

47th International Symposium
of Philosophy and Theology Professors

DIGITALISATION AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

- Volunteering
- Bible Study
- Spiritual Exercises
- Pray



Trakošćan, Croatia, April 23 - 24, 2025

Univerza v Ljubljani
Teološka fakulteta



SVEUČILIŠTE JOSIPA JURJA STROSSMAYERA U OSIJEKU
KATOLIČKI BOGOSLOVNI FAKULTET U ĐAKOVU

UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ

Faculty of Catholic Theology



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DIGITALISATION AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY



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INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC OF THE SYMPOSIUM

The 47th International Symposium of Philosophy and Theology Professors, organized this year by the Catholic Faculty of Theology of the University of Zagreb, in co-organization with the Catholic Theological Faculty of the University of Graz, the Faculty of Theology of the University of Ljubljana, the Catholic Faculty of Theology of the University of Sarajevo and the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Đakovo of the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University in Osijek, will take place in Hotel Trakošćan (near the Trakošćan Castle) from 23 (lunch) to 24 (dinner) April 2025.

The topic of this year's symposium is **Digitalisation and Religious Identity**.

The rapid progress of digital and information technologies has led to the fact that digitalisation does not only mean the conversion of analogue content into digital formats, but without it, it is no longer possible to imagine the daily life of either an individual or a society. The impact of digital technologies on all areas of human and social life has caused profound changes in the overall perception and shaping of contemporary reality so today we talk about the digital revolution and the digital age. Not only that, digital and information technologies open up unprecedented opportunities for people to achieve better living, working and communication conditions. The creation and use of digital technologies have a reciprocal effect on man himself, on his understanding of himself and the meaning of his existence, on his self-awareness and identity, on the way he thinks and evaluates the world around him, on relationships with other people and communities, on religious beliefs and ethical principles. Digitalisation challenges both society and humanity in the complexity of its structures, the interconnectedness of people, shared values and individual, local and global interests. Finally, digitalisation is a boon and a challenge for the Church as a spiritual and social reality in its speech about God and the presence of God's gift of salvation in the world.

Digitalisation with all its phenomena represents an unavoidable challenge for theology that it cannot ignore if it wants to maintain its prophetic role in the Church and society. The task of theology is not only to reconstruct the digital space with theological instruments. In the light of God's revelation in synthesis with human reason and experience, theology studies the contributions and dangers of the influence of digital transformation on religious truths, life and practice. Finally, the task of theology is to explore the creative possibilities of digital and informational speech, which would better connect the message of the Christian faith and contemporary culture.

One of the key challenges of digitalisation, especially for pastoral care and catechesis, is access to information related to religious content. Individuals have access to a wide variety of religious/theological content and resources that may not be based on the tradition or authority of a religious community. This can lead to a certain disorientation among believers (individuals or entire communities) regarding the understanding of doctrinal content, especially among those who are not sufficiently theologically (and IT) literate. Exposure to different religious content can ultimately lead to an identity crisis (individual and community).

Digitalisation also affects religious practice. Many believers "participate" in Eucharistic celebrations through the media or perform other forms of religious practice on digital platforms (e.g. spiritual exercises...), thus reducing personal contact with individuals in their faith community and with the entire community.

PROGRAMME

Wednesday, 23 April 2025

12.00 **Arrival and accommodation of participants at Trakošćan Hotel, Trakošćan**

13.00 **Welcome Drink and Lunch**

15.30 **Opening and welcoming speeches**

KEYNOTE LECTURE

Chairperson: Nikola Vranješ

15.50 **Is Artificial Intelligence God-given or on its Way to Becoming God?**

(Janez Vodičar)

Discussion

BREAK

Chairperson: Danijel Tolvajčić

17.15 **The Question of Mind Uploading: Theological, Philosophical, and Ethical**

(Bojan Žalec)

17.30 **Cybergnosis: Digital Transcendence and the New Quest for Sacred Knowledge**

(Mikolaj Martinjak)

17.45 **God on the Web?**

(Martina Bär)

18.00 **Videogames: Theological Considerations, Ethical and Pedagogical Approaches**

(Antonina Wozna Urbanczak)

18.15 **Discussion**

19.00 **DINNER**

PROGRAMME

Thursday, 24 April 2025

Chairperson: Janez Vodičar

- 9.00 **Cybertheology: Theology in the Information Age**
(Vili Radman)
- 9.15 **Algoethics: Theology as an (I)Relevant Interlocutor in the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence**
(Damir Šehić)
- 9.30 **Canon Law and the Digital World**
(Zdenko Ilić)
- 9.45 **Discussion**
- 10.15 **COFFEE BREAK**

Chairperson: Denis Barić

- 10.45 **Pastoral Activity in a Scientific and Technological Environment. Starting Points, Challenges, Perspectives**
(Nikola Vranješ)
- 11.00 **Theological Language in Digital Culture: The Efficiency of the Sacraments and the Silence of the Apostolic Efficiency**
(Janez Ferkolj)
- 11.15 **Dangers of AI in Practical Pastoral Work**
(Andrej Šegula)
- 11.30 **Discussion**
- 13.00 **LUNCH**

PROGRAMME

Thursday, 24 April 2025

Chairperson: Tonči Matulić

16.00 Limitations and Potential of the Virtual: Utopian and Dystopian Views on Virtual Relationships

(Mario Bernadić)

16.15 Digitalisation and Emotional Virtues

(Saša Poljak Lukek / Tanja Valenta)

16.30 Empathy in the Digital Age

(Barbara Simonič)

16.45 Plenary discussion

17.45 Symposium closing remarks

18.00 DINNER

DEPARTURE

ABSTRACTS

Is Artificial Intelligence God-given or on its Way to Becoming God?

*Prof. Janez Vodičar, Ph.D.
Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana*

At the outset of the Bible, God creates humanity in His image, and today, humanity is crafting increasingly sophisticated electronic systems that appear to mirror divine attributes such as omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. These AI systems, which "dwell among the clouds," are becoming indispensable in human life, addressing issues such as illness, uncertainty, and ignorance, while even predicting the future and shaping global conflicts. As AI becomes an irreplaceable partner in modern life, it raises critical questions about the nature of divinity and human dependence on technological systems.

Although AI is often described as "artificial" or "machine," its growing prominence and power suggest a role that may seem to surpass human capabilities, thus prompting concerns about its potential to replace or challenge the traditional Christian understanding of God. According to the teachings of the Church and the living tradition of the Magisterium, Revelation has authority over the image of God. In the age of digital culture, this authority, as we know it from the history of the Church, is being called into question. The Church's magisterium response to this technological development has largely been limited to ethical, political, and educational issues, with less focus on the deeper theological implications. To address these concerns, this paper will draw on Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics, which emphasizes the interplay between the known (tradition, scripture, revelation) and the unknown (emerging technologies). Ricoeur's framework suggests that human interpretation can be creative, maintaining fidelity to tradition while engaging with new meanings and contexts.

By exploring the fundamental Christian message within this context, we aim to provide a meaningful response to the challenges posed by AI, while also fostering a redemptive and sound approach to AI's role in contemporary Christian life. By seeking soundness and a redemptive openness, we will also be better able to guide contemporary proclamation and life in the Christian community.

The Question of Mind Uploading: Theological, Philosophical, and Ethical

*Prof. Bojan Žalec, Ph.D.
Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana*

Mind uploading (or mind transfer) is a highly relevant issue for theology, as it touches on key theological questions such as immortality, resurrection, and the nature of human beings as the image of God, to name just a few. It is also linked to significant philosophical and ethical concerns including personal identity and the importance of vulnerability and affectedness. Due to advancements in science and technology, this topic is becoming increasingly relevant. Therefore, it is essential that theology, philosophy, and ethics engage with this issue and formulate an appropriate response. The structure of the lecture: 1. Defining the problem of mind uploading: two questions; 2. Theological significance of the issue; 2. Technological aspects; 3. Assumptions of mind transfer and key perspectives in the philosophy of mind; 4. Arguments against mind uploading; 5. Ethical aspects; 6. Possible religious responses to the challenge of mind uploading.

Cybergnosis: Digital Transcendence and the New Quest for Sacred Knowledge

*Assist. Prof. Mikolaj Martinjak, Ph.D.
Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies,
University of Zagreb*

This paper explores and develops the concept of cybergnosis. Cybergnosis is a construct that is presented as the attainment of spiritual or transcendent knowledge through digital technology. Drawing from ancient Gnostic traditions and contemporary digital culture, this paper will examine how the internet, virtual reality, and the concept of consciousness uploading represent modern pathways to gnosis. Special attention is given to the philosophical implications of digital consciousness transfer and how global information networks might function as metaphysical spaces akin to traditional religious conceptions of heaven. By analyzing both theoretical frameworks and cultural artifacts, this paper argues that cybergnosis represents not merely a technological evolution, but also a spiritual one. Cybergnosis is the reimagining of ancient quests for sacred knowledge within the digital landscape.

God on the Web?

Prof. Martina Bär, Ph.D.

*Institute for Systematic Theology and Liturgical Studies,
Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Graz*

In the autumn of 2013, Pope Francis called on the members of the papal media council to make greater use of new media and social networks for the proclamation of the Gospel. This call is thematically linked to his programmatic letter *The Joy of the Gospel*, which was published in the same autumn and in which he calls on Catholic Christians to evangelise today's world. For the Pope, effective proclamation with the help of new media does not depend on whether the Church is in possession of the latest technologies, but on whether it succeeds in using new media to convey the face of a Church 'that is for all a home'. How can the Church fulfil this ambition and why virtual reality must not be the only form of proclamation of the Gospel?

Videogames: Theological Considerations, Ethical and Pedagogical Approaches

Antonina Wozna Urbanczak, Ph.D.

*Institute for Systematic Theology and Liturgical Studies,
Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Graz*

Video games have a significant economic and cultural impact in today's world. Global videogame industry generated a turnover of 196 billion \$ in 2023, exceedingly triple the film industry and ten times the music industry. Cultural transformation since the beginning of gaming phenomenon in 1980's is so profound that the medium transcended its original purpose as entertainment, influencing the players engagement with narratives and moral, philosophical, and religious concepts. Despite this relevance, the relationship between video games and religion still remains invisible, at least in mainstream academic circles. The present paper focuses on two theological issues present in the design and narratives of video games: theodicy and resurrection. It analyzes also the value of life and its understanding in a ludic environment. The aim is threefold: to examine these theological concepts in video games accordingly to the still scarce bibliography, to propose an ethical- pastoral interpretation, to offer some hints for the religious pedagogical approaches.

Cybertheology: Theology in the Information Age

*Assoc. Prof. Vili Radman, Ph.D.
Franciscan Theology Sarajevo*

Cybertheology explores the interface between faith and technology, analyzing how the digital era shapes theological thought and practice. This paper examines the novelty and multidisciplinary nature of Cybertheology in dialogue with other theoretical frameworks, including media theology, digital religion, neurotheology, and technophilosophy, highlighting its unique approach to contemplating transcendence within the digital paradigm. The article also addresses key challenges of the digital age, such as the phenomenon of digital spiritual emptiness, algorithmic bias, and ethical dilemmas. It then explores the opportunities technology presents for theological practice and dialogue, and finally, defines the core tasks of Cybertheology in the contemporary context. This approach enables a systematic understanding of how digital spaces not only transform religious practices but also raise new ontological and epistemological questions regarding the nature of faith, community, and ethical responsibility.

Algoethics: Theology as an (I)Relevant Interlocutor in the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence

*Assist. Prof. Damir Šehić, Ph.D.
Department of Religious Sciences, University of Zadar*

As contemporaries of the change of eras, we have entered the Digital Age in which the theological discourse is constantly dominated by the topic of technology and its relationship to man. The topic of this presentation, following the aforementioned imperative, reflects on artificial intelligence as one of the significant aspects of the transformation of the Digital Age, confronting it with Algoethics. By strengthening the general application of artificial intelligence in all aspects of human life, the possibility of artificial intelligence being an agent of transformation of human thinking and decision-making becomes certain. Algoethics was coined by the Italian philosopher Lombardi Vallauri in 2017 and was taken up by the Pontifical Academy for Life at a conference dedicated to the "good algorithm", at the conclusion of which the Roman Call for the Ethics of AI was signed. The presentation, structured in two parts, brings theological argumentation of the necessity of Algoethics in the application of artificial intelligence and problematizes the relevance of theological discourse in the discourse on the ethics of artificial intelligence.

Canon Law and the Digital World

*Assist. Prof. Zdenko Ilić, Ph.D.
Catholic Faculty of Theology in Đakovo
of the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University in Osijek*

Canon law, defined as the sum of canonical regulations of the Catholic Church, has tried to be a clear and concrete response to the current needs of all members of the Church through its promulgations and publications in the manner prescribed by the competent authorities of the Church. Until recently the only possible way of publishing and interpreting the canonical norms of the Church was in a printed, paper form. The possibilities of the digital age have brought many benefits to the various institutions, including the Catholic Church. One of these benefits is a faster and easier acquaintance of the faithful of the Church with its current canonical and legal norms using digital technology. How does the Catholic Church cope with all this? What legal force and obligation do canonical norms published digitally have? Who is responsible for their digital publication and who controls their content? What about the sensitive personal data that appears in them and their possible misuse? Since it is impossible to provide comprehensive answers to these questions - due to the complexity of the matter as well as insufficient knowledge of the impact of digital technology on humans - the answers will only provide some basic guidelines and assumptions.

Pastoral Activity in a Scientific and Technological Environment. Starting Points, Challenges, Perspectives

*Prof. Nikola Vranješ, Ph.D.
Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Zagreb*

Although pastoral activity doesn't stem from scientific and technological elements, these are crucial marks of human culture and creativity. The link between pastoral and scientific-technological elements today, and in the future, is a primary necessity and challenge for pastoral activity. It's crucial to discern certain specific areas of this link that could enhance pastoral activity in the near future. Among these areas, in this lecture, we are discerning the following: the theological-pastoral meaning of the tendency toward the wholeness of reality, the respect for the evolutionary image of the world and life, the cultural Christian significance in digital and virtual reality, the area of purification and enrichment of religious life, the problem of religious fanaticism and fundamentalism and the area of safeguarding the Earth as our common home. Exploring these themes scientifically enriches the dialogue between theology and science and significantly aids pastoral practice.

Theological Language in Digital Culture: The Efficiency of the Sacraments and the Silence of the Apostolic Efficiency

*Assist. Prof. Janez Ferkolj, Ph.D.
Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana*

We never see life, we never see the life of the Spirit: we believe it. The efficiency of the sacraments is not our work but the work of God. The Church works on the base of prayer and silence from where obtains the attitude of silent presence and efficiency in the world. The digital opportunities of modern times give the Church the new possibilities to illuminate the Face of God.

Dangers of AI in Practical Pastoral Work

*Assist. Prof. Andrej Šegula, Ph.D.
Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana*

Artificial intelligence is permeating all aspects of life. When we consider its effects, we first think of the positive results it brings to the fields of science and technology, as well as scientific work. It can also be very helpful in pastoral work, in administration (organizing church registers, data, financial matters) and concrete pastoral activities (technical aids in the church, classrooms, halls, assistance in collecting and organizing content for evangelization). Despite all the positive contributions, we ask ourselves – where are the boundaries or dangers that modern technology – artificial intelligence – brings? We start from the fact that God is the incarnate Word, which is the principle of pastoral work. This means that we must be careful not to overlook the individual person we have before us (office, liturgy, catechesis, pastoral events) through the unconsidered use of artificial intelligence.

Limitations and Potential of the Virtual: Utopian and Dystopian Views on Virtual Relationships

*Assoc. Prof. Mario Bernadić, Ph.D.
Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Sarajevo*

Virtual relationships have, whether we like it or not, become an integral part of our daily lives. The problem often lies in our tendency to view them in a black-and-white manner: either we idealize them as a solution to all problems, or we demonize them as a source of alienation and superficiality. Interestingly, these two perspectives often coexist—the first emerging more unconsciously, while the second is held more consciously. This presentation seeks to take a balanced approach: While virtual relationships may not be "real" in the classical sense, they can still be meaningful and valuable in their own way. Thus, the key question is not whether they replace real-life relationships, but rather how they can complement and enrich them. In this sense, virtual relationships function primarily as a tool—one that, with some effort and caution, can be meaningfully and purposefully integrated into our lives and interpersonal connections.

Digitalisation and Emotional Virtues

*Assoc. Prof. Saša Poljak Lukek, Ph.D./Tanja Valenta, Ph.D.
Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana*

The rise of digitalisation has profoundly altered the ways in which humans develop emotional and social skills. While digital technologies provide unprecedented access to information and social connectivity, they also introduce challenges to the development of emotional virtues, such as empathy, compassion, patience, and gratitude—essential for ethical relationships and personal growth. Furthermore this paper explores the potential of AI-driven models to cultivate emotional virtues through personalised learning, and immersive experiences. Through a careful balance of digital and real-world experiences, human can be equipped with the skills to navigate both virtual and physical spaces with emotional depth, moral awareness, and relational integrity. Drawing on insights from psychology, philosophy, and theological anthropology, this study seeks to provide a critical and constructive framework for understanding how digitalisation and AI can be ethically integrated into emotional development of a human.

Empathy in the Digital Age

*Prof. Barbara Simonič, Ph.D.
Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana*

Empathy is the key to connecting people and understanding others. Its absence weakens social bonds and affects individuals and society. In a theological context, it is the basis of love for others and religious experience, so the loss of personal contact also affects religious life. Digital communication is increasingly replacing personal contact, which affects the quality of interpersonal relationships. Social networks and technology contribute to the depersonalisation of communication and different features of empathy. Online interactions often remain superficial and limit non-verbal cues and emotional depth. Digital empathy relies on text-based communication, emojis and memes as a substitute for non-verbal cues and asynchronous exchanges. Research shows that digital empathy often involves more cognitive aspects, while traditional empathy is based on holistic face-to-face communication. This paper explores the impact of digital communication on empathy, presents a theory of digital empathy and suggests ways to stay emotionally connected in the digital age.

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