Damir Šehić

CHALLENGES OF THE DIGITAL CULTURE IN EDUCATION IN THE FAMILY – "TECHNOLOGICAL DISCONNECT" AND ITS MORAL IMPLICATIONS ON EDUCATION IN THE FAMILY

Abstract

The effects of digital culture have transformed society and human ethos, and exponential digitalization has led to an anthropological transformation. By causing profound and complex changes in all levels of the sociocultural environment, digital culture has also changed the psychological, physiological, spiritual, and moral consequences of an individual and family in general. The challenges that digital culture poses to family life by modifying relations of spouses, are also reflected in the upbringing of children and their education, reshaping language, changing mentality, and restructuring value hierarchies.

This paper approaches the topic through two thematic units, the first of which aims to detect some of the most serious challenges of digital culture confronting education in the family. The second part discusses the phenomenon of the "technological disconnect" of family members and some aspects of the challenges that this new phenomenon poses to education in the family. This part of the paper discusses the "technological disconnect" of parents and its implications on children and their moral education, observing the problems of shifting responsibility for upbringing and education to the technology and media, as well as the phenomenon of parental alienation syndrome.

While not disregarding all the benefits of the postmodern digital culture, this work aims at emphasizing and contributing to the

discussion on the negative implications of "technological disconnect" on the moral aspect of education in the family.

Key words: *digital culture, "technological disconnect", moral education, education in family*

Introduction

This research *Challenges Of The Digital Culture in Education in Family – „Technological Disconnect" and its Moral Implications on Education in Family*originated as the product of an interdisciplinary project that sought to approach a complex topic like this one from several perspectives of the different scientific disciplines that touches. Therefore, the paper certainly contains inherent shortcomings of precision in each discipline. Howevery, the starting point is in moral theology. From the perspective of moral theology, an attempt is made to observe the social phenomenon of digital culture that enters and transforms the pedagogical realm, as well as morareligious pedagogy by talking about education in the family and by observing its moral implications of parenting.

1. Challenges of digital culture for education in the family

Starting off by understanding the word digital which comes from the Latin word *digitus,* meaning finger, used as synonymous with "counting", which came from the term counting by fingers, we can offer the etymological origins of the digital culture.[1]

The digital culture through its means of technological inventions and digital evolution, challenges the Church and theology to reflect on the human condition, faith, and the nature of the Church's mission within a radically new context,[2] especially considering morals and education.

Digital culture with its cyberspace epitomizes the ideal of postmodernity. As some theorists consider "surfing the net is the ultimate postmodern experience for it offers omnipresence, multilocality, endless pleasures, time disappears, boredom is

---

[1] Cf. Fulvio Šuran, Quo Vadis Digitalis Homine? Digital Philosophy and the Universe, In: *In Medias Res, časopis filozofije medija,* 8 (2019) 15, 2375-2384., 2376.

[2] Cf. Wim A. Dreyer, Being church in the era of 'homo digitalis', In:*Verbum et Ecclesia,* 40 (2019) 1, 1-7., 1.

deflated, drug of the ever new, without commitment, nomadic, undefined spatiality, anonymous, the reality is malleable, fantasy, ceaseless journeying. All of these readily resonate with the cultural phenomena of postmodernity."[3]

One of the dominant characteristics of the digital culture is, as *Amoris Laetitia* detects, a "culture of the ephemeral",mainly referring to the speed with which people move from one affective relationship to another, from one fashionable idea to another. Along with the lines of social networks, the digital culture has created the impression that love and family can be connected or disconnected at the whim of the consumer. As well as the thought that, once indissoluble and holy marriage as the fundament of the family, can be quickly and easily blocked.[4]

Digital means are pleasant, very useful, and always available. They have offered a new model of behaviour, which has been applied in behaving with people, so the most important life connections and relationships are reducible to materialistic objectification and user-friendly service. Everything, everyone is disposable.[5] Understanding that context of the digital era, some scientists suggested a philosophical premise which introduces the metaphysics of our digital era as a paraphrase of the famous Cartesian syllogism,*computo ergo sum – I compute, therefore I am*, mainly based on the fact that most of our contemporaries are mentally-digitally connected to their touchscreens instead of being interested in direct contact with people around them.[6]Paraphrased more precisely *I post (tweet), so I exist.*[7]Moreover, given the omnipresence of smartphones and digital media in the lives of people in the digital era, it seems more than obvious that technology-initiated routines shape one's self-perception, self-reflection, self-presentation and the impres-

---

[3]   Cf. Jonas Kurlberg, Doing God in Digital Culture: How Digitality Is Shaping Theology, In: *Cursor - Zeitschrift Für Explorative Theologie,* 2020., 1-9., DOI: 10.21428/fb61f6aa.db204d48, 2.

[4]   Cf. FRANJO, *Amoris laetitia – Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family*(19.III.2016.), Vatican, 2016., (Hereinafter: AL), no. 39.

[5]   Cf. Anita L. Cloete, Living in a digital culture: The need for theological reflection, *HTS Teologiese Studies,* 71 (2015) 2, 1-7., DOI: 10.4102/hts.v71i2.2073, 1.

[6]   Cf. Fulvio Šuran, Quo Vadis Digitalis Homine? Digital Philosophy and the Universe, 2376.

[7]   Ibid., 2377.

sion one makes on others.[8]In addition, according to many relevant studies, social media have become an important source of self-esteem.[9]Given this, *I tweet so I exist* turns into the existence reshaped digitally.

Adding the fact that the differences between online and offline life are gradually blurred, with the awareness and consent that the fundamental nature of reality and existence is constantly changing, it is quite clear that this also constitutes the foundations of the new anthropology of *homo digitalis.*[10]According to this philosophical concept, humanity has evolved from *homo sapiens* to a better version of human *homo digitalis,* being that evolved in the age of silicone, with the Fourth Industrial Revolution conducted by digitisation and networking.[11]

1.1. *Philosophical platform ofdigital culture*

The main question is how it is possible for digital culture to challenge the fundamental human ideas, moreover the very essence of human nature. And, can digital culture change our understanding of humanity?

Digital culture can only be understood if one understands the postulates of postmodernism that changed the paradigm of Western civilization, built on Judeo-Christian foundations. Therefore, understanding the philosophical doctrine of the postmodernism is not optional but crucial, because only in that way one can understand the reasons for the development of society and events in the obvious direction.The power of ideas, that is, the power of words, must not be underestimated, for words are the expression of man's ideas well known to our civilization of the Logos, which is acquainted with the divinity of speech. Understanding digital culture begins with understanding the paradigm

---

[8]   Cf. Christian Montag, Sarah Diefenbach, Towards Homo Digitalis: Important Research Issues for Psychology and the Neurosciences at the Dawn of the Internet of Things and the Digital Society, *Sustainability,* 10 (2018) 10, 1-21., 2.

[9]   E.g. Amy L. Gonzales, Jeffrey T. Hancock, Mirror, mirror on my Facebook wall: Effects of exposure to Facebook on self-esteem. *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour, and Social Networking,* 14 (2011) 1-2, 79–83. DOI: doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2009.0411

[10] Cf.Fulvio Šuran, Quo Vadis Digitalis Homine? Digital Philosophy and the Universe, 2377.

[11] Cf. Wim A. Dreyer, Being church in the era of 'homo digitalis', 3.; E.g. Natasha F. Saxberg, *Homo Digitalis.How Huma Needs Support Digital Behavior for People, Organizations and Societies*, Copenhagen, 2015.

of Western civilization, built on Judeo-Christian philosophical foundation that shaped the very basic postulates ofthe concept of human nature.

The anthropology of Western civilization was formed under the cover of the Christian view of man, who was created by God and is in relationship with him.As a relational being,unless man "relates himself to others, he can neither live nor develop his potential.".[12]Christian anthropology builds on the anthropological question of what man is in himself in relation to God by asking about man's vocation, which, among other things, is determined by the creation of the Sabbath after him. The Sabbath implies that man as well as humanity is not the last instance of creation, but the penultimate. By completing the creation of the world, on the Sabbath God establishes a divine reality that stands above the order of creation, and is contained in the aspect of creation that reveals the purpose and meaning of man beyond mere earthly existence.[13] The Sabbath directs man, God's image, to the service of adoration and worship of the Creator, in which he manifests the fullness of his own existence, in relation to God for whom he was created.[14]

The dignity of human person in the context of Christian view shows that man is not the bearer of human dignity per se, but it is given to him as a gracious gift of God as the crown and pinnacle of God's creation.[15] It is not, therefore, a wrong perception of man as more than matter and irreducible to a mere particle of "nature or an anonymous element of human society", because he transcends the entire reality by admitting to himself an immortal soul which is not only a product of false physical or social conditions, but on the contrary, he reaches the very essence and the truth of things.[16] The reasons mentioned, as well as the connec-

57

---

[12] Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Gaudium et spes – Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (7.XII.1965.), In: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_196 51207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (10.3.2023.), no. 12. (Hereinafter: GS.)

[13] Cf. Damir Šehić, *Teološko-bioetičko vrjednovanje ustavnosudskih odluka o pobačaju.*, Katolički bogoslovni fakultet, Zagreb, 2021., 263.

[14] Cf. John Thomas Swann, *The Imago Dei. A Priestly Calling for Humankind*, Wipf and Stock, Eugene (IN), 2017., 34.

[15] Cf. GS, no. 12.

[16] Cf. *Ibid.,* no. 14.

tion between the idea of God and the self-concept of man, confirm why Christian anthropology is considered personal-forming.[17]

The origins of the humanistic philosophy of digital culture, initiated with the Greek thought, starting with Socrates' doctrine of the immortality of soul, received an ethical imposition in his ethical intellectualism, on which Platonic dualism was built, which considers man as an accidental unity of two completely different components, soul and body.[18] The dualistic construction of the overall reality considers man on this earth to be temporary, in constant desire for the super sensible and transcendent, with which he stands in contact with his reason.[19] Despite the dualism, there was a common ground, an objective created world. With the Cartesian turn to the thinking subject, as the only clear and separate idea, the body as an extended substance (*res extensa)* and the soul as a thinking substance *(res cogitans)* are irreversibly separated from the predominant European thought.[20]

Explicit impact on understanding the human nature had the "emphasis on the mind as information independent of physical human body, the obsolescence of the human body, the elimination of the human particularity and uniqueness, subordinated to the Logic and orderliness of the computer as a metaphor for the cosmos".[21]

The Cartesian search for an undoubted foundation of human knowledge led to an important change in the perception of the human being, and generated a split in the human being.[22] The body is first separated from the soul, after which the soul that actually animates human matter, is omitted, and its functions are attributed to consciousness, that is, to the human brain. With this, the soul is materialized, after which the body tries to

---

[17] Cf. Ivan Devčić, *Pred Bogom blizim i dalekim. Filozofija o religiji,* Filozofsko-teološki institut Družbe Isusove, Zagreb, 2007., 207.

[18] Cf. Ivan Šestak, *Prilozi filozofiji o čovjeku*, Filozofsko-teološki institut Družbe Isusove, Zagreb, 2011., 17.

[19] Cf. *Ibid.,* 18.

[20] Cf. *Ibid.,* 35.

[21] Cf. Denis M. Weiss, Human Nature and the Digital Culture. The Case for Philosophical Antropology,In: *Paideia*, https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Anth/AnthWeis.htm(10.2.2023.)

[22] Cf. Luis Miguel Pastor, Jose Ángel Garcia Cuadrado, Modernity and postmodernity in the genesis of transhumanism-posthumanism, In:*Cuadernos de bioética*, 25(2014) 3, 335-350., 337.

transcend itself through dematerialization. Separation of subject and object, God and nature are separated, thus beginning the mechanistic understanding of matter. Subjectivist rationalism makes being subject to opinion, and human reason becomes the highest instance, whereby the created reality loses its authority and value.[23] Cartesian dualism becomes the platform for the construction of transhumanist anthropology[24], which is intellectually upgraded by his successors, the rationalists, on whose thought the empiricists were also dependent to a considerable extent. The optimistic rationality of modernity, vigorously criticized by postmodernist thought, carried out the subjectivist instrumentalisation of the mind, and used the will to power to equate the true mind with technical-scientific rationality.[25]

59

The aforementioned philosophy of digital culture is equivalent to the technocratic paradigm, as pope Francis addresses it in *Laudato Si'*[26]*,* is a postmodernist paradigm that underpins contemporary culture and society promotes an era of liberation from the oppressive structures of the past. Despite the fact that postmodernism describes itself as anti-philosophical, which implies the rejection of traditional philosophical alternatives, in all statements or texts of postmodernists, at least implicitly, a certain notion of reality and values is assumed.[27]

The tenors of the postmodern who influenced the development of postmodern culture, deny the Judeo-Christian image of man as the created Imago Dei, who is the crown of creation and who completes the meaning of the created earth and human society. This fundamental truth of the Christian anthology was especially fearlessly promoted by St. John Paul II, in the midst of a paradigm shift, that vehemently denies the fact that only in the Judeo-Christian environment could man be awakened to the awareness of the person and personal freedom.[28] Western soci-

---

[23]   Cf. Ivan Šestak, *Prilozi filozofiji o čovjeku*, 36.

[24]   Cf. Odilon-Gbenoukpo Singbo, *Teološko-bioetičko vrjednovanje transhumanistič-ke antropologije*, Kršćanska sadašnjost, Zagreb, 2021., 228.

[25]   Cf. Ivan Šestak, *Prilozi filozofiji o čovjeku*, 36.

[26]   Cf. FRANCIS, *Laudato si' – Encyclical Leter on Care for Our Common Home,* (24. III.2015.) In: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html(11.2.2023.), no. 106., (Hereinafter: LS.)

[27]   Cf. Stephen Ronald Craig Hicks, *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucalt,* New Berlin, Scolargy Publishing, 2004., 6.

[28]   Cf. Ivan Šestak, *Prilozi filozofiji o čovjeku.* 24.

ety was built and shaped on the recognition of man as a human person with full dignity and human rights, to be the first historical civilization circle to do so.[29]

On the contrary, the idea of postmodernism on which the paradigm of the modern world was shaped and built, denies human individual value, emphasizing that the identity of the individual is largely constructed by the socio-linguistic groups to which they belong, and the groups are varying across dimensions of sex, race, ethnicity, and wealth. Human nature, they believe, is determined by the struggles between these groups that are resolved by relations of domination, submission, and oppression,[30] and the person has no inherent value but is merely an example of his race, gender, ethnicity, or another group. Taking this into account, it becomes clear what constitutes anthropological transformation.

But the anthropological transformation does not stop here. The next scale is overcoming these biological-social material categories, and in the spirit of the Cartesian understanding of the mind as primary, the human body, sex, race, age, ethnicity isabsolutely irrelevant when one defines himself in the digital world or cyberspace. Digital sphere gives us chance to easily change our identity in the form of qualities that we identify with, by simply changing a very few lines of text.[31]Cyberspace is a mode of existence in a purely bodiless, inhuman state, and the person becomes an information, modelled and filtered words and ideas.[32] The same cannot remain without influence on man and his self-concept, which consequently fundamentally changes the anthropological paradigm, changing humans themselves.

One of the interesting paradoxes of the digital age that challenges human autonomy and control is in the fact that people extend their bodiless powers through information control system

---

[29]   Cf. Damir Šehić,*Teološko-bioetičko vrjednovanje ustavnosudskih odluka o poba-čaju.*268.

[30]   Cf. Stephen Ronald Craig Hicks, *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucalt,* 7.

[31]   Cf. Fulvio Šuran, Quo Vadis Digitalis Homine? Digital Philosophy and the Universe, 2379.

[32]   Cf. *Ibid.*

and they simultaneously open the door to being controlled and constrained by this very system they create.[33]

The ongoing paradigm shifts and profound anthropological transformation creates new dimensions, and requires new approaches and methods, because it seems that a new nature of man and a new form of humanism are being created, which inaugurates its own system of values.[34]

1.2. *Anthropological transformation indigital culture*

Without a doubt, postmodern society is passing through an extremely delicate and complex phase of global mutation, and people are in the midst of an overwhelming process of anthropological transformation. This unprecedented paradigmatic change consists of conditioning the biological evolution by cultural evolution which includes technique and technologies, as never before. The anthropological transformation has also reinforced an illusion of human unlimited power and potential with great risks of separating humanity from its own nature and from "Nature" itself. That is obvious simply by considering the developments in the fields of genetics, robotics, and artificial intelligence, where human beings appear to be capable of (pre)determining sequences of life events, even from the very beginning, the reproduction and the ending of a life.[35]

Digital culture has initiated a sort of anthropological transformation, changing the paradigm of values and norms themselves. Anthropological and cultural change is taking place in all areas of human life and requires a change of approach.[36]Numerous authors consider this anthropological transformation to be an anthropological crisis, which tries to transcend human nature, by its postmodernist mentality, to trans humanize human short-

---

[33]   Cf. Esther Oluffa Pedersen, Maria Brincker, Philosophy and Digitalization. Dangers and Possibilities in the New Digital Worlds, In: *SATS - Northern European Journal of Philosophy,* 22 (2021) 1, 1-9., 1.

[34]   Cf. Piero Dominici, The Digital Mockingbird. Anthropological Transformation and the "New" Nature, In: *World Futures The Journal of General* Evolution 78(2022) 6, 1-29., DOI: 10.1080/02604027.2022.2028539, 1.

[35]   Cf. Piero Dominici, The Digital Mockingbird. Anthropological Transformation and the "New" Nature, 2.

[36]   Cf. AL, no. 32.

comings and to create a biologically and psychologically superior post human.[37]

The new "biotechnical century" introduces us to new possibilities of development in the fusion of genetic and computer evolution, and thus to the economic era of commercial use of numerous biotechnological scientific discoveries. The techno-scientific revolution modifies the current possibilities of biology and implies a future paradigm shift in the understanding of sexuality, reproduction, birth, and the need for ethical reflection[38]. The novelty of transhumanist anthropology is manifested through the fact what was a necessity until yesterday, is understood as a choice today. Remaining a "natural man" becomes a choice that is already being made in decisions about nutrition and the type of food one consumes, procreation in which one can choose the genetic settings of the child, pharmacology and medicine in which one chooses what improvements wants, etc.[39]It is the same philosophical platform of digital culture as the technocratic paradigm that Pope Francis opposes to Christian anthropology[40], which constitutes the intellectual, moral, and spiritual antipode of the same.[41]

In the context of the Catholic educational approach, this phenomenon is taken seriously in the new Directory of Catechesis in the chapter on Catechesis in the face of contemporary cultural scenarios. The Directory recognizes the anthropological transformation of society that detects a three-tier society made up of firstly, people who do not cope with the digital age, than digital migrants or those who later became participants in the digital world, and a generation born in the digital age.[42]Differentiation is needed because it indicates a fundamental difference in men-

---

[37] Cf. O. N. Gorodyskaya, Antropological crisis. Searching for overcoming strategy, 2019., In: *Philpapers,*https://philpapers.org/rec/goracs-4 (23.2.2023.)

[38] Cf. Marija Selak, *Ljudska priroda i nova epoha*, Naklada Breza, Zagreb, 2013., 68.

[39] Cf. Odilon-Gbenoukpo Singbo, *Teološko-bioetičko vrjednovanje transhumanističke antropologije*, 258.

[40] Cf. LS, no. 106.

[41] Cf. Nadia Delicata, The family and the dominant technocratic paradigm: challenges in the digital culture, In: *Strengthening Families*, J. Stala, J. Garmaz (ed.), The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow Press, Kraków 2016., 223-250., 228.

[42] Cf. PONTIFICIO CONSIGLIO PER LA PROMOZIONE DELLA NOUVA EVANGELIZZAZIONE, *Dirrettorio per la Catechesi,* Citta del Vaticano, 2020., no. 362.

tal approach and style of communication, because digitalization and artificial intelligence change the existing human biological characteristics, capacities and functioning. A new type of person is characterized by the presence of "digital competencies" and is aimed at combining its own intellectual abilities and resources of intellectual systems.[43]

Another great change caused by digital "omnipotence", which directly affects the anthropological transformation and the approach to human nature, but above all in the practical possibilities of the man of the digital age, is the "digital afterlife". The means of the digital era offerincredible possibility of digital afterlife, through the fact that the dead continue to live on within social networks. Some studies concerning the dead and digital media have shown that users increasingly maintain a mediated connection to the decreased by posting statuses and messages, while some social network platforms enable profiles to be placed into memorialized state.[44]

1.3. *Some challenges of digital culture inthefamily relations*

"Parental love is the single most important factor in a child's life".[45]There is no scientific doubt that parents are held responsible for teaching their children about values, social norms, and accepted behaviour, as well as enabling their children to study, help in the family, remain healthy, and be able to make good decisions about people and information.[46] The great challenge parents are facing emerges as children gain access to the Internet, especially by using mobile devices that are difficult to super-

---

[43]   Cf. Tatyana Leshkevich, Anthropological Changes of the Person of the Digital Era, In:*6th International Conference on Contemporary Education, Social Sciences and Humanities.(Philosophy of Being Human as the Core of Interdisciplinary Research,* Atlanta, 2020., 100-104., 102.

[44]   Cf. Robbie Fordyce, Bjork Nansen, Micha Tamara Kohn, Martin Gibbs, Automating Digital Afterlives, In: *Disentangling. The Geographies of Digital Disconnection,*Andre Jansona, Paul C. Adams (ed.), Oxford, 2021., 115.

[45]   Cf. Ronald P. Rohner, Introduction to Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPARTheory) and Evidence, In: *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture,* 6 (2021) 1, DOI: 10.9707/2307-0919.1055, 1-65., 3.

[46]   Cf. Sonia Livingstone, Jasmina Byrne, Parenting in the Digital Age. The Challenges of Parental Responsibility in Comparative Perspective, In: Giovanna Mascheroni, Cristina Ponte, Ana Jorge (eds.), *Digital Parenting. The Challenges for Families in the Digital Age, Yearbook 2018.,*Nordicom, University of Gothenburg, 2018., 19-30., 19.

vise, moreover in contact with technologically complex services that parents as digital migrants may not understand.[47]

Sophisticated technologies simultaneously facilitate and complicate the educational and upbringing process in the family."In digitally connected, family have broadened both the scale and scope of parenting obligations, heralding the practice of transcendent parenting".[48]When used well, technology makes a great difference in the communication of family members who are distant from each other, allowing frequent visual and audio interactions of family members, and helping overcome difficulties. However, digital means cannot replace or substitute personal and deeper encounters that require physical presence and closeness, irreplaceable in a family relationship, especially in the upbringing of children in the family. Nevertheless, ambivalent effect of digital means leans over to negative impact on the dynamics of family relationships, especially through alienation.[49]

The human family is not a mere biological and socio-economic reality. It is the most foundational social and educational core that nurtures to become truly human by teaching to transcend ourselves to the other, especially the Ultimate Other.[50]More crucially, in families one is being formed spiritually to become developed person, men and women who desire to become loving by knowing and exchanging love. Still, child grows older and is exposed to wider networks of human relationships in the neighbourhood, extended family, school and society as a whole.

Some recent large-scale studies on the sample of 2,326 parents of children aged 0-8 on their practise and attitude surrounding their children's digital media use, which showed that digital media use varied from family to family. The parents' own usage of digital media strongly influenced their children's media use. Approximately, a quarter of the parents who reported their digital-centric lifestyle, averaging approximately 11 hours of media use a day, reported their children's heavy medias usage, about

---

[47] Cf. Sonia Livingstone, Jasmina Byrne, Parenting in the Digital Age. The Challenges of Parental Responsibility in Comparative Perspective, 20.

[48] Cf. Sun Sun Lim, Transcendent Parenting in Digitally Connected Families. When the Technological Meets the Social, In: Giovanna Mascheroni, Cristina Ponte, Ana Jorge (eds.), *Digital Parenting. The Challenges for Families in the Digital Age, Yearbook 2018.,*Nordicom, University of Gothenburg, 2018., 31-40., 31.

[49] Cf. AL, no. 278.

[50] Cf. Nadia Delicata, *The family and the dominant technocratic paradigm: challenges in the digital culture*, 223–250, 236.

4,5 hours on a daily basis. A quarter of parents who reported media use approximately 2 hours a day, reported their children's media use more than 1.5 hours a day.[51]Equally as a positive correlation was detected between the parents' use of the Internet and their children's use of the Internet[52], a causal connection between the use of the Internet as an escape from reality among adolescents and the quality of the relationship with their parents was also detected, as defined by the interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory.[53] Many scholars have been interested in interpersonal relationships as predictors of excessive internet use. "There are a number of studies that support the assumption that poor family relationships and functioning are linked to problematic internet use."[54]

The internet is not just a playground for children, it is increasingly becoming the medium through which adolescents fill their developmental needs for social interactions. Adolescent relationships are being initiated, maintained, and transformed online, and by using the internet for social interaction the youth can control their self-expression, can experiment with their identity or self-presentation. Digital means and social networks are perfect for those with lower social skills as a way to connect to their peers and seek emotional support online, while at thesame time providing immediate reward and gratification.[55]The problem with the aforementioned is the fact that over time adolescents develop a preference for online social interaction almost exclusively. "Both emotional problems and preference for online social interaction have been found to be associated with using the internet excessively in a way it might cause negative healthoutcomes, such as missing social engagements, experiencing

---

[51] Cf. Elisabeth Gee, Lori Tekuchi, Ellen Wartella, The Introduction, In: Elisabeth Gee, Lori Tekuchi, Ellen Wartella (ed.), Children and Family in the Digital Age: Learning Together in Media Saturated Culture, Routledge, New York, 2017., 1-13., 3.

[52] Cf. Elisabeth Gee, Lori Tekuchi, Ellen Wartella, The Introduction, 3.

[53] Cf. Ronald P. Rohner, Introduction to Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPARTheory) and Evidence, 3.

[54] Cf. Jakub Mikuška et. Al., Social relational factors of excessive internet use in four European countries, In: *International Journal of Public Health,* 65 (2020) 8, 1289-1297., DOI: 10.1007/s00038-020-01484-2, 1290.

[55] Cf. Jakub Mikuška et. Al., Social relational factors of excessive internet use in four European countries, 1289.

subjective problems in life, and developing difficulties in keeping up with school or work requirements".[56]

The great challenge for families in excessive internet usage, as was already mentioned, are interpersonal relationships being predictors of the same. Researchers tested Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory in the context of internet gaming disorder and found "that experiencing parental rejection was indirectly associated with problematic online behaviour"[57]. Another study found a direct relationship between family functioning and internet gaming disorder.[58]Therefore, conclusion can be made that positive parenting, meaning parental acceptance, warmth, closeness, and communication has been consistently found to be a direct or indirect protective factor in studies that focused on excessive or problematic Internet use.[59]

The observed inclination of children and adolescents to excessive use of the Internet and to satisfy the need for social interaction online, without direct contact, has grounds for the conclusion that "Generation Z" and "Generation Alpha"[60], usually called digital natives, e.g. people born in an augmented society where technology and social media are ubiquitous and where algorithms make decisions or skew their perceptions, are increasingly turning into *homo digitalis.*

However, parenting in the digital context is not hopeless and clueless. Some parental solutions in managing their children internet use revealed two styles of parental mediation. The first is *restrictive mediation* in which parents are restricting or banning or insisting on supervising any of a long list of online activities.[61]This parental mediation style is called the gatekeepers because they emphasise restrictive mediation and act as a gateway to the technology to ensure *protectione* and *provisino.*[62]The

---

[56]   Cf. *Idib.*, 1290.

[57]   Cf. *Ibid.,* 1290.

[58]   Cf. *Ibid.*

[59]   Cf. *Ibid.*

[60]   Cf. Eva Teba Fernández, Educating the homo digitalis: the role of education and digcomedu to palyate the effects of algorithms, fake news, polarization and lack of critical thinking, In: *Vivat Academia. Revista de Comunicación*, 154 (2021), 71-92., DOI: 10.15178/va.2021.154.e1378, 71.

[61]   Sonia Livingstone, Jasmina Byrne, Parenting in the Digital Age. The Challenges of Parental Responsibility in Comparative Perspective, 21.

[62]   Cf. Patricia Dias, et. Al. The role of parents in the engagement of young children with digital technologies. Exploring tensions between rights of access and

second style was *enabling mediation* in which parents are undertaking active strategies such as talking to a child about what they do online or encouraging their activities as well as giving safety advice, usage of technical controls, and parental monitoring which are building a safe framework and encouraging positive uses of the internet.[63] This style is also referred as scaffolding where parents discover the optimal level at which to instruct the child, and they facilitate a broad range ofmediation strategies including supportive and instructive position.[64]

Culture educates our sensibilities and therefore our ability to be reasonable, to attest to truth and act morally. If the family, as the immediate relational circle, nurtures the child'sinclination to personhood, culture is what informs the very expression of personhood among people in a particular time and space.Therefore, culture is the very context in which human families exist. "Digital technologies are recreating our culture through new opportunities for humanization, but also new dangers for a dominant technocratic paradigm to thwart the inherent integral relationality of all things grounded in God."[65]

This space of society and community has expanded to digital means, especially to the internet which has become a new backyard where children play and learn. Understanding that, the new advice of the pastoral theology instructs the Christian community not to ask how to use new technology to evangelize and raise children in the faith but to ask how to become an evangelizing presence on the digital continent.[66]

Regarding family, one of the important influences that this digital continent has brought to education in family is digital parenting. The concept of digitally mediated parenting arises new themes such as: parents mediating children's online activities; perception and experience gaps of parents and children; parents

protection, from 'Gatekeepers' to 'Scaffolders', In: *Global Studies of Childhood* 6 (2016) 4, 414–427. 417.

[63]   Cf. Sonia Livingstone, Jasmina Byrne, Parenting in the Digital Age. The Challenges of Parental Responsibility in Comparative Perspective, 21-22.

[64]   Cf. Patricia Dias, et. Al. The role of parents in the engagement of young children with digital technologies. Exploring tensions between rights of access and protection, from 'Gatekeepers' to 'Scaffolders', 417.

[65]   Cf. Nadia Delicata, The family and the dominant technocratic paradigm: challenges in the digital culture, 246.

[66]   Cf. PONTIFICIO CONSIGLIO PER LA PROMOZIONE DELLA NOUVA EVANGELIZZAZIONE, *Dirrettorio per la Catechesi,* no. 371.

and children interacting through social media; and the role of technology in parenting at a distance. The impacts of digital and online technologies on parenting and parent–child relationships are yet to be understood, described and measured.

2. The "technological disconnect" of family members

The phenomenon of technological disconnect is introduced into theological discourse by the encyclical *Amoris Laetitia,* which pope Francis considers to be a serious obstacle in the family that has given in to the dangers of forms of new communication. *Amoris Laetitia* detects the consequences of the phenomenon of technological disconnect, especially in relation to children and young people, who are alienated by the uncontrolled influence of digital culture not only from the real world, their own families but also from themselves, leading to apathy, passivity and reduced social and personal ambitions.[67]

Technological disconnect is a kind of new terminus technicus for a phenomenon whose occurrences and consequences are already seen in the family and society, but which has yet to be explored. Technological disconnect, unlike digital disconnect, which is a kind of right to disconnect from the network, especially in the context of the constant availability of workers, represents a disconnection from reality due to virtual reality.

2.1. *Someaspects of "technological disconnect" challenges to education in the family*

Both parents, mother and father are involved in significantly different types of relationships and activities with the child, which is a major predictor of the development of his personality. Better educational influence is achieved by synchronization and togetherness of father and mother than when they act separately.[68] Equally, the quality of marital relationships and ways of parental interaction is an important developmental factor at the child's early age.[69]

---

[67]   Cf. AL, no. 278.
[68]   Cf. Pavao Brajša, *Brak i obitelj iz drugog kuta,* Glas Koncila, Zagreb, 2009., 76.
[69]   Cf. Michael E. Lamb, Charlie Lewis, Father-Child Relationships,127.

According to some research, there are more father subjects to technological disconnect, which can be associated with the increasing number of platforms that are predominantly male. Although, the behaviour of technologically disconnected person can also be seen in mothers. It may be needless to mention, but children who grow up without a father have a higher risk of emotional and mental problems and school failure,[70] and the father's absence in the child's development is the most important factor in developing antisocial behaviour and inclination to crime in boys.[71]The same educational effects are achieved, according to some research, in the physically present father who lives with the child, but is actually absent, does not provide the child with paternal support, is emotionally distant or inaccessible.[72] It is not certain to what extent the term technological disconnect enters the realm of parental alienation syndrome. With this phenomenon, if scientific verification confirms it as such at all, a largely unexplored space is opened, which is expanding with further digitalization. The situation poses the question of to what extent a technologically disconnected child is a consequence of parental disconnect and to where the child is rejecting once accepted and meaningful relationship.

This technological phenomenon and its impact on family life and relations have been a great concern of *Amoris Laetitia* in the seventh chapter Towards a Better Education of Children. Understanding the context of modern families, which are largely characterized by "a cultural decline that fails to promote love or self-giving", pope Francis detects symptoms of *the culture of the ephemeral.*[73]

The Pontiff is referring to the "speed with which people move from one affective relationship to another, believing along the lines of social networks, that love can be connected or disconnected at the whim of the consumer, and the relationship quickly

---

[70]   Cf. Rebecca O'Neill, The Fatherless Family, In: *CIVITAS–The Institute for the Study of Civil Society,*Civitas, London, 2002., 1-20, 7.

[71]   Cf. Michael F. Teneyck, Krysta N. Knox, Sarah A. El Sayed, Absent Father Timing and its Impact on Adolescent and Adult Criminal Behavior, In:*American Journal of Criminal Justice,* 2021., 1-25., DOI: 10.1007/s12103-021-09640-x, 1.

[72]   Cf. Gary L. Dick, The Changing Role of Fatherhood: The Father as a Provider of Selfobject Functions, 112-113.

[73]   Cf. AL, no. 39.

blocked".[74] Referring also to the parental fears of permanent commitment, the obsession with free time, and the attitude toward relationships not in a vision of God's plan for man and woman in a firm marital bond, but in weighing "costs and benefits for the sake of remedying loneliness, providing protection, or offering some service".[75] People are treating affective relationships the same way they and the whole postmodern culture treat material objects and the environment, "everything is disposable, everyone uses and throws away, takes and breaks, exploits, and squeezes to the last drop. Then, goodbye." As *Amoris Laetitia* detected, "the culture of the ephemeral appears to replicate the patterns of interaction on online social networks. A tendency to objectifying the other echoes the consumerist ethos, itself grounded in mechanical means of production and an instrumentalist mindset."[76]

It is a social and family context that is under constant danger of being a victim of the narcissistic tendencies that makes people incapable of looking beyond themselves and beyond their own desires and needs.[77] One may think the means he uses will not make a great influence if one holds them under control, but evidence shows that digital means change people on a more fundamental level, technology changes us as its users, by silently instructing in new habits of experiencing, reasoning, and acting. Authors suggest that the same way a book implicitly trains the reader to be focused on a text, as well as appropriated lifestyle attitude, so browsing online seems to be tacitly shaping people to surface gaze, judge instantaneously based on immediate impressions.[78]

In this highly demanding and fluid digital age, parents are key factors that can amortize the negative effects of digital culture on a child's life, development, and personality.Aggravating circumstances for parents are manifold, starting with the fact that caregivers are not the first people to whom children want to reveal their emotional concerns, social adjustment problems,

---

[74] Cf. *Ibid.*
[75] Cf. *Ibid.*
[76] Cf. Nadia Delicata, The family and the dominant technocratic paradigm: challenges in the digital culture, 225.
[77] Cf. AL, no. 39.
[78] Cf. Nadia Delicata, The family and the dominant technocratic paradigm: challenges in the digital culture, 225.

and love concerns in adolescence.[79] Another problem is the fact
the internet is complicated, fast-changing, and ever-updated
space which is creating great difficulties for parents in grasping
important things their children need to know and learn. Further-
more, minorities of parents are truly neglectful of or abusive to
their children, which makes them inappropriate to ensure their
child's safety.[80] This exactly is the context in which *Amoris Laeti-
tia* warns that society should not ignore the risks that these new
forms of communication pose for children and adolescents, they
actually "at times can foster apathy and disconnect from the real
world. This "technological disconnect" exposes them more easily
to manipulation by those who would invade their private space
with selfish interests".[81]Children thus technologically discon-
nected are extremely vulnerable and exposed to exploitation and
abuse, even more so if their parents are absent or disconnected.

2.2. *Moral implications of "technological disconnected" parents*

This technological disconnect as we have seen can also be
applied to the parents, which is making even greater damage to
the family relations. Parents who interact more with digital tech-
nology than in person, were initially described as absent parents
or the act of being physically present but having mind elsewhere
based on communication or content from mobile phones.[82] "More
recently, the concept of "technoference", has been introduced,
defined as everyday interruptions in interpersonal interactions
or time spent together that occur due to digital and mobile tech-
nology devices".[83] Trying to define what constitutes "problematic"
media use for parents, several studies investigated the quality
and quantity of parent-child interactions with the parent's digi-
tal technology use. Studies have suggested that parent mobile

---

[79]   Cf. Sonia Livingstone, Jasmina Byrne, Parenting in the Digital Age. The Chall-
enges of Parental Responsibility in Comparative Perspective, 27.

[80]   Cf. *Ibid.,* 27.

[81]   Cf. AL, no. 278.

[82]   Cf. Brandon T. Mcdaniel, Jenny S. Radesky, Technoference: Parent Distracti-
on With Technology and Associations With Child Behavior Problems, In: *Child
Development*, 89 (2017) 1, 100–109., DOI:10.1111/cdev.12822, 100.

[83]   Cf. Brandon T. Mcdaniel, Jenny S. Radesky, Technoference: Parent Distraction
With Technology and Associations With Child Behavior Problem, 100.

technology use around children is associated with fewer parent-child interactions, lower responsivity to child bids, and qualitative observations of parent hostility in response to child bids for attention.[84]This parents'technoference, absent parents or technologically disconnected parents as *Amoris Laetitia* addresses it, have a great moral implications and consequences. "Parents always influence the moral development of their children, for better or for worse"[85], meaning there are always moral consequences of parents behaviour, therefore they should take up this essential role and carry it out consciously, enthusiastically, reasonably and appropriately. Parents are obligated to consider what they want their children to be exposed to which includes constant concern about "who is providing their entertainment, who is entering their rooms through television and electronic devices, and with whom they are spending their free time".[86] Parents are morally obligated to devote time to their children, teaching them moral values and witnessing them by their own example with simplicity and concern, which is the only way to shield them from harm and prepare for the real Christian life.

Amoris Laetitia tries to emphasize the manifestation of a deep-seated structural sin in our times,neglect and abandonment of the family that places children in the centre[87], that threatens to not just "change", but dismember the family as fundamental relational and formative human experience. The research on how technology shapes culture and our self-understanding as human beings inevitably must be placed in the centre of all reflections on the family and, especially, on education and upbringing, because family is the centre of the wellbeing of the society.[88]

Parents are deeply responsible for shaping the will of their children, as well as their moral formation, "fostering good habits and natural inclination to goodness. This entails presenting certain ways of thinking and acting as desirable and worthwhile, as part of a gradual process of growth".[89] That is the reason why it is so important that within their families parents encourage shared

---

[84] Cf. *Ibid,* 101.

[85] Cf. AL, no. 259.

[86] Cf. AL, no. 260.

[87] Cf. AL, no. 259.

[88] Cf. Nadia Delicata, The family and the dominant technocratic paradigm: challenges in the digital culture, 227.

[89] AL, no. 264.

expressions of faith which can help children gradually to mature in their own faith.[90]Parents should always provide moral formation through active methods and dialogue that teaches through sensitivity, always accompanied by a good living example. That is the way for children to learn themselves the importance of certain values, principles, and norms, rather than imposing these as absolute and unquestionable truths.[91] That cannot be provided by an absent or technologically disconnected parent, but only by a conscience and grateful parent who is aware of his irreplaceable role.

Amoris Laetitia offers a great pedagogical emphasis in preaching the Gospel of the family that spans the history of the world, from the creation of man and woman as Imago Dei, the image of God (Gen 1:26-27), to the fulfilment of the mystery of the covenant in Christ at the end of time with the marriage of the Lamb (Rev 19:9).[92]

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION –"TECHNOLOGICAL DISCONNECT" AND ITS MORAL IMPLICATIONS

We seem to be in a moment in history where things that are self-evident must be articulated. Nevertheless, we will repeat the words of*Familiaris Consortio*: Parents, through the Divine command of Procreation, have given new life to their children, they have the most solemn obligation to raise their offspring, with the greatest respect for the image of God in which they were created. If parents, as the first and main educators of their children, fail to do so, hardly anything can make up for their failure.[93]

Although all parents as human beings often fail in many aspects of universal and religious upbringing, the failure of this aforementioned kind brings a new level of moral responsibility.

To extend parental responsibility for the education of children to the wider reality,"Christian communities are called to

---

[90] FRANCIS, *Lumen Fidei – Encyclical Letter on Faith,* (29.VI.2013), In: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html#:~:text=The%20light%20of%20Faith%3A%20this,(Jn%2012%3A46). (11.3.2023.), no. 53.

[91] Cf. AL., no. 264.

[92] Cf. AL. no. 63.

[93] Cf. JOHN PAUL II., *Familiaris consortio – Apostolic Exhortation on the role of the Christian family in the modern world,* (22.11.1981.), no. 36.

offer support to the educational mission of families", particularly through the catechesis associated with Christian initiation. To foster an integral education, we need to "renew the covenant between the family and the Christian community". Therefore, moral responsibility rests alsoon the entire Christian community, starting with ourselves.