they involve paths that can only be practiced worldwide. The world resumes its journey, another journey, innovating and focusing on the rebirth of each country, which is not called to be a spectator, but rather an interlocutor and actor in this

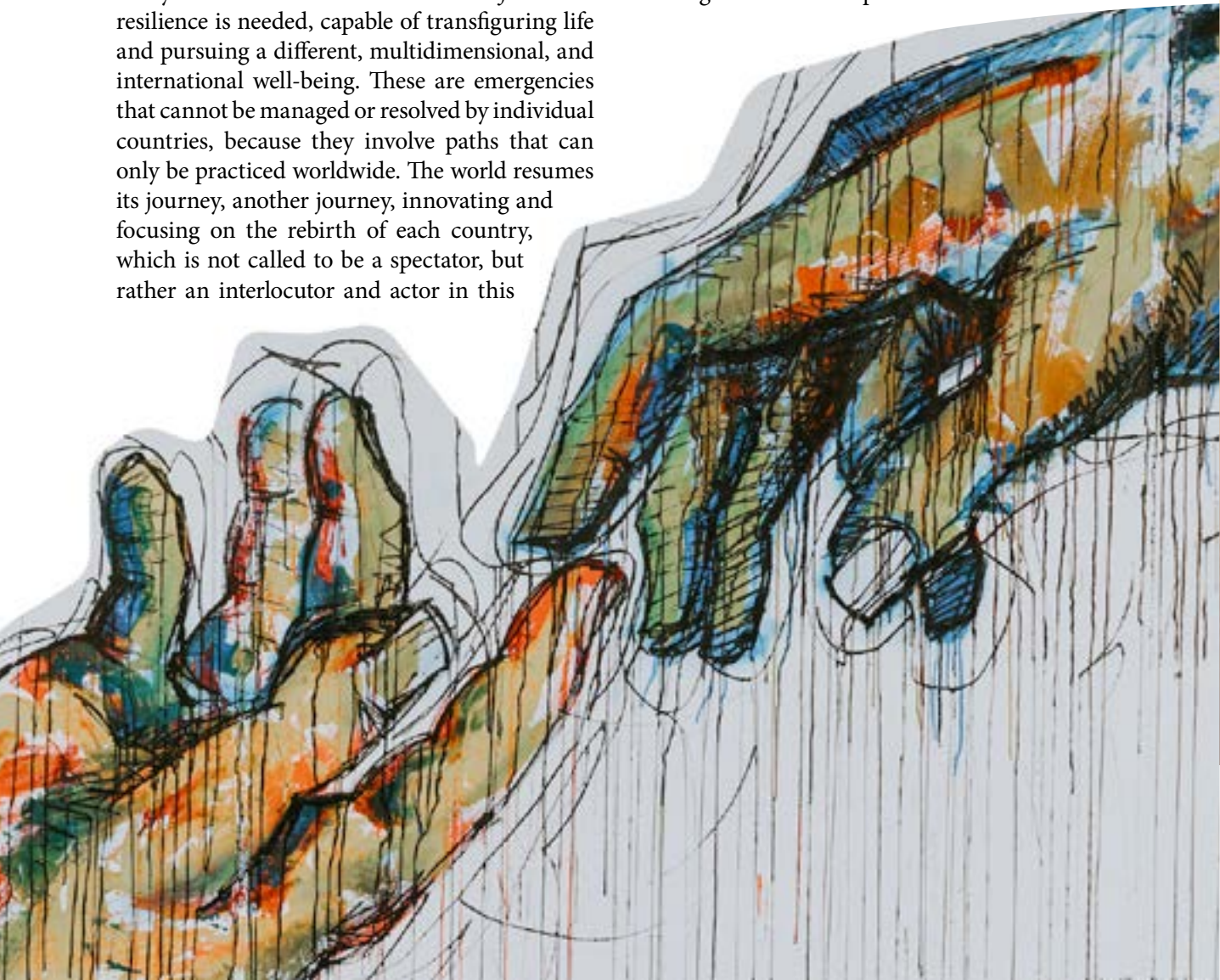
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Resilience yes, but transformative.

”

new time. It is not enough to decide ‘what’ to do, the ‘why’ also matters, and ‘how’ to do it.

Like the women of the Gospel, the whole human family is called to retrace their steps and be transfigured by this proclamation: the Lord, with His novelty, can always renew one’s life and that of the community (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 11). In this humanity disfigured by Covid-19, the Lord is committed to regenerating beauty and reviving hope: “*See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*” (Is 43:19). God never abandons His people, He is always beside them, especially when suffering becomes more present.



Storytelling: new opportunity?

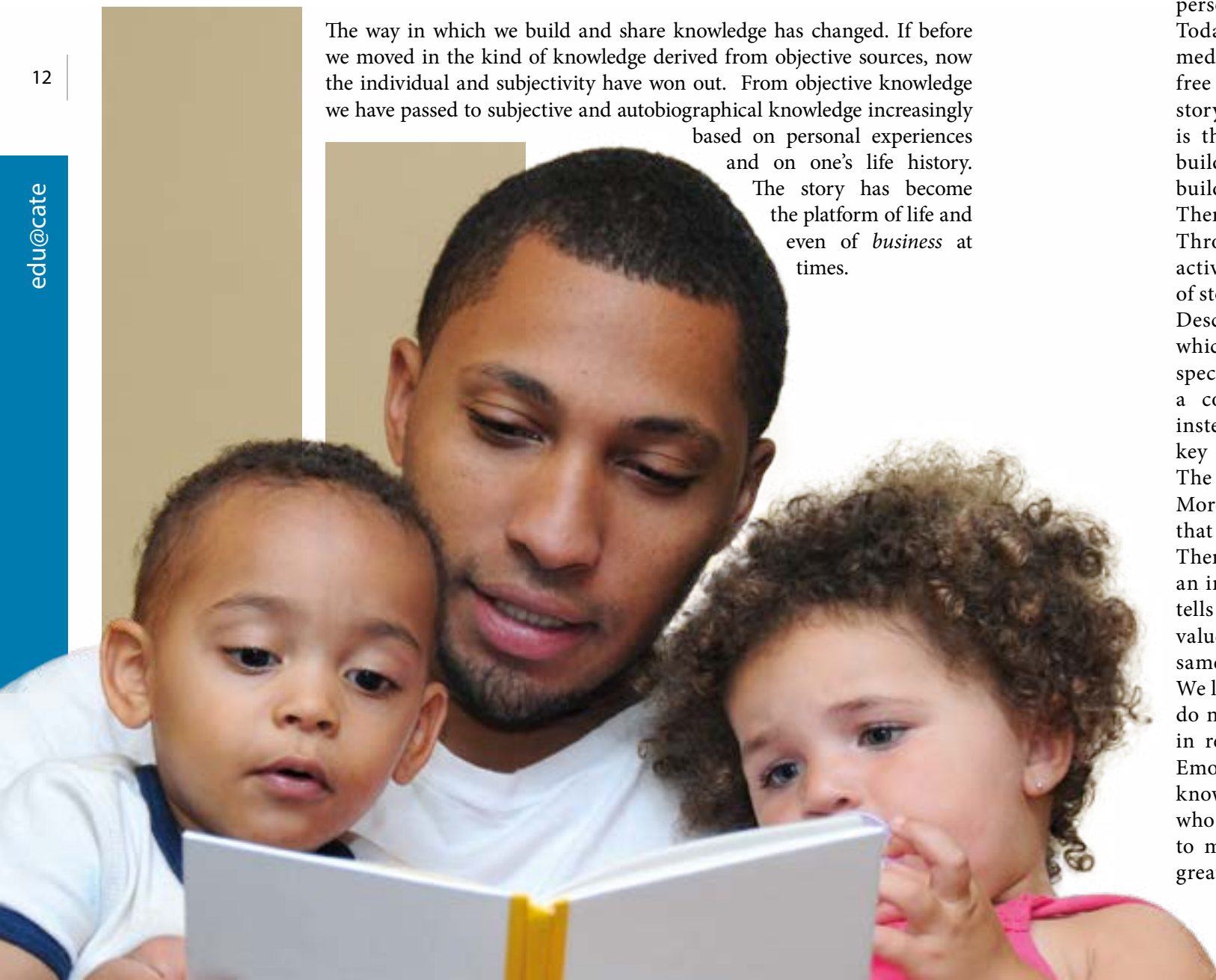
Mara Borsi, FMA
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Ten years ago, storytelling was hardly spoken of. To understand its present success we need to understand above all, the huge changes that have happened in the way we communicate.

The way in which we build and share knowledge has changed. If before we moved in the kind of knowledge derived from objective sources, now the individual and subjectivity have won out. From objective knowledge we have passed to subjective and autobiographical knowledge increasingly based on personal experiences and on one's life history. The story has become the platform of life and even of *business* at times.

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edu@cate



■ Involvement

Storytelling is a diverse way for people to relate with each other and through which they get involved. Linear, descriptive information is less involving than in the past. Obviously, if storytelling is a platform of life, it is also a skill that must be mastered and know how to build. But 'doing *storytelling*' does not mean 'telling stories' as the concept is usually translated.

Storytelling means communicating through stories, meaningful representations that start from one's own life experiences and tend to be emotional, because they recover and stage a personal experience.

Today, many speak of themselves on the social media, on the web. They speak of life, work, free time, their interests and passions. The story, as an expressive technique of oneself is the element that allows involvement and building identities and of defining and building relationships.

Therefore, involvement is the key word. Through involvement one can value or activate a kind of '*bringing*' capital, a capital of stories that builds bridges between subjects. Descriptive classic communication, from which we all come, is based on *key-messages*: specific information that a person, a brand, a company transfers. While storytelling instead, is based on *key-emotions*. They are key emotions that go straight to the heart. The information which is there, arrives after. More than a story, *storytelling* is the dynamic that involves, beginning with the key emotions. Then after, the fact that this dynamic regards an individual who becomes an '*influencer*' or tells of a brand that brings new consumption values, changes little. The dynamic is the same and we call it *storytelling*.

We learn because we become emotional. If we do not become emotional, we do not succeed in retaining any information or knowledge. Emotions are the point of departure for all knowledge, and precisely because of this, those who are able to manipulate them or know how to manage them, either do serious harm or great service to the human community.

■ Digital storytelling

The term refers to a storytelling technique that uses digital tools. Using this strategy in the context of learning means building effective, inclusive, and enabled educational contexts to respond to students' current needs.

According to **Joe Lambert**, Founder of the *Center for Digital Storytelling* (CDS) at Berkeley, in California, this type of integrated narration, with the use of the new technologies, is defined according to these elements: 1. *Point of View*: the author starts from a point of view. 2. *A Dramatic Question*: the author poses a question (or a problem) which will be answered by the end of the story. 3. *Emotional Content*: the author starts from emotions to expose the problem. 4. *The Gift of your Voice*: the author tapes the account with his/her own voice, a way of personalizing the story and helping the public understand the narration itself. 5. *The Power of the Soundtrack*: the author chooses music or other sounds to support the drama. 6. *Economy*: the author projects a brief narration. It must be able to measure the information to recount the story without over-burdening the spectator with too much information. 7. *Pacing*: the author decides on the pace of the story (slow or fast).

Digital storytelling can be used with benefit in the school context as an active methodology through which children are placed at the center of their learning, starting from the idea that through a story one learns a study topic better and more effectively. It does not simply identify with a multimedia presentation, because it is supported by a *storyboard*.

The advantages are that of experiential learning, which is more creative, potentially multidisciplinary, and transversal, which is why it is particularly suitable for teaching. Content can be offered to pupils in the form of digital stories, both for learning and proposing to the students to create these stories. The narrative approach used with this form of narration offers simpler access to abstract and complex concepts, favoring what is called '*Netoworked*' Knowledge (connective knowledge) and

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Combinatorial Creativity. It is precisely the narrative mechanism, supported by multimedia elements, that generates hermeneutic-interpretative processes and significant conceptual correlations that favor and facilitate cognitive memorization.

■ Learn to be in the world

Today the educational trend aims increasingly at relieving children from fatigue and suffering as if this did not exist and as if it invalidated the dynamism of happiness. This on the one hand, prevents you from being resilient in the face of challenges and increasingly fragile; on the other hand, it prevents finding the very meaning of happiness that is always in overcoming and in the search for something that is really worth the effort of living and involving oneself. Today's society seems to suggest that we live resurrection without death, live happily without ever passing through suffering, watch a plant grow without seeing the death of the seed and or the roots extending themselves and the body pushing and toiling to make a hole in the ground.

This ambivalence of seeing sad children and young people and, at the same time, to want to continually relieve them of it, without helping them to overcome loss and detachment is what makes them increasingly insecure. If we raise children with the idea that 'nothing must do you harm', we stop them from testing themselves and risking (getting dirty, getting hurt, failing, suffering) and thus we impede them from learning and developing the needed resilience to be in the world.

The creative use of technology to facilitate learning turns out to be one of the most interesting aspects. In practice, eight steps can be identified for doing *digital storytelling*:

1. Define the initial idea through a short description, a diagram, a question
2. Research, collect, study information on which story will be built
3. Write the story by defining the style and narration plan you intend to adopt
4. Translate the story into a script
5. Record pictures, sounds, videos
6. Mount and reassemble the material
7. Distribute the product
8. Collect and analyze feedback

Digital storytelling can be a moment of learning aimed at technological literacy, the development of synthesis, research and organizational skills that are more stimulating and creative than traditional methodologies.



The advantages deriving from this type of approach in teaching are manifold and stimulate students to a more conscious use of technology. Therefore, adopting *digital*

storytelling for teaching means responding to current needs in terms of developing skills emerging from the information society.

STORIES FOR LIFE

Stories help us to live because they are born from life itself

Thoughts of a child (struggling to read...)

*I think I am a child like many others
even if at school I don't read like the others.*

*I have many friends to play with,
I feel good, I enjoy myself, I go fishing.*

*But when I am bent over a book
the letters dance a little.*

*Reading makes me very tired,
to learn the timetables... no problem!*

*Mom spoke to some teacher,
perhaps he's myopic, that can cause headaches.*

*Another spoke of a strange illness,
I think she said DYSLEXIA...*

*Oh! I don't know what to think!
Is it serious? Should I be worried?*

*And yet, I don't feel sick,
I feel like a normal child.*

*Mom told me not to worry:
it is not chicken pox or measles!*

*I don't have to think about it right now,
I already went for a special visit.*

*The doctor was very kind,
I even read... without hurrying to finish.*

*She then told me to be serene,
the improvements will come in a flash.*

*DYSLEXIA: Now I know what it means
even if someone has yet to understand it.*

*And now at school, with small reading steps,
I am no longer afraid of the pages of a book.*

Author: Rita Bimbatti, Clinical Pedagogue and Health Sociologist, expert on Specific Learning Disorders. Educare.it - Year XVII, N. 8, August 2017



The courage to generate: Sophie Scholl

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“If the grain of wheat fallen to the ground does not die, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much fruit” (Jn 12:24). To generate we must be credible witnesses of lives given. Paul VI said: “Young people need witnesses and not teachers”. It is important to tell the young, stories of the lives of young witnesses who know how to touch the heart and mind.

“So that you can tell and fix in memory” (Ex 10: 2). Life becomes history. This is the theme for the 54th World Social Communications Day 2020. Pope Francis stresses that the heritage of memory is particularly precious, that there is no future without being rooted in the history lived. There are life stories of people who really existed, illustrious or unknown, whose lives have been made bright by counter-current choices. People who dared to oppose totalitarian regimes, oppressive political powers, dominant cultural currents. They share the courage to generate love, to the faith they witnessed to with their lives.

■ Sweetness and strength

Sophie Scholl was born on 9 May 1921 in Forchtenberg in Germany, her father is the mayor and died in Munich on 22 February 1943. Fourth of six children, she lives a peaceful childhood in contact with nature, whose contemplation will accompany her for all her life fighting for universal values. The family is united, of sincere Lutheran faith, cultured, civilly active, guardian of a world of affections, freedom of thought, and shared moral values. Sophie and her older brother Hans learned from an early age to act according to conscience and intelligence. Theirs is a story of resilience.

Of an awareness. Of a metamorphosis. And sacrifice for a just cause. You can be wrong. But you can always correct the course. You can do the right thing. There is always a choice. Even if it sometimes leads to death.

Sophie is thoughtful, loved dance, and good reading. Sophie manifests the traits of a personality that is both tender and strong. She is attracted by nature, art, culture, including theology, which gives her a certain charm. The thirst for truth leads her to confront the great interlocutors of the past on existential issues: Plato, Socrates, Augustine, Pascal, Dostoevsky, and with mainly French and German personalists. The realization of evil does not stifle in her the contemplation of beauty: *“Despite the hatred, everything is so beautiful”*. She writes in the *Diary*: “All this exists despite the fact that man in the midst of all creation behaves in an inhuman way... All this is already a great grace”. One day she described to a friend the impressions received while listening to F. Schubert’s *“Trout Quintet”*: “Isn’t this also a mystery, that everything is



so beautiful? Despite the hatred, it continues to be so. In my enjoyment of beauty an unknown element has been inserted, an omen of the Creator, that every innocent creature praises His beauty. For this reason, only humans are capable of being truly cruel, because they are free to dissociate themselves from this song of praise. And now one might often think that they do so by covering this song with the sound of cannons, curses, and blasphemies. But the song of praise has the upper hand... and I want to do everything possible to associate myself with its victory."

From the Message of Pope Francis for the 54th World Social Communications Day 2020

"Man is a narrative being. Since childhood we are hungry for stories as we are hungry for food. Whether they are in the form of fairy tales, novels, films, songs, news... , stories influence our life, even if we are not aware of it. We often decide what is right or wrong based on the characters and stories we have assimilated. Stories mark us, shape our convictions and our behaviors, they can help us understand and say who we are."

■ Thought and freedom

Like other young people, Hans and Sophie fight for cultural freedom. The Scholl siblings are convinced that fighting for Christian values and human rights is more than their own lives. They are not willing to compromise, despite knowing that they risk at least marginalization and persecution. "I feel like crying about how cruel men are in big politics, how they cheat on others just to have an advantage. Often I do not wish for anything other than to live on an island like Robinson Crusoe. Sometimes I am tempted to consider humanity as a disease of the earth's skin... I see myself in front of men so big that they are worse than the beasts. After all, however, it is only a matter of holding on, resisting, in the mass that tends to nothing more than its own advantage. Probably only one man has so far managed to go all the way, straight to God."

■ The White Rose

Hans founded *The White Rose* group in Monaco. Inspired by the Christian principles of brotherhood and justice, they believed in life. They were animated by the courage of a faith stronger than hatred, repression, and death. A faith that had urged them to take full responsibility for the words spoken and the actions done, to awaken the consciences of the people to whom they belonged. "Nobody has a love greater than this: to give one's life for their friends" (Jn 15:13), said the prison

chaplain after their death, who in the last few hours had assisted them with deep compassion. When Sophie finally manages to enroll at the university, she joins the group. *The youth of The White Rose* develop a strategy on the front of free

thought, with the weapons of words. They decide to write flyers and distribute them. They buy a mimeograph, a typewriter, paper, envelopes, stamps, and begin to send messages, in hundreds of copies, to addresses chosen at random from the telephone directories. Others leave them in popular places: bus stops, cinemas, trams (at night), telephone booths, in Stuttgart, Cologne, Vienna, Freiburg, Hamburg, and Berlin. Sophie, Hans, and their friend Probst are charged and tried. During the interrogation, Sophie takes full responsibility. "The laws change, the

From the Message of Pope Francis for the 54th World Social Communications Day 2020

"Man is not only the only being who needs clothes to cover his vulnerability (cf. Gen 3:21), but he is also the only one who needs to tell himself, to 'put on' stories to protect his life. We do not only weave clothes, but also stories: in fact, the human ability to 'weave' leads to both fabrics and texts. The stories of all times have a common 'loom': the structure includes 'heroes', even daily ones, who face difficult situations in pursuit of a dream, fight evil driven by a force that makes them courageous, that of love. By immersing ourselves in stories, we can find heroic motivations to face life's challenges."

conscience remains. I believe I have done the best thing for my people and for all people. I do not regret anything and I accept the penalty!"

At the end of the trial Sophie continues to believe that she is bearing fruit despite death: "The sun still shines." "The wind has our dreams." The night before their execution, she has a dream: she is bringing a baby to baptism, when she feels herself sinking, but manages to save the baby while she falls into the abyss. "The child symbolizes our ideas ... they will triumph after our death."

"Only a person who thinks is truly free" is the teaching of this life story, of the courage to change, and the courage of faith, an invitation to follow the good that is within us, letting it be expressed even when we have to travel a path that is not easy to follow, not to let others decide, to have the courage to go beyond what is acclaimed as right when the heart does not consider it such.

Tender heart, strong spirit, and freedom of thought are the qualities that make a person truly free. Yet often they are clouded, and we are powerlessly witnessing unnecessary wars, unjustified suffering ... Thus the purpose of Sophie's words is renewed, which then served to enlighten minds and, today, to illumine the paths and teach the value of culture and of Good.

In order not to get lost, you need to breathe the truth of edifying tales, of stories that help to find the roots and the strength to go forward together, because even when injustice and suffering are told, you can "learn to leave space for redemption, also recognizing among them the dynamism of the good and giving it space. It is consoling to know that, as the wisdom of the days teaches, a 'good' story is able to cross the boundaries of space and time. Centuries later, it remains current, because it nourishes life (cf. Pope Francis, Message for the 54th World Social Communications Day 2020).

For further study

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The gaze

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With which eyes, with which heart, with which smile will you go back to walking the streets in the cities, to meet the gaze of many people who, in the months of the Pandemic from Covid-19, were missed. Everyone feels the desire to meet again, to look each other in the eyes on the daily roads of life and of the world.



Every morning they leave home, loved ones to go to work at a supermarket checkout. They look behind a mask at the customers who, fearfully, are at the cash register to pay. The gaze is focused on the products. Sometimes, however, the gaze is raised that crosses with that of the other. It is the significance of the gaze that makes the difference. And so while the cashier looks on, realizing that behind the concern for spending, there is a lot of gratitude, because every day we continue to work for others. There is infinite vitality in the gaze. They are the eyes that tell others about themselves and the world. In these times, in which life is marked by the rhythm of social distancing and the mask, the gaze remains the fragment of humanity by which we continue to be witnesses and interlocutors.

■ The gaze beyond the mask

The mask leads us to rediscover the beauty of the eyes. It does not hide, indeed reveals, makes the eyes speak and does not remove the voice. "In the hospital, during an surgery, dialogue with the eyes of an anesthesiologist or an instrumentalist is decisive, they help to keep attention high, they give strength; the mask makes the eyes more attentive and more sensitive."

The eyes... the light that lives there. Let's all train ourselves to grow in humanity.

The mask must be worn, it is a tool to start living again. You have to make peace with the fact that it makes you warm, prevents facial recognition from your mobile phone, fogs up your glasses, marks your face, and limits some freedoms. The protection of the mask makes the profile of the face indistinct: however it makes the language of the eyes more intense. And so it is in the experience of a woman discharged from the hospital when she turns to doctors and nurses, saying: *"When I meet you again, I will not remember your faces distinctly, but I will unfailingly recognize your eyes."*

The annoying mask opens a new horizon. If you want to talk to someone or know who is in front of you, those eyes have to be seen.

The communication entrusted to the eyes leads to greater attention to the other, to putting more sensitivity into it, starting with recognizing them. It is valid in the operating room, it is valid everywhere and where you can choose whether to ignore who is next to you or try to know them, to start again from a 'good morning', looking at each other in the eyes.

"Communication does not stop with the mask. The empathy of the healthcare staff towards patients has been strengthened in the ability to engage with the gaze. If a smile is not visible, the eyes will do it, reassuring or measuring themselves with the person in front of them."

A human gaze changes life. In the Gospel, Jesus teaches us to recognize a radical depth in the power of the gaze. The look not only expresses persons, it transforms them. The look changes life. *"If your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light"* (Matthew 6:22). *"If your whole body is full of light, then it will be as full of light"* (Luke 11: 36). In this present, which requires isolation and distance, there is an opportunity to train yourself to discover those light sources that are in people and in life situations.

It is necessary to learn again to wrap in good gazes those who remained behind in this pandemic so they will meet witnesses sensitive to what is done to the littlest ones. It is necessary to learn

to be grateful and to appreciate all the human labor carried out in silence and in the offering of one's life: doctors, nurses, health care workers, volunteers... It is necessary to learn to look at the human condition, fragile and sensitive, with a benevolent gaze that knows how to be moved by them and for anyone suffering from its wounds. It is necessary to learn daily to nourish a merciful gaze so that we can be better each day. The reciprocal presence of people, of their bodies, their closeness, and meeting them, remain a point of departure and of reference for a journey of hope.

We must daily train ourselves to look at everyone again, with eyes that communicate fraternity and closeness, above and beyond the masks.

The masks hide faces, but reveal sentiments through the eyes.

■ Solidarity is in the gaze

The Slovenian philosopher **Slavoj Žižek** writes: "A suspension of sociality is sometimes the only access to otherness, a way of feeling close to all isolated people on Earth. This is the reason why I am trying to be as supportive as possible in my loneliness. And this is a deeply Christian idea: when I feel alone, abandoned by God, at that moment I am like Christ on the cross, in full solidarity with Him."

In the Covid-19 pandemic, we have been invited to distance ourselves socially, "to refrain from touching each other!" The only possibility of drawing close to others is to turn our gaze on them and understand what they are living and what they want to say in the depths of this dark time. The philosopher Hegel writes, *"A person grasps a vision of this night when he/she looks at human beings in the eyes."*

The coronavirus does not deprive us of our gaze, and physical distancing strengthens the intensity of the gazes and of the bonds with others.

How beautiful are people's eyes! In these days in which masks cover the faces of people we meet, leaving only the eyes uncovered, it seems that, after so much time, we begin to really look at each other, to exchange gazes with each other.

And it is those eyes that express emotions, feelings... to reveal what you are going through and feeling inside.

In this pandemic, the gaze has become the fulcrum of life. If the other smiles, it is intuited by the eyes that crease and the small lines that form at the sides of the eyelids because the mouth is not seen. Who would have ever thought that simple masks would become so important to the point of revealing behind the faces of people, feelings of closeness and of solidarity.

Many times, Pope Francis has highlighted the beauty of the other's gaze, for example when giving alms. *"Do we look into the eyes of the person in need? Or do we toss a coin and hurry away? Which of the two gestures is the most important? It is not the appearance that counts, but the*

We will come out better... starting with the gaze.

ability to pause to look at the face of the person asking for help. Each of us can ask ourselves, am I able to stop to look at the face, to look into the eyes of the person who is asking for help?" (General Audience, 9 April 2016).

At the time of the coronavirus, the pleasure of looking at others with benevolence and attention has become a bit rare, almost strange. And yet, the eyes are the light of lives and makes us feel alive. How wonderful are the timbre of the voice, the rhythm of the steps, especially the smile of loved ones! And this counts for all the people we meet.

How will we go back tomorrow to meet on the street or on the train? Will we be conditioned by fear and suspicion, or will we be able to balance the due prudence with the desire to find and re-weave relationships that represent "the most important thing in the world, the very canvas of the human world?" Will we realize that we are a human family walking in the common home which is our one planet Earth? Will we be able to find the momentum of fraternity beyond borders, the acceptance of diversity, the hope of living together in a world of peace?



Digital citizenship

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Starting from the digital as an agent of change, the article presents the opportunities and risks, highlighting the importance of education to acquire the competencies needed to exercise digital citizenship in an aware and responsible way.

■ The digital as an agent of change

The digital revolution is working a radical transformation of society in every sector of life. It is changing our way of acting, thinking, living, working, managing, and communicating. By now, technology has become an integrated part of every aspect of our life and contributes to creating a new culture and a new mode of living the relationship with oneself, with others, and with the world. This does not regard tools to use, but an environment to inhabit, that is a real connective fabric. The arrival of the COVID-19 Pandemic confirmed this fact. The condition of isolation due to the restrictive norms to stop the spread of the contagion, is doubtlessly something unprecedented.

During this emergency, initiatives were multiplied that show, on the one hand, the functionality of the digital technologies and, on the other hand, the consistence of digital life, to the point of affirming that it is not something different in daily life, but is simply daily life lived with different tools and rules. In fact, they allow us to exercise our 'digital citizenship' (<https://www.agendadigitale.eu/cittadinanza-digitale/>).

Thus, frequenting the digital environment can influence life offline. In this context, "to be digital means to use the latest technologies to increase and not replace the cognitive, physical, and collaborative capacity of human beings" (Trombetta S. Et al. 2015).

■ The digital environment: opportunities and risks

Pope Francis says that "the digital environment is a plaza, a meeting place, where you can caress or hurt, have a fruitful discussion or a moral lynching." This statement is sufficient to understand the

immense benefits of the digital age for humanity as we experience it in this time of pandemic. At the same time, it allows you to understand the risks that threaten the person. Faced with this observation, one wonders how to behave. Staying offline is not a possible option, because it would be a choice of social, cultural, and economic exclusion. In fact, the network is an environment rich in stimuli in which the subject broadens the field of cognitive, affective, and socio-relational experience. Rather, it is a matter

of understanding that network security does not depend only on the technology adopted, but on the ability to discern its correct use (Pearson Academy Notebooks, 2017).

For this, it is necessary to know the risks to avoid the uncomfortable and dangerous situations that the digital environment can entail. Cyberbullying, fraud, piracy and copyright infringement, soliciting, sexting, etc. and social divisions are often replicated *online* and the gap between rich and poor is getting stronger. So it is



necessary to be competent to prevent risks and promote digital inclusion in which fundamental services are transferred online, encouraging participation in social life, especially for the most vulnerable people (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference 2019, *Let it be real*).

■ Which skills for digital citizens?

According to the European reference framework of 2006, digital competence is one of the 8 key competences of lifelong learning. They are necessary for personal fulfillment, active citizenship, social cohesion, and employability in a knowledge society. They are defined as a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to behave the right way in reality. So, the citizen of today's society cannot ignore the digital. Some scholars say: "It is not the citizen who is 'digital', it is the digital that occupies an increasingly large part of citizenship" (BRICKS Magazine year 7, n.3).

The digital person is seen as one who is empowered

to live citizenship by using the network and all the technological tools at its disposal in a critical and responsible way. According to the framework for digital skills (DIGCOMP), the citizen must acquire skills that not only concern the use of tools, but that respond to the typical needs of the information and communication society such as the need to be informed, interact, to express oneself, to be protected, to manage critical situations relating to digital environments (FERRARI-TROIA, DIGCOMP p. 4).

To achieve this goal, DIGCOMP has outlined 5 areas in which 21 digital skills are described:

- *Information and data literacy*, the first step of digital literacy, that is, the ability to search, collect, and process information and use it critically.
- *Communication and collaboration*, essential for communicating, sharing, collaborating through digital tools, interacting and participating in online communities and networks.

- *Creation of digital content* to be less consumers and more producers respecting intellectual property rights and licenses.
- *Security* to act effectively to safeguard your own and others' personal protection.
- *Problem solving* to identify needs, make decisions, solve conceptual and technical problems through digital means.

This picture reveals the demanding work to be done to become honest digital citizens. These skills need to be gradually acquired. Therefore, the process is not automatic and being digital natives is not enough, a targeted educational path is needed.

■ Educate to digital citizenship

If the digital permeates all areas of life, it can be said that any education for active citizenship requires the digital dimension. For this reason, living in the digital environment is learning that requires appropriate accompaniment on an educational level.

Digital education implies planning interventions aimed at a positive and aware use of *social media* that allows you to live, learn, communicate, and participate in social life. Like any responsible citizen, digital citizens must have a strong sense of belonging, engage and actively participate in the social project, have the right to security and protection to grow and live life freely and responsibly. The path must be designed starting from the 5 areas, with the related skills to be developed, based on the different levels of learning.

If the new generations immersed in this digital environment are to be accompanied, the educators are called to continuous training on the topic. They must be able to make the different educational places into a laboratory where adults and children are involved in the design, experimentation, and creation of highly qualified spaces for learning oriented towards digital citizenship as a transversal axis of active and responsible citizenship.



For further study



- *Journey of education to citizenship in all school grades in English: Common Sense Education* (www.commonsense.org/education)

- *Program the Future* (www.programmailfuturo.it)



- *You become citizens: https://www.etwinning.net/eun-files/book2016/IT_eTwinningBook.pdf*

- *DigComp 2.1, The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens with eight proficiency levels and examples of use* (<http://europa.eu/!Yg77Dh>) edited by the European Commission's Joint Research Center.



- *Manual de educación para la ciudadanía digital (in all languages), in https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/es/pub/resources/publications/digital-citizenship-education.htm*

All in the same boat

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“This is not the time for forgetfulness. The Covid-19 Pandemic crisis we are facing should not make us forget the many other emergencies that bring suffering to many people” (Urbi et Orbi Message, 12 April 2020).

The world crisis caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic, due to its seriousness and geographic expansion, has re-dimensioned many other humanitarian emergencies that affect millions of people forced to live experiences of precariousness, abandonment, and marginalization.

in exodus



Almost every day, television and newspapers present news of people who are fleeing from hunger, from war, from violence, from other grave dangers in the search for safety and for a dignified life for themselves and for their families.

“Before, I felt like a child,” whispers Ali. “But now that I work, I feel like a man.” Ali is thirteen years old and arrived in Khalakan, in Iraqi Kurdistan at the beginning of 2015, after his family escaped from the war in Iraq. Now he is forced to work as a butcher to support the family. “I would like to go back to school.”

Like the child Jesus in the flight into Egypt, Ali experienced along with his parents, the condition of the displaced and refugee, living each day in fear, uncertainty, discomfort. In him, Jesus is present as at the time of Herod when He was forced to flee to be saved. In that face everyone is called to recognize the face of the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick Christ who challenges and urges us to weave networks of proximity and solidarity. “Faced with megacities with a very high population density and structural problems between the wealthy and excluded, the poor, it is necessary to promote the culture of solidarity and the sharing of goods with the most needy. We must not forget that the problem of one’s neighbor is everyone’s problem.”

The Pandemic reminds us that we are all in the same boat, that worries and fears are common and that “no one is saved by themselves.” This is why solidarity and co-responsibility are essential because we can face the crisis with everyone’s contribution. “Have the courage to open spaces where everyone can feel themselves called to seek new forms of hospitality, of fraternity, and of solidarity”

(Pope Francis Meditation, 27 March 2020).

Peréz Esquivel, Argentinian, Nobel Peace Prize recipient, has always supported Latin American minorities. In an interview with the Osservatore Romano, he says of the crisis provoked by Covid-19, “We are at the end of an epoch of humanity. Thus, we need to reconsider the paths to follow, keeping in mind what the

An economy can be recovered, a life cannot. The life of people has priority.

pandemic will leave behind.” Covid-19 has spread in the Countries of Latin America and already we foresee the consequences at the social-sanitary and environmental levels. The most affected are the poorest ones where there is no water, thus, there is a lack of hygiene and food: *poverty changes its name in each Country, but it manifests the same face everywhere.*

On the day of the Solemnity of Pentecost, after the Regina Coeli, Francis exhorted all to invoke the Holy Spirit to “give light and strength to the Church and to society in the Amazon,” reminding that the indigenous people are especially vulnerable, the poorest, and most defenseless and he stressed that we must “take care of people who are more important than the economy.”

■ Poor and vulnerable

“The most vulnerable, in every part of the world, cannot be abandoned: let us ensure that they do not lack basic necessities.” This is the appeal of the **Archbishop of Oklahoma City, Monsignor Paul S. Coakley**, President of the Committee for Internal Justice and Human Development of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States (USCCB) who urges focusing attention on “people who are poor, vulnerable, marginalized to offer them some hope and assistance in these unprecedented circumstances.”

Food security, housing, access to health care, fight against racial and ethnic disparities, help for the unemployed, migrants, and refugees, education, international assistance, and debt relief, support to charities that serve vulnerable populations must be addressed.

The **Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar** also asks for substantial help to create quality health systems, to promote the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises to decrease unemployment, and to guarantee food security and basic social services like hospitals, schools, and adequate housing. Working for the common good in this time of trial, recalls the reason for Christian hope. To walk in this hope is to stay close to our needy sisters

and brothers, to participate in efforts to ensure assistance to the most vulnerable people, confident in the presence of God until the end of time.

■ Internally displaced people

There are many displaced people in the world, fleeing armed conflict and forced to leave their homes due to natural disasters. *“Conflicts and humanitarian emergencies, aggravated by climatic upheavals, increase the number of internally displaced people and affect people who are already living in a state of serious poverty. There are no adequate structures that respond to the needs of those who have been displaced”* (Discourse of Pope Francis to the Diplomatic Corps of the Holy See, 9 January 2020).

The coronavirus brings many emergencies back into the open. And thus, the number of internally displaced persons who use charitable activities increases, especially for the supply of food.

The communities that work to guarantee aid, have not stopped opening the doors to continue the mission with the canteens and reception centers, continuing to serve the many needy, the elderly, the displaced, and refugees. New types of poverty have affected workers in the catering sector, tourism workers, small artisans, anyone who has suddenly found themselves without a salary. Thus, requests for meals and food packages are increasing; the distribution of foodstuffs and personal hygiene products, with home delivery for the elderly who are alone

and the most fragile families; socio-health care and support for children who do not have the opportunity to attend online lessons.

“I found myself on the other side of the barricade - says a volunteer - becoming a user of great moments of charity and receiving many messages of sharing closeness that opened my heart. I became even more aware of how important the other is for each of us: it doesn't matter which side you are on, but that you have to be there. When you give, you receive, and when you receive, you give.”

The emergency highlights the centrality of being close to serve. Approaching others often also means being willing to take risks, as it has been for many doctors and nurses in the pandemic months. Being close goes beyond the sense of duty. There is a poem by Antonio Machado that says: *“Wayfarer, there is no path, the path is made by going”*. Hope is for young people who, among the lights and shadows of existence, can discover the paths of life, spirituality, and values. *There is always the hope of building another, more just and fraternal world*. It is necessary to make new buds emerge that, at certain moments in history, acquire vital energy by enveloping everything they encounter.

Young men and women are interlocutors of their lives and builders of their own history. Pope Francis challenged them saying *“make yourself heard”*. Young people are these new buds that sprout with the power of life and hope!

Take care of the elderly

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Since the beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic, there has been talk of the elderly, their loneliness, and their death far from loved ones. Their disappearance is a loss of wisdom, of memory, of paths that can still say a lot, of a dialogue that does not stop with young people. Their silent and suffering testimony has a lot to teach our world, which many times considers the value of people on the basis of efficiency and productivity.

There is a dimension made of gift and contributions such as the experiences of a life, wisdom, knowledge, understanding, which cannot be measured. The elderly teach us that.

The elderly are at the center of the loving care of the **Little Sisters of the Poor**. It is a Sunday morning like many others. At the end of the Eucharistic celebration, during the announcements before the final blessing, while the assembly is ready to leave, the mind is struck by a voice: *“We live by Providence, next to the last: the elderly poor. Today you are Providence through what you generously want to give us.”*

It is an appeal that touches the heart and breaks our usual patterns. Intrigued, I approach that Sister. Her gaze is pleasant and her smile contagious. An invitation to visit the community where she lives in Rome, near the

Basilica of St. Peter in Chains, to learn about their history and vocation. Here a community of sisters from different parts of the world live together with poor elderly people, lovingly taking care of them.

■ Hospitality

Sr. Rosemary Rese explains that, “The essence of our mission is that of hospitality for the elderly poor of every race and religion who are received as Christ, taken care of like family, and accompanied with dignity to the last moment of their earthly journey.”

The mission of the Little Sisters of the Poor was born in 1839 at St. Servan (France), when a woman, Jeanne Jugan, with the consent of her room companion, decided to share their modest apartment with a sick elderly woman, “*accepting to work more and asking alms to insure what was necessary for her care.*”

The intuition of Jeanne Jugan thus became the basis for an as yet unknown work, that soon grew and gave life to the Foundation of a Religious Institute that has as its only apostolic work, the care of needy elderly people, received “*in their last years of life in a domestic environment like that of a family.*”

Sr. Rosemary continues, “In the 19th century, the elderly were practically abandoned to themselves.

Lacking financial means and family support, many ended up living on the street, inclined to unhealthy vices, reduced to living by asking for alms.”

Still today, the elderly are victims of what Pope Francis calls the ‘culture of waste’ and many “*ignore the riches that our elderly people can offer to the young generations.*”

Sr. Rosemary adds, “they have wisdom and experience to offer people of every age. They teach us how to live and often teach us how to die as well. As Pope Francis writes, “*they are the memory of a people.*”

“Today, as yesterday, we endeavor to satisfy the physical and spiritual needs of the residents in our

houses with methods and modalities appropriate for the time and place. The Little Sisters, qualified lay personnel, families of the residents, lay and volunteer collaborators, form a team that offers a personalized attention to the needs of each resident, helping them to remain independent and involved in the daily activities and in choices for their care.”

The Little Sisters of the Poor are present on the five continents in 32 Countries for service to the elderly, with one objective, that is the heart of their mission: respect for the life of each person. They offer an assistance centered on the person, distancing any choice that could “*offend their dignity and respect for life, just as it was received from God.*” In recent years, the desire to strengthen the apostolate and the quality of religious and community life, led the Institute to open new Foundations where assistance for the elderly poor is lacking.

■ Reciprocity

Poor among the poor, like Jesus Christ, *for your sake he became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich* (2 Cor 8: 9). In needy elderly, the religious see Christ and try to alleviate His labors and solitude. “*Material poverty serves to free us from clinging too much*

to material things, to recognize our dependence on God who provides for all our needs.”

This aspect shakes our way of thinking, always accustomed to planning everything, being in control of every situation and not taking a step without careful evaluation. Yet, explains the religious, “we read in the Gospels: *Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you.* God’s providence is surprising,

stories abound with benefactors who come to the door with the necessary providence. By limiting our acceptance of government funding and other fixed income, we allow others to share the

mission by offering the opportunity to perform an act of charity and allow an exchange of goods between them and the poor.”

This reciprocity functions one hundred percent, beyond every expectation, even in the rapport between the young and the elderly. In fact, in the experience of the Little Sisters of the Poor, it is surprising to assist at intergenerational encounters, there is an almost immediate bond. “There is the transmission of the wisdom acquired over the years by the elderly and the lively novelty offered by the young, full of enthusiasm and hope. It is interesting, for example, to observe young people who teach the elderly how to use digital media, putting a new world of experience within their reach.” Sister Rosemary points out how in the concluding document of the Synod on young people in 2018, Pope Francis asked young people to consider their relationship with the elderly. In fact, the latter “*need to find a receptive ear to listen to their stories and young people need to understand their roots that will guide their future choices.*”

Thinking about the religious, their simple and discreet presence, their very precious mission, I ask Sister Rosemary what contribution the Little Sisters of the Poor can offer as women engaged in the Church.

“The woman’s heart gives life. Like Little Sisters of the Poor, consecrated women, in love with the God who calls us and supports us, love overflows into the lives of our guests

and also pours into the lives of all those who, in various ways, join us in the mission of elder assistance. As we accompany the elderly at the end of their journey towards the eternal encounter, we consider ourselves women who, in the heart of the Church, commit themselves to generating new souls in Heaven.”



The dreams of the elderly are imbued with memory, and therefore fundamental for the journey of young people, because they are the roots. From the elderly comes the sap that makes the tree grow, makes it bloom, gives new fruit

(Pope Francis).

In the heart of humanity

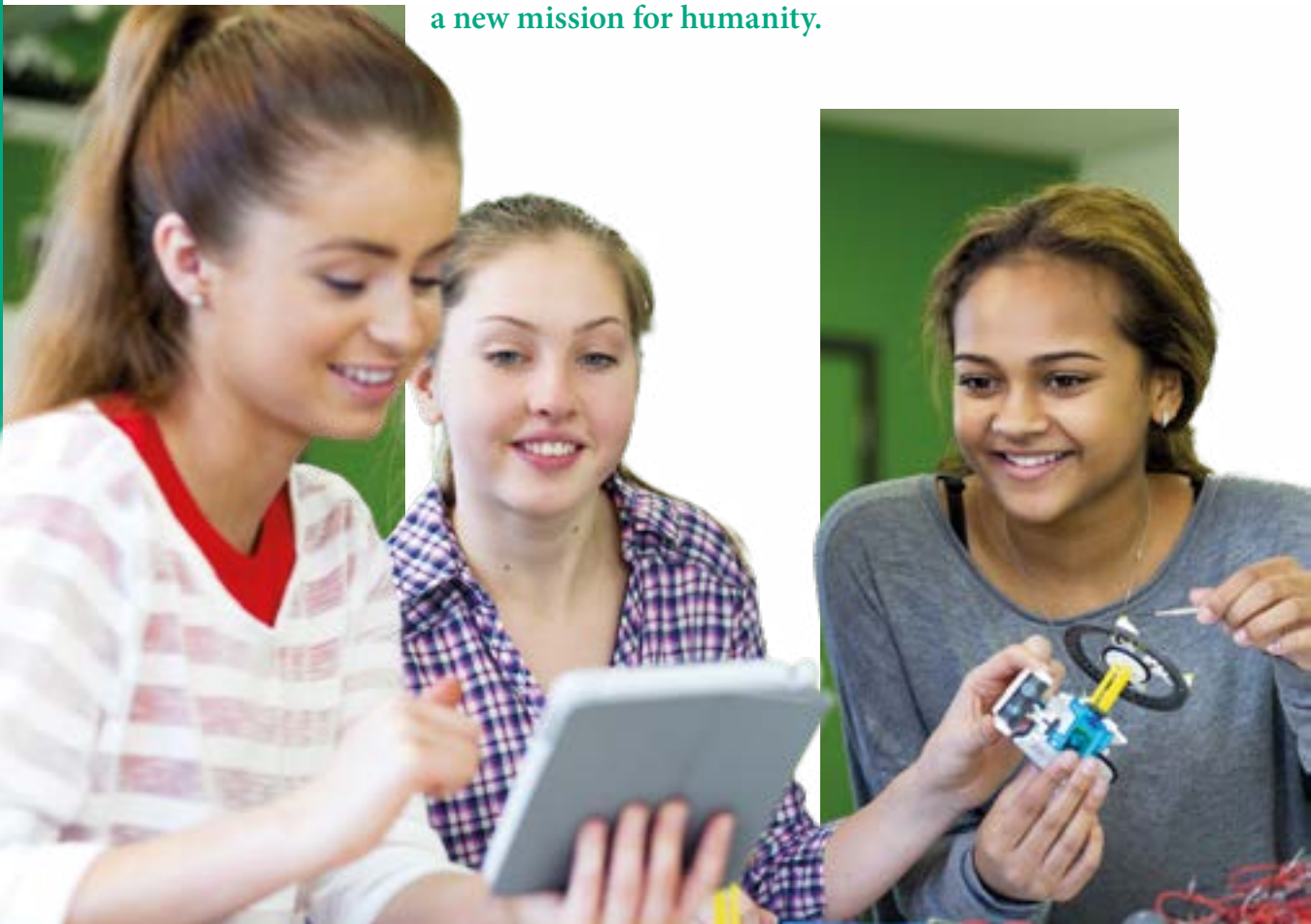
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Being a *transient* traveler is very common when one travels from one point to another of the world, making stops, and you have to be in those conditions many times. And one stops in a space-time, in a place to which one does not belong because you are journeying towards a more definitive point.

Today, we are all *in transit*, we inhabit a space where we do not belong in a stable way because the dynamism of life leads us to be on a continual voyage towards the best version of ourselves. And that best version always has to do with others. Just as it is happening in the whole world where suffering, fear, and disease strike us. It is a temporary situation. However, it is a new periphery of humanity that requires care and the commitment to bring hope and joy to those who are living it.

It is a new way for the Proclamation,
a new mission for humanity.



Since 2013, after the beginning of his ministry, Pope Francis has invited humanity with the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, to a joyful and contagious new way of transmitting the Gospel, and reaching the existential peripheries with the light of the Word.

The “outgoing” Church is the community of missionary disciples who take the initiative, who are involved, who accompany, who bear fruit, and celebrate (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 24). These verbs express the intentionality of a new face of the missionary in this century; an openness to the questions of the Spirit and humanity, in that *sensus fidei* that makes the missionary capable of discerning the will of God in events.

In harmony with the Church, the FMA Institute has made this call a time of reflection and action, as expressed in Circular no. 985, which motivates the Convocation of General Chapter XXIV: “We listen in order to discern ‘other places’ to live the Gospel logic of gift and fraternity. We allow ourselves to be questioned by all human peripheries, with particular attention to the situation of young people and young women; by human mobility, by caring for the common home, by digital spaces, by the search for a just and safe peace.”

It is the experience of being *in transit*, traveling, and like every traveler, we carry our backpack with experiences lived and open to know the new, because it is dynamic and changeable. It is a recall to the prophetic and charismatic mission to recuperate the vital identity of the Institute (FMA Cost. art. 75), to stimulate ingenuity and creativity so that the responses will be new, incarnate in the new human peripheries.

■ With the young

The choice of theme for the 35th World Youth Day (WYD) ‘Young people, I say to you, get up’, today has taken on particular significance due to the Covid-19 pandemic that affected the entire human family. The young brave explorers are called to work for a better tomorrow; they are the sentinels of the morning announcing the dawn to come, as Saint John Paul II defined them (Circular 996).

It is a demanding ‘pilgrimage’ that has involved young people all over the world, who through the media, spread messages of resurrection, life, and salvation everywhere by taking care of others and putting themselves at the service of those who have no voice to ask for help.

In 2015 in **Argentina**, a group of young women created ‘*Chicas en Tecnología*’, a non-profit organization that aims to bridge the gender gap in the informatics sector: “working, helping, forming, and accompanying a generation of women leaders in technology”. *Chicas en Tecnología* offers several free programs, research areas, workshops, conferences, and events for young people and teenagers.

Julian Weich and **Nicholas Wertheimer**, a social entrepreneur and a young doctor **are convinced that everyone’s commitment is needed to change the world**. With the **Safe Water Project**, they offer a solution to the inability to access drinking water. With water filtering technology and nanotechnology, they reach many African villages where water is a scarce commodity and, therefore, where health is at risk.

Jack Thomas Andraka is only 16 years old (he was born in 1997) and is already a renowned inventor and researcher in the field of cancer. This is possible in the United States. In 2012, at the age of 15, he received the *Gordon E. Moore Award*, the *Intel International Science and Engineering Fair Grand Prix*. To develop his invention: a new, quick, and inexpensive method to detect the increase in a protein that signals the onset of pancreatic cancer and it reports it very early, allowing for a winning cure.

These and many other young people are close to the existential vulnerabilities of those who “in transit” as travelers feel united by the same pain, beyond any race, language, and gender.

■ Journeying with the Church

The Church was not aloof, and multiplies itself with generosity and creativity to reach every family, every home, every person, so that social isolation becomes a reason to know Jesus more and better. The communities of consecrated life, the FMA educating

communities, the families of young people, the local churches, have all formed a 'new network' which unites, comforts, embraces, and ensures its presence through online communication.

Pope Benedict XVI, already with a vision of the future, in his message for the 47th World Communications Day in 2013, *Social networks: doors of truth and faith; new spaces for evangelization*, he wrote: "Seeking to make the Gospel present in the digital environment, we can invite people to live prayer meetings or liturgical celebrations in specific places such as churches or chapels. There must be coherence and unity in the expression of our faith and in the witness of the Gospel within the reality in which we are called to live, be it physical or digital. We are called to make known the love of God to others, even to the ends of the earth."

From these spaces of communication, which must be inhabited with care and commitment, everyone feels called to live their discipleship today even more, to be close to suffering humanity.

It is beautiful that in the Magisterium of the Church there is so much harmony with the

experience of familiarity, closeness, and kindness that are at the basis of Don Bosco's Preventive System lived in the FMA communities and in the most profound experience of the person.

Pope Francis appealed to a group of digital evangelizers to communicate with tenderness and passion to strengthen faith and nourish hope in those approached, even on social networks, because online speaks about presence, warmth, and accompaniment. It is a new form of mission that transforms need into opportunity, which proclaims Christ and His Kingdom. Evangelization reaches the hearts of the users of the social networks, small domestic churches, through text, graphics, audio, and video messages that are shared in virtual space. This is not a simple transmission of content, but new

languages for new realities: this is the great challenge for the Word of Life to continue to be incarnate in the heart of women and men.

We are disciples of the Teacher on the Net, in transit towards a new humanity that can be glimpsed today, transforming it with the strength of love and merciful tenderness.

Saying things with 'closeness and proactivity', because both express 'tenderness', which is the language of God (iJornada tuitera de IMisión, Evangelización y Cultura Digital, 14 June 2019).



Ethics, Education and rights

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On February 28, 2020 the Pontifical Academy for Life, Microsoft, IBM, FAO, and the Italian Government signed the *Rome Call for an AI Ethics*, to support the ethical approach to Artificial Intelligence, promoting a sense of shared responsibility between Organizations, Governments, and Institutions to guarantee a future for digital innovation and technological progress at the service of genius and human creativity.



#withtheyoung... listening

It is in the digital environment, in the 'online marketplace' that new generations all over the world create and reinvent their relationships. The important issue courageously addressed by the Pontifical Academy for Life and by the other protagonists of the *Call* is the way to 'be there', as parents, academics, educators, religious, where young people are from all over the world.

Advances in technology are a driving force for establishing and strengthening alliances, shortening distances, and feeling closer, without losing sight of the human being, whom not even the most advanced Artificial Intelligence can replace.

Pope Francis is categorical on this point, it is an epochal crossroads: "Humans invented the steam

engine, electricity, printing. Now is the season of Artificial Intelligence, the era in which even important decisions are often taken together by humans and an algorithm, truly a relationship to be explored."

■ Algor-ethics

The signing of the 'Call for an AI Ethics' is an historical event with a social, political, and technological impact at the national and supernatural levels, aimed at promoting what has been defined as an **Algor-ethics**. It is the development and use of Artificial Intelligence according to the fundamental principles of good innovation: *Transparency*, the systems of Artificial Intelligence must be understandable; *Inclusion*,

it must take into consideration the needs of all human beings in such a way that everyone can benefit and every individual can be offered the best conditions possible to express and develop themselves; *Responsibility*, of those who plan or implement solutions of Artificial Intelligence; *Impartiality*, do not create or act according to prejudices, thus safeguarding human equality and dignity; *Reliability*; *Security*; and *Privacy*.

Msgr. Vincenzo Paglia, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, says, "the intent of the *Call* is to create a movement that expands and involves other subjects: public institutions, NGOs, industries, and groups to produce an address in the development and use of technologies derived from AI. From this point of view we can say that the first signing of this *Call* is not a point of arrival, but the beginning of a commitment that appears even more urgent and important than what has been done so far. The text of the *Call* is also characterized by being a first attempt to formulate a set of ethical criteria with common value references, offering a contribution to the development of a 'common language to interpret what is human'."

The technology that populates the 'digital galaxy' is 'a gift from God', but it is also a resource with complex implications, in which the relationship between "the properly human contribution and the automatic calculation" must be studied well, because it is not always easy to "foresee its effects" and "define its responsibilities". This is why the Pope says that new technologies are not "neutral instruments" and by their very nature they can "blur the boundaries hitherto considered clearly distinguishable: between inorganic and organic matter, between real and virtual, between stable identities and events in continual relationship between them."

■ The role of education

The document highlights how the impact of artificial intelligence has today brought about a profound change in the way humanity knows itself and interprets reality. And it is here that the school, the Church, the educators need to find their own space to interact with young people, in

the ever-changing and more evolved forms and ways that science puts into play, educating to the uniqueness of the person, to critical thinking, to the values of Christian teaching.

From the digital tracks disseminated on the internet, the algorithms extract data that allow you to control mental and relational habits, for commercial or political purposes, often without realizing it. This asymmetry weakens critical thinking and the conscious exercise of freedom. Inequalities are amplified enormously, knowledge and wealth accumulate in the hands of a few.

There is a long way to go, but there are prerequisites: Education. A radical rethinking of it is necessary and a priority, not only in the redefinition of the notional horizon, but in the rethinking of the very purpose of the educational process. The themes of social inclusion, of artificial intelligence as an enabling tool, of social vulnerability in a horizon of cultural and technological acceleration, intersect to form a clear, complex, challenging framework, which today calls for people and societies to accept their responsibility.

"Human beings still have a monopoly on evil. The problem is not AI; the problem is humans who use new technologies for non-humanitarian purposes" (Kasparov).

As Hans Jonas says, we need an ethics for technological civilization, a cosmic ethics based on the 'courage of responsibility', not only to answer questions relating to overpopulation, energy and environmental problems, and safeguarding subsequent generations, but also to define the role of the human being alongside Artificial Intelligence.

There is a need for stimuli, tools to solicit thought, challenging horizons and provocations, to manage the technological revolution of which we are contemporaneously, architects and interlocutors. There is the daily challenge of a guided transformation, not imposed, in respect to values and responsibilities. Everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the common good, promoting critical thinking and the spread of conscious perspectives. Only by acting in this way can the foundations be created for the continuation of an authentically human life 3.0.

For reliable AI

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In science fiction literature, Artificial Intelligence has always been a dream and a mirage, the fruit of the tree of Eden, both desirable and feared for the well-being and evolution of humankind.

The Android Hunter is the original title of Philip K. Dick's work, which inspired **Ridley Scott's** film, *Blade Runner*. Written in 1968, the film is set in San Francisco in 1992, where the last world war transformed the Earth into a desolate and hopeless planet, forcing people to take refuge in the Galaxy. It is the story of Rick Deckart, an agent who is in charge of withdrawing six androids who fled from extra-world colonies. While doing his job coldly, motivated only by the 'price' on the outlaws that will come to him, he has a doubt: **what is human and what is not?** After the final scene of *Blade Runner*, with the monologue "I have seen things that you humans cannot imagine..." by the antagonist Roy Batty, even in the viewer the thought insinuates itself that a bit of the human is in that android, seized with melancholy for what it has lived and for the death it is facing.

The **android** is an artificial being, a robot, with human features, present above all in sci-fi imagination. In some cases, the android is indistinguishable from the human being
(<https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Androide>).



Even the **dream** fascinates with its ineffability, and distinguishes humans from machines: machines do not dream and are not even able to give answers about dreams. In the short film *Decalogue 1* by Polish director Krzysztof Kieślowski (1988), the super-computer of Paweł's dad is capable of solving the most complicated physical calculations, but it cannot answer the child's question: "What is mom dreaming about?" In the film, the father, a university professor who imagines the advent of machines capable of human thinking, is put into crisis by the tragic death of his son, 'unforeseen' by his mathematical calculations. Often in the machines, there is the desire to transfer 'something of ourselves' into 'something produced by us', completing them with what we are missing.

■ Immersed in the Infosphere

Artificial Intelligence (AI) does not only concern robotics and the attempt to replicate humans (androids), but also technological systems capable of simulating some human cognitive functions. William Gibson's *Neuromancer* is a 1984 novel in which the author develops decidedly futuristic scenarios. Reading this work, you find yourself projected into a future where physical boundaries seem to dematerialize. It is cyberspace, an interconnected, global and dynamic network, described by Gibson: "Cyberspace: a graphical representation of data obtained from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light aligned in the non-space of the mind, clusters and constellations of data."

It is a definition that approaches the current concept of **Infosphere**, theorized by Luciano Floridi, professor of Philosophy and Information Ethics at Oxford University, in which analog and digital merge, as well as online and offline, placing everyone in the new '**onlife**' condition, in a world increasingly governed by algorithms and the power of '**Big-data**', a huge volume of data stored, managed, and analyzed to know the profiles of people and use them for economic purposes. AI has become an integral part of everyday life: from the apps we usually use, to medical diagnoses, to stock markets, to security systems... everything is now subject to its influence. With the evolution of studies on neuronal networks (**deep learning**), AI is able to adapt to complex tasks, learning from experience, and

providing great help to humans, especially in research fields that concern health, raising also ethical questions about the goodness of the choices in this field.

■ An ethical response

Pope Francis, in his discourse to the participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life, on February 25, 2019, says: *"Today's evolution of technical capacity produces a dangerous enchantment: instead of giving human life the tools that improve its care, there is the risk of giving life to the logic of the devices that decide its value. This reversal is destined to produce harmful results: the car does not just drive itself, but ends up driving people. Human reason is thus reduced to an alienated rationality of effects, which cannot be considered worthy of the human being."*

Paolo Benanti, Franciscan friar of the Third Order Regulars and Professor of Moral Theology and Bioethics at the Gregorian University in Rome, during the Rimini Meeting 2019, speaking on the theme "What will humans think? Human creativity and artificial intelligence", explains the concept of **algor-ethics**: *"In the relationship homo + machine sapiens - which I believe to be a relationship capable of increasing our capabilities - we must ask ourselves what the specificity of the human being is, and then understand what the place and specificity of the machine is. We therefore need an ethical response. But if the ethical principles are the same as always, the decision today is machinic. That's why I have baptized a new way to tell the machine what ethical norms are important for us, which I have called 'algor-ethics'. Where the good, which is a value, must become a numeric value that the machine can calculate."*

It is humans, with their specificity, who humanize the machine and give a 'good' direction to the actions it performs. Is there an algorithm that can decide for the good? But above all, can a car decide? A machine is

able to decide on the basis of procedures and optimization of results (*problem solving*), based on the observation of contexts and the learning of behaviors, but those who give the directives to algorithms and automated systems are the engineers, developers, technicians. They are

the ones who, as people, have the ability to distinguish - and therefore to decide - between good and evil.

■ Artificial Intelligence

The works of science fiction literature, of the romantic and evocative genres, also contain the moral aspect of the custody of human life. **Isaac Asimov**, scientist and writer, elaborates three laws of robotics in the book *I Robot* (1942). Here is the first: *"A robot cannot harm a human being nor can it allow a human being to suffer damage because of its lack of intervention."* So what do we ask of a machine? Whether it is a procedure for carrying out a banking operation, a medical diagnosis or help with doing a job, what we ask of a machine is respect for the dignity of the person and physical and mental safety, in a nutshell, it must be reliable. Reliability is one of the terms used in the "AI Guidelines", a document prepared by a team of 52 experts and approved in 2019 by the European Union, in order to guarantee the use of AI with the utmost respect for ethics, in compliance with the laws and regulations in force in the EU: AI must be **reliable**, secure, *trustworthy*. On February 19, 2020, the European Commission presented the **White Paper** on AI in which it proposes a framework for reliable artificial intelligence based on excellence and trust. The commitment to reliable AI concerns all the actors and processes that are part of the technical and social context of the system throughout its life cycle. Precisely

for this reason, on February 28, 2020 in Rome, the Pontifical Academy for Life, Microsoft, IBM, FAO, and the Italian government, signed the **Call for an AI Ethics**, a document created to support

an ethical approach to AI and promote the commitment to shared responsibility between organizations, governments, and institutions.

The signatories pledge to work together, nationally and internationally, to promote the development and use of AI according to the fundamental principles of good innovation: Transparency, Inclusion, Responsibility, Impartiality, Reliability, Security, and privacy.



On that occasion, Pope Francis made himself present with a **Message** in which he says, *"simple education in the correct use of new technologies is not enough: they are not 'neutral' tools, because, as we have seen, they shape the world and engage consciences on the level of values. There is a need for a broader educational action. Strong motivations must be developed to persevere in*

the search for the common good, even when there is no immediate benefit. (...) In other words: it is not enough simply to rely on the moral sensitivity of those who research and design devices and algorithms; instead, it is necessary to create intermediate social bodies that ensure representation of the ethical sensitivity of users and educators."

It is right to rejoice in the progress of techno-sciences and to be enthusiastic about the vast possibilities that these continuous innovations open to us, because "science and technology are a wonderful product of human creativity which is a gift from God" (EG 102).

The appeal is to everyone's responsibility, so that through human intelligence and ethical action, "good things" can be created aimed at the well-being of humanity.

Youth and Artificial Intelligence



The action research program **Societing4.0**, with the University of Naples Federico II, the RAI "Digital Inclusion" direction, in collaboration with other media and institutional partners, has launched a literacy format for digital technologies entitled **Societing4.0: What are technologies 4.0.**



The intent was to give citizens and businesses, during the Covid-19 quarantine days, the tools necessary to study the main 4.0 technologies - from Robotics to Artificial Intelligence, from 3D Printing to Augmented / Virtual Reality, from Big Data to the Internet of things - and rise again from the crisis.



The missionary dimension of the FMA Institute

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The missionary spirit is written in the DNA of the Church and of the FMA Institute. This reality finds its reason to be in the identity of the Institute aroused by the Holy Spirit for the Christian education of the young without discrimination of race, culture, religion, nation as we read in the Constitutions. “The missionary dimension, an essential element of the identity of the Institute and the expression of its universality, has been part of our history since its very beginning” (art. 75). Those who met, believed, and welcomed Jesus feel the inner need and the joy of communicating Him to others. They move, are urged out of themselves, are attracted and attract, give themselves to others, and weave relationships that generate life. Whoever has met Jesus, welcomes His sending as a life imperative: “Go into the whole world ...” (Mk 16:15).

From the beginning Mornese was configured as a house open to the world, where you could breathe the evangelizing dynamism that directed one to witness Jesus to those who did not yet know Him. With the Foundation of the Institute, the first FMA are in the wake of many Religious Congregations: they are animated by a strong missionary ardor capable of infecting even young women. They are ready to overcome any personal and institutional difficulty to proclaim the Gospel even in the most distant places of the earth.

One conviction that moved Mother Mazzarello and the first community was: “A daughter who enters [the Institute] with the intention of thinking only of her soul is not capable of fulfilling the duties incumbent on the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians” (Report of the first meeting of the Superiors - Mornese, August 1878, in Orme di vita D 93). Accepting the call, forming, and giving oneself to “gain souls for Jesus” (L 9, 49) and to “work for the glory of God and the salvation of souls” (L 37,2) is a characteristic note of the FMA. Mother Mazzarello exhorts her spiritual daughters to have a “big and generous heart” (L 27,14) capable of embracing the world. To the departing missionary, Sister Ottavia Bussolino, she leaves some reminders

and encouragement, among which: “love all and all your sisters, love them in the Lord, but do not share your heart with anyone, be entirely for Jesus” (L 65,3). Between the lines of this reminder are some important elements of Salesian-style missionary spirit. The center of the missionary’s life and proclamation: Jesus; the engine of missionary life: universal love (love everyone) starting with sisterly love (love all your sisters); the style of loving: love them in the Lord, but with an undivided heart centered on Jesus. It is He, Jesus, the source and point of rotation that gives meaning to our way of loving and proclaiming the Lord.

We carry the missionary spirit first of all in our hearts, because it is the fire that burns inside us and urges us to proclaim. It is not a matter of geographical territories, but a gift to be communicated where the Lord calls us to be prophets and witnesses of His love. The words of Mother

The missionary holiness of the FMA Institute is in the longing for evangelical radicalism and charismatic fidelity (Mother Yvonne Reungoat, Circular n. 913).

Mazzarello to the sisters in a Good Night reveal this: “There is no need to go on a mission to be missionaries; and you missionaries, if you do not live continually with the thought of gaining souls and merits, of making use of all means to truly be all of the Lord and of souls, what missionaries will you be?” (Chron. III 318-319).

Reviving the sense of the missionary spirit in the Institute today requires welcoming the words of Pope Francis to “be an outgoing church” and to remember our charismatic origins. Indeed, the FMA Institute has a rich tradition of resourcefulness, zeal, apostolic-educational creativity, missionary audacity. This requires each FMA to be in love with Christ, to discover herself as ‘a mission on this earth’, to recognize herself ‘marked by fire’ by the mission to educate (EG 273), to allow ourselves to be questioned every day by the mandate, “I entrust them to you”, to renew our the educational passion daily, to



continuously strengthen the 'missionary character' of her vocation and to feel called upon to witness the love of the Lord, here and now where He calls.

Perhaps the question that arises in our hearts is: what are the 'new places' to live and witness to Jesus and which ways of proclaiming, so that the Gospel reaches the hearts of people, especially young people? Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello teach us that we must start from the needs and desires of young people. The Final Document of the Synod on young people reminds us of some of the urgent challenges for a renewed missionary impulse: the digital environment; migrants, many of whom are young; women in the Church; sexuality; the economy; politics; work; the common home; cultural and religious pluralism; ecumenical dialogue (DF 144-156). All this requires us to 'prophetically' rethink our presence in the different realities where the Institute is located. Some attention can be useful and fruitful for this task of rethinking. Always remember that the mission of the Institute is participation in the one salvific mission of the Church, the attentive and evangelical immersion in the reality where we are inserted, allowing ourselves to be questioned by the peripheries of the world, with particular attention to the situation of young people and

"The love of Christ impels us": this is the secret of the growth of the Gospel and of the Spirit of Mornese (Mother Yvonne Reungoat, Circular n. 913).

women, human mobility, the many sufferings and tragedies of men and women of our time; to freely seek those missionary paths which are more suitable for our time in order to fulfill the desire for God who "wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2: 4).

The missionary spirit finds its source and its effectiveness when it moves in an interior spiritual dynamic: "Jesus wants evangelizers who proclaim the Good News not only with words, but above all with a life transfigured by the presence of God" (EG 259). It is the ascetical-mystical ardent dynamic of the *da mihi animas cetera tolle*. Following in the footsteps of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello and of many Blesseds and Saints of the Salesian Family, means nourishing oneself at its primary sources: "Charity as love of God and neighbor, and piety" (BRAIDO Peter, *Don Bosco priest of young people in the century of freedom*, vol. II, Rome, LAS 2002, 146.), especially love for Jesus in the Eucharist and Our Lady.

The missionary spirit is combined with holiness. The true missionary is holy and holiness is the soul of the mission. The educational mission becomes for the Salesian educator a theological place for the radiation of God's love and the place of her/his sanctification.



The music of the future: between algorithms and artificial intelligence

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Thirty years ago one of the best moments of the week for teenagers (at the time they called themselves that) was seeing the Top Ten on television, the classic of the best-selling records. That climb from the bottom to the top was exciting. Finding out who was at the top of the charts every week was always an exciting time to find out if there was your favorite song. Once, to discover new singers, it was either introduced to you on the radio, or you saw them on a TV show, or because the record dealer advised you. Today it is no longer so. That world of people who recommended music to listen to has now been replaced by an algorithm.

From recommended music to imposed music

It is useless to regret the past and, therefore, you have to deal with the network which has different mechanisms that must be known so that you can choose independently. *Is it still possible to choose freely?*

Today if you want to listen to music you can subscribe for a free or paid subscription to a streaming platform or purchase one that always offers all the novelties. If you open the most



popular online music services **Apple Music**, **Spotify**, **Amazon Music**, **Deezer**, **YouTube Music**, **Tidal** or **Google Play Music** at any time, you can see that they show charts with completely different songs. Apple Music, for example, reflects more the tastes of the over 40s, Generation X, while Spotify, that of the very young, the Z Generation. *Why this difference?*

The Network aims to make you always find what you like best. So through the algorithms, programs that are inserted in the design of the platforms and that users do not see, it is able to memorize all the movements that users perform on their computer. In this way, when the users return to the same platform, the algorithm will recognize them and try to make them live the best experience possible, for example by offering songs similar to those already listened to or those that friends listen to. In this way, we don't even have to make the effort to search anymore, because there is software that works for us by interpreting our tastes and desires. So someone might say that this is an advantage. I think it is not, because if once we trusted a person we knew, who advised us selflessly, now we rely on software that follows mechanisms other than the usual taste, because it responds to business logic. As the streaming music services have specialized with a specific audience, it is logical that different rankings are created, because they respond exactly to the tastes of that group of subjects who will listen to the same music.

■ From artificial intelligence to machine learning

Artificial Intelligence has allowed the design of computer systems capable of creating services which, to a common observer, would seem to be the exclusive domain of human intelligence, but which are actually guided by an electronic computer. Here, the songs recommended by the various platforms, based on our previous listening, are guided by Artificial Intelligence. But don't think it's

a trivial thing like, for example, you listened to a song by one rapper and I recommend a new one from another rapper. It is much more. In fact, everything is guided by **machine learning** processes consisting of a series of techniques that allow AI systems to predict, classify, order, make decisions and, in general, extract knowledge from the data that we leave on the net without the need to define explicit rules. The qualitative leap is due precisely to the transition from rule-based intelligence to data-based intelligence, used to train computer systems and allow them to learn how to extract the experiences they need to create new information, new connections, and use all of this for future interactions. Recent research has shown that 72.3% of users on the net choose to listen to the music that the platform offers them. This facilitation in finding the songs that you are apt to like is a million euro affair as *machine learning* works to submit songs and artists belonging perhaps to the same record company, to the same manager or to commercial agreements with the distribution platform of the music. It is basically a form of advertising hidden from our eyes, and driven by the platform owner. It is true that these extremely effective algorithms, with data processing formulas on user ratings, suggest new music or artists that we do not know and that, in all probability, we will like; but the question is: *are we really free?*

■ Artificial intelligence discovers new artists

A few years ago, Apple acquired the **Asaii** music analysis startup with the aim of further improving the suggestions for users and making them try new content. Founded in 2016, it aimed to apply machine learning technologies to the aggregation and analysis of streaming music on the internet. Reading the song play counters and associated data from Apple Music, Facebook, Instagram, Sound Cloud, Spotify, and Twitter, this software scoured the net to provide insiders with information about the most popular songs and emerging artists. The result of this research is presented in a simple and clear dashboard to consult.

Obviously this data collection allows record companies, labels, and musicians to monitor their music on streaming platforms and to identify

new emerging artists. Apple also bought **Platoon**, another small technological startup that tries to help independent musicians get discovered by the main labels. The founders had assumed that singers who are in their early stages may not have enough money to record their music in the studios and gain access to editing software. **Platoon** enters the scene by financing the artists who according to the algorithms, he believes will succeed in the business, helping them not only to create their music, but also to sell it.

However, the digital revolution has not limited our freedom because, in fact, there is a return to the personal choice of music with the purchase of vinyl, which increased by 13% in 2019. We hope they will not be purchased on Amazon where artificial intelligence works for these products too!



The most beautiful years of Gabriele Muccino

Andrea Petralia

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Retracing paths taken twenty years earlier, returning young and looking for explanations, giving answers or answering new questions. Where life does not allow you to crush, rewind, and wind back the tape of your history. We think about art, film, showing weaknesses and regrets, hopes and successes, disappointments and failures, friendship and loves of a group of four friends, and there it makes the fictional characters, or perhaps the director's, tell them as History flows.

"Man as a narrative being. Life as a frame of constructive stories, of stories that help to find the roots and strength to go forward together. Memory as a space that reveals the wonderful wonders of our heart."

The dynamism of adolescence, its genuineness, youth, maturity, loves, and nostalgia are some of the themes told by the Director Gabriele Muccino in the film **The most beautiful years**, a tribute to *We were so loved* by Ettore Scola; a path of reconciliation with oneself, agnostic in some ways and, at the same time, rich in a secular, profound religiosity, continually tried by anguish and fears, a celebration of past youth, a story of friendship lived over the course of forty years, from adolescence to adulthood.

What were the most beautiful years of young people who, in the early 1980s, were divided between those who wore bell-bottom jeans and shouted the slogans of the previous decade and those who succumbed to new fashions, pop music, and unexpected little comforts?

Probably those are the years of **Edoardo Bennato**, singer-songwriter with his *Captain Hook's Rock*,



denim jackets, cotton hair, a certain shyness, and dreams that perhaps could begin to come true.

In the film *We were so loved*, the Story narrated involves individual destinies. The characters of Scola, Age, and Scarpelli, from protagonists of their time, became subjects of the system, yielding under its blows, and riding on the most eager fashions. The melancholy of time that passed, of the hair that turned gray, of the emotions that softened stemmed from the loss of a friendship, of values, of an active role in society.

Muccino is inspired by the film of Scola for the predefined story known to everyone: three friends, three crossed and parallel paths, three or four decades. In *The Most Beautiful Years*, however, time is not substance, it is not individual and generational defeat, it is simple narrative ellipses, the story of time passing.

"The great story is what defines us, even if we don't want it to" - says Muccino. The impact of the Berlin Wall opened up a horizon of hope towards a better world. Clean hands instead gives an idea of resetting and changing the political class. 9/11 made us feel fragile and vulnerable by putting an uncertain future ahead of us. This story is part of the *stories* of four friends, Gemma, Giulio, Paolo, and Riccardo.

The protagonists of *The Most Beautiful Years*, Romans of different social backgrounds and personalities, do not have a political belonging, an idea or an ideology. They have simple dreams to hold on to, work aspirations, memories, and pacts to rely on. It is probably a sign of our times: the absence of a community, a community of ideas and models of life, which makes it 'a pacifying and reassuring film'.

It is above all the interiority of its protagonists that interests Muccino, the storm that overwhelms them, especially when they are very young. Their

passions are sometimes desperate and a little shouted, even if justified, in their desires, in the adverse destiny that separates two lovers or in the desire not to be poor and without ambitions like those who came before.

The narrative construction of the film, which tells the shared adolescence of the four protagonists and the paths of each, choosing to focus on one character in turn, uses the punctual gathering of friends - meanwhile changed and aged - as the only measure of time. The narrative ellipses and detachments in the editing do not reveal the epochal changes,

they do not capture the spirit of the times: the characters grow and evolve only according to the story of their lives, without ever becoming universal figures.

With the camera, the Director photographs the continually 'restless' soul of his complex creatures, and narrates well their camaraderie, grudges, separations, and rapprochements. The story of Muccino never bores, and each character passes the baton to the next, in the great race of life, with a fluidity that makes each scene of the film full of tension. If the movement is precipitous in the introductory part, because

adolescence itself is stormy, after the rough sea it calms down, the suffering becomes more acute, the acting becomes more sober.

Muccino feels the need to restore hope to himself and to others, to that generation of 50-year-old adults and he does it by remembering and starting from adolescence, from real, spontaneous emotions, offering friends the possibility of a new happiness.

In this swollen river, however, the Director sometimes omits the Big Story, forgetting the effects it had on small stories. A choice, because everyone tells their own story and lets themselves be influenced by the *air du temps* in their own way.

Each story comes from life, from the encounter with the other. Communication is called to connect memory with life through the story (Pope Francis).

The great story is what defines us, even if we don't want it to (G. Muccino).



The most beautiful years tells the story of four friends. Their hopes, their disappointments, their successes, and failures are the intertwining of a fascinating story of friendship and love, through which that of Italy and the Italians is also told. A large fresco that tells who we are, where we come from, and also where they will go, and who our children will be. It is the great

circle of life that repeats itself with the same dynamics, despite the fact that different years and ages pass in the background.

What are the most beautiful years? Those that allow us the freedom to tell stories. Those stories that are our life made of images, stories, posts, and tweets. Stories that show the beauty of what we are and live!

Artificial intelligence guidebook for humans

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What is artificial intelligence? Where does it come from? Where is it found and what is it changing and will change in our life? It's easy to talk about AI and run into a spiral of questions that appear threatening. In reality, there are answers that, if put in order, manage to clarify the current and future scenarios of AI.

The ferment around the topic of Artificial Intelligence (AI) leads us to think that there are many words spoken of a theme that is current, and the paradox is that there are still very many who do not grasp its meaning and importance, despite the Artificial Intelligence that accompanies human history and is proving inextricably linked to it. The issues addressed in the *Artificial intelligence guidebook for humans*. We, at the center of a new world, make us aware that Artificial Intelligence marks the rhythm of our lives, poses important challenges that can “stimulate the readers’ desire to make them become the protagonists of a new world, where the search for harmony with machines seems not only inevitable but potentially very effective to reveal the true nature of our human specificity.” When speaking of Artificial Intelligence, it is easy to fall into a spiral of questions that seem threatening, therefore, it is opportune to begin with a basic question, *What*



is Artificial Intelligence? “Artificial Intelligence is a recent discipline that over the years has provided an important contribution to the progress of Informatics. It has been influenced by numerous disciplines, among them philosophy, mathematics,

“We cannot be unprepared for developments in technology, we cannot just endure it, rather we can help generate it”.

psychology, cybernetics, the cognitive sciences.”

The definition leads to openness about the characteristic of Artificial Intelligence: “it studies the theoretical foundations, the methodologies, and techniques that allow designing hardware systems and software program

systems designed to provide the computer with performances that, to a common observer, would seem to be of exclusive relevance to human intelligence.” So is Artificial Intelligence able to solve problems or perform tasks and activities typical of the human mind and ability? The answer is essential to understand the relative ethical implications, especially for those who live the passion for the educational mission, especially bearing in mind that intelligence is not conscience: the first is the ability to solve problems, the second is the ability to feel pain, hate, love, pleasure.

■ Unrepeatable qualities

The extraordinary evolution of Artificial Intelligence, recalling the concept of the

mechanical lever attributed to Archimedes, affirms that presently the algorithm is the lever to lift the world. And yet, “it is necessary to abandon fear of the lever to make room instead to the centrality of the human being in this new world characterized by ‘Artificial Intelligence.’” Perhaps, we need to be aware that intelligence is the most characteristic trait of human beings. In fact, the first ability robots do not have is the capacity to communicate. Humans are prevalently distinguished by their extraordinary ability to tell credible stories, to prefigure common objectives, to join together behind their ideas. Technologically advanced societies perhaps lack the strong awareness of the importance of dedicating time to children, young people, as well as the elderly and, more generally, to those who really need it. The refined robotic supports can never be compared to the smile given to a child.

In addition, there is a role waiting to be interpreted: support for the weakest people, what a civil society cannot ignore if it aims to achieve harmonious integration between humans and intelligent machines; similarly to dreams, passions, is the ability to tell of oneself, and narrate, exclusive qualities of the person.

Artificial Intelligence is not just about processing information. Feelings are deeply human, and cannot be ‘measured’. Thus science fiction seems to distinguish itself from science not so much for the daring challenges to human intelligence, but rather for the tacit extension of feelings, self-perception, awareness of being in the world.

“The emotions that we human beings and, probably many animals also feel, seem inextricably linked to the experience of life and, consequently, of death”.

The difficulty and consequent embarrassments that scientists and philosophers have always

felt in trying to formalize these concepts seem to be based in animal biology, which reflects on itself, which distinguishes people from artificial creatures produced by intelligence, from what are called *machines*. And yet the lever of Archimedes has no autonomy, while intelligent machines seem to move with impressive levels of independence. The level of sophistication achieved by Artificial Intelligence is such that the designers themselves are sometimes unable to provide satisfactory explanations about the behavior of the software they have created. And this determines the emergence of ethical issues of great importance which, however, can only return to humans, and only to them, the responsibility for intelligent automation processes. The authors wisely study what is affirmed, “Human beings possess qualities that are difficult to replicate in a robot, and still others that are totally distinctive. They establish social relationships that lead to the construction of large projects, unite behind the symbol of a flag or an ideal, manifest emotions and express feelings such as friendship and love. How can we replace a young person who cares for disabled elderly persons and smiles with them, making them relive emotions

buried in the past? Will we have to wait for intelligent machines to understand the importance of spreading well-being in places where history has confined poverty, misery, and despair? There is, in the care of social relationships, in conscious perception, in the celebration of feelings, a new largely unexplored world.”

Therefore, the challenge is to re-think the way that AI can contribute to improve the life of the poor and to reduce today’s inequalities.

On the way

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camilla

Dearest friends, I greet you with joy and hope through Mary's hands, that She may walk with us in this desired experience of GCXXIV. I wish to take up the metaphor again with you of the 'fabric', remembering two words that we considered, the threads that challenge us: 'generativity' and 'memory'. These threads will weave a prophetic network in the FMA Institute that give us fundamental choices to re-signify the Charism in the Church and in the world.

Mary lovingly takes these threads and helps us to weave the listening network, a space of attention to what Jesus will tell us. Are we able to hear Him? She is an ever-present Mother, as in Don Bosco's life, who welcomes us, respects us, trusts us. She gives him the charismatic thread generated by the Holy Spirit. With Mary it is easier to understand the generative force of the Charism and therefore, we cannot help but have a clear memory on the journey that Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello have traveled.

We are called to a beautiful vocation: to contemplate God and young people and God in young people who are the meaning and horizon of our mission. There! The 'missionary spirit' of the Institute is woven together. We are invited to remember many sisters, lay people, and young people who throughout history have woven the 'joy of the Gospel' in the Salesian style.

I wonder, how can we further empower the experience of being outgoing that Pope Francis speaks so much about? Excuse me! but now he urges us to a courageous attitude that fills our hearts

with dreams as "missionaries of hope and joy".

We cannot neglect what the Pope said to Gianni Valente of the Fides Missionary Agency, in the extraordinary missionary October in 2019. "To follow Jesus and proclaim the Gospel one leaves oneself and one's own self-referencing, but then it is necessary also 'to remain', to remain in the places and situations in which the Lord makes us arrive. It is a question of living together with others, staying at their pace, asking to accompany them in learning to walk at their own pace. Only in the fabric of daily life can a process of real inculturation of the Gospel in the various realities be achieved."

I would like to ask you: are we ready to be outgoing, bearing witness with our lives to the love of Jesus, without pretending to want to immediately provide solutions for everything? What do the poor, the needy, who also have so much to share in building the Kingdom of God, offer us? With a poor and humble heart, I believe we can do it. Courage! We still lack some thread to weave Chapter XXIV.

Look, friends, the network has already been woven since 8 December 1841. And today we offer new threads so that the network remains strong and supports new vocations and new generations. See you next time!

Words of Camilla!



Salesian Marian Spirituality

Be a motive of joy for Our Lady

From the letters of Mother Ermelinda Lucotti, 4th Superior General.

The invitation of Mother Linda Lucotti to “be a motive of joy for Our Lady” still resounds today. *“It would be a very beautiful thing if our Mother and Queen could be consoled by each one of us and our houses, if she could feel very good among us.”*

1955 was a deeply ecclesial and Salesian year for the celebration of the Eucharistic Congress and the memory of the 50th anniversary of the Coronation of Mary Help of Christians in the Basilica of Turin-Valdocco. Mother Linda proposes to the entire FMA Institute to offer Our Lady a crown of twelve spiritual stars, woven with the gold of goodwill and the pearls of prayer.

“To honor our Celestial Help of Christians, we will offer Our Lady a crown of twelve spiritual stars, one per month, represented by the three theological virtues, by the four cardinal virtues, by the virtues corresponding to the holy Vows, and by the virtues of work and temperance, virtues St. John Bosco declared to be a badge of the good Salesian and therefore of every good Daughter of Mary Help of Christians” (L 368).

Mother Linda feels that Mary whispers to her what to suggest to each of her daughters: *“Cultivate your inner life, clothed in the thoughts, feelings, intentions of the Heart of Jesus. Think as Jesus thinks; love as Jesus loves; work as Jesus did for the glory of the Father and the salvation of souls. Let creatures be like the steps that rise up to Him. Do not stop at them, do not hold them to yourself, but bring them to His love, let them seek Him and live according to His law” (L 412).*


For Mother Linda, devotion to Our Lady consists in presenting her to the young in her holiness and powerful goodness, recalling her life and making her live spiritually close to us: *“This is the most effective way to arouse love for virtue, which makes us similar to her and pleases her” (L 411).* *“She expects only one thing from us: that we go to her with the soul of daughters. It seems to me that Mary Help of Christians, our common Father Don Bosco, and our St. Mary Mazzarello will be delighted with this beautiful union of prayer and exercise of virtue” (L 368).*



▲
Our Lady of the La Vang,
Vietnam.

For reflection and prayer:

- Which new styles of personal and community life should there be to live this unprecedented time with Mary.
- How can we witness to the young that Mary is present in our life and opens to us the paths to hope.



“An ecological conversion involves allowing all the consequences of the encounter with Jesus to emerge in relations with the world around them. Living the vocation of being custodians of God’s work is an essential part of a virtuous existence. This conversion implies *gratitude and gratuity* for the world which is a gift received from the love of the Father, *loving awareness* of not being separated from other creatures, and of forming with the other beings of the universe a wonderful universal communion, *creativity, and enthusiasm*, in order to face the dramas of the world with hope.”

*(Encyclical Laudato si’.
Ecological conversion. III, 216-220)*



Istituto Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice
Salesiane di Don Bosco

