

Editorial ■ Uvodnik

Digitalization and Religious (Christian) Education and Formation

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The theme of the second issue of the journal *Religija i obrazovanje. Časopis za teološko-religijska i pedagoška istraživanja* (RiO) fits well within the contemporary efforts of the Church to connect Christian education with digital and virtual reality — that is, to foster an education that prepares for an inevitable, yet constructive and appropriate, Christian participation in that reality. An introduction to, and brief presentation of, this issue of the journal may fittingly begin with, and be informed by, reflections drawn from a short, yet highly symbolic and significant address that concisely, thoughtfully, and realistically summarizes the relationship between digital technologies and education from a Christian perspective. These are the illustrative words of Pope Leo XIV, spoken in his message for the 60th World Communications Day on 24 January 2026, entitled *Preserving Human Voices and Faces*. The Day itself will be celebrated this year on 17 May.

In addressing his message both to the Church and to the wider public, the Pope approaches the theme of digital technology primarily from the perspective of safeguarding the human person and his or her irreducible dignity and uniqueness. In this regard, education and formation for an appropriate relationship with digital technologies are of crucial importance. Pope Leo XIV situates the question of education for a proper engagement with digital technologies — and especially with artificial intelligence (AI) — within a broader message of shared responsibility and cooperation, emphasizing:

“We are all called upon to cooperate. No sector can tackle the challenge of steering digital innovation and AI governance alone. Safeguards must therefore be put in place. All stakeholders — from the tech industry to legislators, from creative companies to academia, from artists to journalists and educators — must be involved in building and implementing informed and responsible digital citizenship. Education aims to do precisely this: to increase our personal ability to think cri-

tically, to evaluate whether our sources are trustworthy and to discern the possible interests behind selecting the information to which we have access; to understand the psychological mechanisms involved; and to enable our families, communities, and associations to develop practical criteria for a healthier and more responsible culture of communication.

For this reason, it is increasingly urgent to introduce media, information, and AI literacy into education systems at all levels, as already promoted by some civil institutions. As Catholics, we can and must contribute to this effort, so that individuals — especially young people — can acquire critical thinking skills and grow in freedom of spirit. This literacy should also be integrated into broader lifelong learning initiatives, reaching out to older adults and marginalised members of society, who often feel excluded and powerless in the face of rapid technological change.”

It is both encouraging and noteworthy that the efforts invested in preparing this issue of *Religija i obrazovanje* (RiO) correspond closely with the aspirations of the ecclesial-theological and religious-pedagogical sectors of the academic community to realise precisely such a contribution to education and formation at all levels of personal development and maturation. The aim of this contribution is to foster an increasingly appropriate relationship with digital-technological reality itself, and particularly with some of its most significant developments, such as artificial intelligence. With this aim in mind, the present issue offers several valuable scholarly papers that complement one another, providing authentic research contributions as well as academic reflections on particular themes and their interrelation, all in view of discerning suitable paths of progress within the digital-virtual sphere. The aforementioned theme of communication is, in this sense, both fundamental and perennially significant. The human person, as a being of relationships, is confronted in the digital-virtual world with new possibilities and new challenges for development and meaning, above all in the sphere of communication. Digital technology offers unprecedented opportunities for the expression of humanity’s relational nature, while at the same time revealing new and as yet unexplored areas of responsibility.

In this regard, the contribution of Slavko Slišković first directs attention to the rich and longstanding heritage of the Church in fostering diverse forms and means of communication and in transmitting the message of the Gospel. The example of Jesus and the first disciples remains a foundational and ever-inspiring point of reference for both reflection and practice. Yet it is equally important to recognize the various ways

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Digitalizacija i religijski (kršćanski) odgoj i obrazovanje

and means by which the message of the Word has been communicated throughout history, up to the present day. Of crucial importance, therefore, is the awareness, on the one hand, of the Church's positive engagement with new means of communication — often stimulated precisely by emerging technologies — and, on the other hand, of the Church's critical discernment regarding certain forms of their use and expression.

Today, within the context of education and its holistic contribution to personal development, digital technologies must also be considered from the perspective of a new form of spirituality — the so-called digital spirituality. In his paper, Jerko Valković therefore begins from the fact of the pervasive influence of digital media in contemporary culture, as well as from the remarkably strong interest in their study among a wide range of experts. Digital media make possible not only new forms of communication but also new ways of living and celebrating the faith — that is, new ways of shaping spiritual experience. From the standpoint of education for an appropriate relationship with digital reality, it is essential, on the one hand, to recognize the elements of a sound relationship to transcendence within the virtual sphere and, on the other hand, to avoid the pitfalls of reducing spirituality to purely individualistic frameworks.

These reflections are coherently complemented by those theologically articulated by Veronika Sr. Nela Gašpar regarding the understanding and living of religiosity in the digital age. The author focuses in particular on questions related to the formation of Christian identity within the digital environment. The dangers that stand out in this context include the privatization of religion and an excessive focus on the human person as its primary subject. From an educational perspective, such warnings are of particular importance. The formation of Christian identity within the believing subject is fundamentally shaped by the Christian creed and by the following of Christ, which must be recognized as essential and appropriately actualised, while remaining safeguarded in their unchangeable core, even in the face of various currents of individualism characteristic of so-called this-worldly spirituality.

As one of the most challenging developments in digital technology, artificial intelligence establishes entirely new standards of relationships, both in interpersonal and human–technological interactions. In this context, the question of the human person as the image of God (*imago Dei*) — one of the central tenets of Christian anthropology — becomes particularly relevant. In his contribution, Taras Barščevski first points to the fundamental characteristics of certain contemporary approaches to AI in

order to highlight the importance of ethical norms in its use. He further directs his analysis toward a discernment of current approaches to AI from the perspectives of substantive, functional, and relational interpretations, which address both the relational dimensions and the functional capacities of AI systems. By recalling the biblical foundations that understand the human person as a being in relationship — with God, with others, and with creation — Barščevski warns of the danger of a so-called “fourth relationship,” that is, a relationship in which the human being, with the help of technological inventions such as AI, seeks to become a “god.” The theology of *imago Dei* thus represents a key point of reflection not only on authentic humanity but also on an authentic relationship to human inventions — an indispensable dimension of Christian education in the contemporary context.

As becomes evident, Christian education is of crucial importance at all levels of formation in fostering an appropriate relationship with the digital-virtual sphere. In this regard, the co-authored paper by Josip Jazvić and Domenico Bellantoni is of particular significance. Since AI is presented as a technological interface of unprecedented possibilities for development and advancement — yet also as a source of potentially harmful consequences across nearly all areas of human life — education for a responsible and well-grounded engagement with digital technology in the field of AI must be pursued as comprehensively as possible. This includes the acquisition of solid psycho-educational knowledge, enabling the harmonious development and application of the skills and competencies necessary for an appropriate interaction with AI-based systems and applications. In this context, Viktor Frankl’s logotherapy and existential analysis — which the authors examine through a profound reading of both the human person and educational processes — prove highly valuable for assessing certain elements of AI in terms of their potential to enhance educational dynamics. The authors thus offer a deeply reflective pedagogical exploration of the new possibilities opened up by AI in the educational field — not in a vague or uncritical sense, but within a framework of critical anthropological inquiry into both the opportunities and the risks of AI, and consequently into human freedom and responsibility. The particular value of this study lies in its concreteness, especially in its examination and analysis of selected aspects of generative AI in view of humanising education within certain pedagogical models, such as so-called “role-playing” activities and the mentoring of students in drafting the project of their own lives.

Christian education, viewed through the prism of its relationship to the digital-technological reality, can and indeed should be enriched by the new theoretical insights and practical proposals presented in this issue of *Religija i obrazovanje* (RiO). It is further complemented, in its own way, by the elements, examples, and stimuli for Christian maturation included in the section Reports of this issue. These comprise several reports by eminent Croatian scholars from various disciplines who participated in the Round Table held at the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Zagreb on 5 October 2025, marking the 25th anniversary of the death of Prof. Ana Gabrijele Šabić. Valuable encouragements for integral Christian education and maturation are likewise contained in the address of Msgr. Ivan Šaško, Ph.D., Auxiliary Bishop of Zagreb, delivered at the awarding of certificates for the completed Programme of Theological-Catechetical Further Education for Religious Instruction in Preschool Institutions (8th generation; academic year 2024/2025), as well as for the completed programme Theological Culture. The ceremony took place on 8 November 2025 at the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Zagreb. We are confident that several reviews and presentations of recently published and noteworthy books will also contribute to the advancement of integral Christian education within the contemporary digital context. In this way, the present issue of the journal brings to completion a coherent set of intended theoretical and scientific, and in part practical, contributions to religious (Christian) education, with particular emphasis on its relationship to the current digital environment.