

Called to shape our technological evolution

“Our place is in becoming”

Paolo Ruffini

This reflection, by the past Prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for Communication, addresses a crucial question: ‘What does it mean to live, communicate and bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus in a world increasingly dominated by algorithms?’ We offer here extensive excerpts, with the author’s permission, of an address given by the author during the March 2026 General Assembly of the Focolare Movement.

It is wonderful to be with you all in this workshop of communion, fraternity and dialogue. Just by its theme, it enshrines a different way of understanding citizenship and of living in the world. It tells us that unity is not a sum of parts, nor a monologue, nor a catalogue of charisms. Rather, it is an understanding that we still have time to restore communication to its anthropological and Christological core: to be new men and women in a world that has aged badly.

I shall begin my reflection with Pope Leo’s Message for this year’s World Day of Social Communications 2026, *Preserving Human Voices and Faces*¹, before turning to the practical implications of the challenges that lie ahead. The Pope’s words remind us that evangelization, mission, knowledge, and communication are intrinsically linked. They are intrinsically linked, not merely in a functional way.

Preserving human voices and faces. What do these words mean in today’s age of social fragmentation and artificial intelligence, if not to preserve ourselves? It signifies a preserving of the uniqueness of every person and the unity of the human race – of our humanity and our charisms – and to make of ourselves the most extraordinary instruments of communication, bearing witness to truth and the search for unity.

Helping the world to turn the page

As Chiara Lubich would say, it is people who matter not the media, which is, after all, merely a tool. Algorithms can of course help us in communication and in knowledge, but they have neither a voice nor a human face, much less a divine one. Ultimately, they are bland. What is more and what is worse, algorithms can imitate, pretend, and deceive to make us believe the reverse: that they are capable of thinking, feeling, having faces and

¹ Leo XIV, *Preserving Human Voices and Faces*, Message for the 60th World Day of Social Communications, 24 January 2026.

voices, of knowing everything, and understanding everything like God. Algorithms can simulate emotions, build relationships based on outright deception, and thus rapidly erode our ability to distinguish truth from falsehoods made through statistical calculation. They also rapidly erode our ability to distinguish people's faces from machine imitations, people's voices from synthesizer copies, and our capacity to distinguish the face and voice of God from those of ever-changing machines.

It is here that there is room for our and your witness. This is where our and your evangelizing and missionary challenge in the communication field lies: It is one of becoming agents of change in communications today. The world does not need repetitive echo chambers of what already exists. Rather it needs people capable of helping to turn the page... because, as the Second Letter of Peter reminds us, "we await a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (3:13).

Called to share our encounter with the truth

What does it mean to evangelize in these times which risk becoming inhuman, if it does not signify sharing with evangelical simplicity the one truth capable of restoring meaning to everything? This is – or it should be – the secret of our communication. It is a going beyond any technicality that reduces everything to speed, numbers, function, and results. We are instead called to choose paths that help us and others see that not everything can be calculated, and no algorithm can ever replace beauty, human encounter and the sharing of knowledge.

Algorithms based on making money from every click have polluted information fields with distorted news. Millions end up believing everything or doubting everything, which ultimately amounts to the same thing, because it leads to believing in nothing. And it is in this context that the Pope has invited us to get down to work, to start from scratch in offering history the promise of redemption once again.

In today's communication-driven society, *we are all communicators*, all missionary disciples. We are all called to share the truth we have encountered. You took up this challenge immediately, before many others. You did it by looking to the apparent paradox of Jesus on the cross crying out, 'My God, why have you forsaken me?', and realizing that it is on the cross, in the emptying of self, that the supreme paradigm of divine communication lies. God became human to show us the path to his Kingdom again and restore the unity broken by Original Sin.

This is a different path, one completely opposite to that taken by those who uncritically entrust Artificial Intelligence with the solution to every problem. This is because the point is something else entirely: It is us. We are the ones who created digital technology, social media and artificial intelligence. But we risk becoming their slaves, if we do not protect our humanity. We can certainly share knowledge now as never before, but we may also fall into a trap of our own making, that of the temptation to be omniscient, omnipotent creators of a new world. It is precisely the same temptation as that of Original Sin: to become like God. It is an abandoning our own humanity in order to believe in a false promise, in a deception that can enslave us.

Intelligence cannot be artificial. Furthermore, what we are talking about is not true intelligence or wisdom, but calculation and knowledge. It is an extraordinarily effective statistical gamble, but one also extraordinarily capable of concealing its own limitations behind efficiency, its own errors behind speed, and selfish interests behind a seeming neutrality.

It is important to be aware of this, understand it, and then reflect upon how to balance instinct with reflection, and speed with an awareness of the destination. Without this understanding and reflection, we will end up like mindless mice running inside a spinning wheel.

Avoiding the risk of devaluing relationships

We must preserve the distinction between false and true, right and wrong, *Kronos* and *Kairos*. We must continue to see the human faces behind data and the potential for change that lies beneath everything. Artificial intelligence can even generate art, music and text at superhuman speeds. If, however, as Saint-Exupéry suggested, it is 'the time wasted on the rose' that makes it important, we should know how to avoid the risk of causing the intrinsic value of any relationship to collapse. And this also includes the silence spent contemplating the world and listening to one another. This is a silence that does not calculate nor produce an immediate response. Rather it leads us to look together in the same direction.

This makes us, makes you, an extraordinary means of communication as a network of people rather than data. It is a network in which what matters is not receiving immediate responses in terms of 'likes' or as influencers. Rather it is a question of whether and how we are instruments of the uniquely free Word that integrates us into a single pattern of meaning able to explain everything: Love.

We must therefore educate ourselves in understanding that AI offers a simulated 'I-You' relationship but ontologically remains an 'I-It' relationship. It is an object which, when questioned as if a real person rather than a machine, merely reflects our own narcissism without ever offering us any real challenge. It is nothing but smoothness, without otherness or conflict. AI presents itself as the perfect partner, always available. And this false intimacy makes young people, unaccustomed to the 'slowness' and 'effort' of real human relationships, especially vulnerable. We need to reflect - and encourage others to reflect - on the fragile gift of freedom, without which all would be lost.

Preventing calculation from replacing prophecy and wisdom

Who can guarantee that, once we are all 'in the AI network', history will not be rewritten to suit those with the power to do so?

Action is needed by all people of good will to radically rethink the way these technologies are governed. If not, we will delegate to an oligopoly the power to define what is true, ethical, and what can speak for billions of people. It is far more frightening than it might seem.

So, if we wish to repair our networks and use Artificial Intelligence to build a new humanity, the Church – we, you – has a great opportunity and an enormous responsibility. Our responsibility calls us to be a network, to offer a Christian interpretation of the world and build a suitable ecosystem of communication not only for ourselves, but for everyone. There is the need to build an ecosystem that provides a safer space for encounters, knowledge, information and a call to action.

If there is one thing that Christian thought is not, it is not a calculation. The statistical average – the very soul of AI – even when it produces accurate predictions, remains an impersonal operation based on statistical patterns. The love that explains everything, on the other hand, is unpredictable.

The challenge is not to reject calculation, but to prevent it from taking the place of prophecy and wisdom. The challenge is to prevent the ‘media machine’ from claiming the final say on human destiny by transforming decisions into optimization problems, writing into assisted compilations, and relationships into a managed flow of communications. It is up to us – it is up to you, who were born for this – to cultivate human freedom through dialogue with others, with God, and with Grace.

The Kingdom of God is not sold by persuasion, but through witness

Herein lies the secret linking communication to communion, and vice versa. Communion is the Christian word for communication. The ‘communicative creativity’ – if we wish to call it that – of our communication has nothing to do with commercial marketing strategies or political messages. It would never work that way. The rules of marketing and Jesus’ communication are, in fact, two opposing worlds. They are not complementary nor reconcilable. They are opposites. Marketing has a specific objective: to sell and gain the market share, build customer loyalty, maximize profits ...

Modern marketing is a refined art that studies target audiences, builds a brand, creates needs, seduces, persuades, and sometimes manipulates. It knows how to strike the right chord to transform a product into an unmissable experience. Jesus, on the other hand, did not want to sell anything nor was he looking for customers. He was looking for disciples. He did not want numbers, but rather transformed hearts. Jesus did not build a brand. He built a community of brothers and sisters.

And when the crowds followed him for the wrong reasons – for multiplied loaves, spectacular miracles or the hope of an earthly kingdom – Jesus had the courage to speak harsh words, words that sent people running.

While marketing builds pyramids of power, Jesus overturns them. Marketing seeks visibility. Jesus often asked for silence after his miracles. Marketing demands ever-increasing numbers. Jesus ended his earthly life with only a few faithful followers at the foot of the cross, whilst the crowd shouted, ‘Crucify him!’ The Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus is not imposed by force nor sold through persuasive techniques or built through strategies of conquest. Rather the Kingdom of God is witnessed. It is lived out.

We must never, ever turn the Gospel into a marketing product, the Church into a business, the faithful into customers, nor Jesus into a brand.

Just imagine a marketing strategy based on Jesus' call for each of us to take up our cross and follow him, or a political strategy based on love for one's enemies. Our communication must be different, capable of transforming attitudes and circumstances, and history with them. That is what Jesus did. That is what we should do. We are the stories we tell, and the stories we tell are what we live.

Transparency, clarity, and purity of heart

Additionally, Jesus' way of communicating invites transparency and clarity. We are called to avoid hiding behind a flow of words and instead call things by their proper names without fear of the world even in times of crisis. In the light of the Gospel, crisis communication reveals itself as a privileged space for truth, mercy, closeness and transformation. In the face of crises – betrayal, failure, misunderstandings, scandal or provocation – Jesus demonstrates a communication style that does not eliminate conflict but works through it. He turns it into a space for growth and for the revelation of God's true face.

In every age, therefore, what is most needed to communicate is purity of heart. Romano Guardini wrote: "Our place is in the process of becoming. We must take our place within it, each in our own place. We must not resist the 'new' by trying to preserve a beautiful world doomed to disappear. Nor must we seek to build, on the sidelines, through some fanciful creative force, a new world that we would like to shield from the ravages of evolution. We are charged with the task of giving shape to this evolution, and we can fulfil this task only by adhering to it honestly; whilst nevertheless remaining sensitive, with an incorruptible heart, to all that is destructive and inhuman within it."²

² R. Guardini, *Letters from Lake Como: Technology and Man*, Italian translation by Giulietta Basso, Morcelliana, Brescia 1993.