EDITORIAL

Introduction

Digital technologies and artificial intelligence no longer constitute a marginal topic for the humanities and theology; they increasingly shape the very conditions under which we think, believe, relate, and hope. The thematic block of this issue is devoted precisely to this new constellation. It brings together twelve contributions[1] from theology, philosophy, religious studies, psychology, sociology, and education, all of which confront the same fundamental question: what happens to the human being—embodied, relational, vulnerable, spiritual—when life is ever more mediated by algorithms, platforms, and intelligent machines?

The articles share a sober but not despairing stance. They neither celebrate a frictionless technological salvation nor demonize innovation as such. Instead, they insist that these developments must be interpreted through a (thick) account of human person(hood), one that does justice to embodiment, mortality, relationality, and transcendence.

Several contributions show how technological imaginaries such as mind uploading, transhumanist enhancement, and affective computing presuppose controversial philosophical and theological assumptions. Others explore the more everyday, but no less consequential, fields of education, mental health, spiritual practice, and online religious communication. Across this diversity, some common

[1] Almost all articles in the block (Žalec, Globokar, Klun, Centa Strahovnik and Strahovnik, Simonič, Furlan Štante, Platovnjak and Brumec, Prijatelj, Miklavčič, Kraner, Štivić), except for the article from Zalta, are the result of research within the research project (J6-60105) *Theology and digitalization: anthropological and ethical challenges*, funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS).

convictions emerge. First, the human person cannot be reduced to data, information processing, or functional equivalence: biological embodiment, lived experience, and social embeddedness are not accidental but constitutive. Second, the digital and AI revolution is inherently ambivalent. It opens new possibilities for care, learning, and spiritual search, while simultaneously intensifying risks of depersonalization, alienation, manipulation, and symbolic inflation. Third, religious and spiritual categories—incarnation, salvation, transcendence, virtue, the sacred, re-enchantment—do not simply belong to a pre-digital past. They are being re-appropriated, translated, and sometimes trivialized within digital culture, and therefore require renewed critical discernment. Finally, the issue suggests that the humanities, and philosophy and theology in particular, have an indispensable role in articulating a humane, ethically responsible, and spiritually sensitive response to AI.

Mapping the Terrain: From Disembodiment to Re-enchantment

The opening article by Bojan Žalec addresses one of the most radical promises associated with digital technology: the possibility of *mind uploading*—transferring the human mind to a non-biological substrate. On careful philosophical examination, this promise turns out to rest on a dualist and functionalist conception that abstracts from the biological, phenomenological, and social dimensions of consciousness. Žalec argues that our current knowledge strongly suggests the dependence of mind on the living, embodied organism; the role of the "lived body" in identity, social integration, and everyday coping cannot simply be replicated in "silicon". Mind uploading thus appears not only technologically and scientifically questionable, but also more fundamentally: a philosophical analysis and reflection show its improbability.

Roman Globokar also takes up a grand technological narrative—Yuval Noah Harari's vision of *Homo Deus*—but approaches it from the perspective of mortality and transcendence. He contrasts Harari's dataist, algorithm-centred outlook with Hans Jonas's philosophy of the living organism, which insists on the irreducibility of life and

the ambivalent gift of mortality. On this basis, Globokar retrieves the biblical understanding of the human being created in the image of God: finite, vulnerable, and mortal, yet simultaneously oriented beyond death. Against deterministic algorithmic imaginaries, he proposes faith in a personal God as a source of freedom, responsibility, and hope.

The theme of embodiment receives a distinctively Christological and ecclesial articulation in Branko Klun's reflection on *Christian incarnation in the age of digital disembodiment*. Engaging transhumanism, posthumanism, and digital self-optimization, Klun shows how Christian doctrines of creation, incarnation, and resurrection affirm the body as gift, relation, and vocation. The answer to the technological dream of escaping corporeality is not a mere defence of "nature" against "technology", but the vision of the body transfigured in love and embedded in concrete, "face-to-face presence".

Where these first contributions focus on broad anthropological and theological frameworks, Mateja Centa Strahovnik and Vojko Strahovnik turn to a specific technological actor: AI chatbots. They analyse how large language models reshape our *epistemic identity* and *epistemic virtues*—curiosity, humility, open-mindedness, and responsibility. Although chatbots do not qualify as full epistemic agents, the authors argue that we are increasingly tempted to treat them as epistemic partners or quasi-partners. This ambiguous status has profound consequences: AI not only supplies information but also affects what counts as knowledge, how it is validated, and how human cognitive capacities are extended. The authors call for reflective practices that sustain human autonomy and virtuous collaboration rather than passive reliance.

The interpersonal and affective dimension of digital culture comes to the fore in Barbara Simonič's article on *empathy between embodiment and digital depersonalization*. Empathy, as a cornerstone of relationships and social cohesion, depends heavily on bodily presence, non-verbal cues, temporal synchronicity, and shared space. Digital communication, by contrast, is often text-based, asynchronous, and anonymous. Simonič argues that this shift can erode the conditions for a full empathic experience and foster depersonalization.

Philosophical and psychological perspectives converge in showing that technological mediation must be critically evaluated in light of what it does to our capacity to perceive and be affected by others as embodied persons.

A related yet distinct angle is developed by Nadja Furlan Štante, who, from the standpoint of theological ecofeminism, investigates the figure of the *emotional cyborg*. In a hyperconnected world saturated with affective computing and artificial emotional intelligence, the boundaries between human and machine "emotions" become increasingly porous. Furlan Štante examines how these entanglements transform identity, emotional literacy, and relationality, with particular attention to gendered experiences and stereotypes. She raises pressing questions about emotional alienation, commodification of affect, and the search for authenticity in environments where digital mediation often replaces embodied encounters. At the same time, she probes how theological conceptions of embodiment and relationality might be reimagined in this cyborgian context.

Ivan Platovnjak and Snežana Brumec move from the social and cultural to the explicitly spiritual dimension. Their article explores the speculative possibility of an AI platform designed to accompany the *inner life*: meaning-making, existential reflection, and spiritual search. Drawing on Iain McGilchrist's distinction between right- and left-hemisphere cognitive styles, they ask whether a fundamentally "left-hemispheric" artefact such as AI could be repurposed to support holistic perception and dialogical presence. They envision an interface that "invites rather than prescribes, listens rather than instructs," while also acknowledging the ethical and epistemological risks such a project entails. The question they pose—whether AI might contribute to a re-enchantment of experience—reverberates throughout the volume.

The clinical and pastoral implications of AI appear in Erika Prijatelj's essay on *AI in mental health*. Against the backdrop of global shortages in mental health services, she explores how AI can provide scalable, personalized support. Yet she insists, from the vantage point of Christian virtue ethics and theological anthropology, that authentic healing is holistic, integrating body, mind, and spirit. It is always

embedded in moral and relational contexts. AI may assist clinicians and patients, but it cannot substitute the moral discernment, spiritual depth, and personal presence that constitute genuine flourishing. Its proper role is auxiliary and complementary, oriented toward promoting virtue and dignity.

In Jonas Miklavčič's article, the focus shifts to *escapism* and *religious experience* in digital culture. He identifies a cultural reversal: where virtuality once functioned as an escape from burdensome reality, many people now seek escape from the overstimulation and performativity of virtual life. Practices such as digital detoxes and offline retreats manifest a longing for silence, interiority, and timelessness—qualities that structurally resemble religious experience. Miklavčič interprets this as a largely implicit re-engagement with the sacred, not necessarily at the level of explicit belief but as a structure of experience. The article thus exposes the religious undercurrents in apparently secular reactions to digital overload.

David Kraner turns to the educational sphere, examining how AI is transforming the *educational process* and, above all, the role of communication. He highlights well-known advantages—personalized learning, support in explaining complex concepts, increased engagement, and help in preparing materials—while also discussing the pitfalls: dependence on technology, concerns about accuracy, plagiarism, and the weakening of interpersonal connections. Successful integration, Kraner argues, demands not only infrastructure and teacher training but also critical reflection on ethical implications and on how to preserve the human dimension of education.

Digital religion takes on a more explicitly socio-political face in Anja Zalta's analysis of online Salafism. She explores how Salafist influencers harness social networks and the digital literacy of Generation Z to construct alternative religious spaces that may disregard broader social consensus within European societies. The article highlights new intra-Muslim dynamics, heightened tensions within and between communities, and the challenges posed by transnational, digitally mediated forms of authority. The result is a nuanced picture of how digitization reshapes religious pluralism, coexistence, and conflict.

Finally, Stjepan Štivić offers a critical reading of *Neuralink's public campaign* through the lens of religious symbolism. As a prominent actor in brain–computer interface development, Neuralink does not merely promise therapeutic solutions but cultivates a narrative of human enhancement and, ultimately, technological salvation. Štivić shows how the company's communication implicitly appropriates Christian motifs—messianic imagery, healing, transcendence of limitations—to build trust and differentiate itself in a competitive field. The analysis underscores how religious language and symbols are recycled in secular technological marketing, often without explicit theological awareness but with a powerful affective effect.

The Contributions in Detail

Although each article can stand on its own, together they trace a coherent arc.

Žalec's rigorous critique of mind uploading dismantles perhaps the most radical digital dream, thereby grounding the entire issue in a robust philosophy of the body. Globokar and Klun then extend this anthropological insight into theological territory: mortality and bodily finitude are not errors to be corrected by technology but sites where transcendence, vocation, and divine image are encountered. Their contributions jointly resist both reductionist dataism and naïve spiritualization.

Centa Strahovnik and Strahovnik move from ontology to epistemology. By interrogating the status of chatbots as epistemic tools, quasi-partners, or partners, they illuminate new forms of epistemic dependence and co-agency. Their careful analysis of epistemic virtues provides conceptual resources for an ethics of knowledge in AI-saturated environments.

Simonič and Furlan Štante together chart the affective landscape of digital culture. Simonič's focus on empathy reveals how the erosion of bodily co-presence can lead to depersonalized interactions, while Furlan Štante's ecofeminist reading of emotional cyborgs highlights the gendered, ecological, and spiritual dimensions of technologically mediated affect. Both articles warn against a latent commodification

of emotions and call for practices that protect the integrity of embodied, reciprocal feeling.

Platovnjak and Brumec's speculative proposal of a spiritually attuned AI platform bridges inner experience and technological design. Their model neither idolizes AI as a new spiritual authority nor dismisses it as inherently alienating. Instead, they ask how its affordances might be oriented toward listening, resonance, and non-prescriptive accompaniment—offering a distinctive contribution at the intersection of spirituality, psychology, and human–computer interaction.

Prijatelj and Kraner take up two crucial institutional fields—healthcare and education—where AI is already being implemented. Both insist that successful integration depends on preserving the primacy of the human person, understood holistically, and on cultivating professional and moral competencies that technology cannot provide. Their articles are particularly valuable for practitioners seeking conceptual and ethical guidance.

Miklavčič and Zalta offer complementary perspectives on religion in digital culture. Miklavčič uncovers quasi-religious structures in secular practices of digital withdrawal. At the same time, Zalta analyses how specific religious movements, in this case Salafist currents, appropriate digital media to reshape authority and identity. Together, they demonstrate that digitalization neither secularizes nor "retraditionalizes" religion; it reconfigures the terrain in more complex ways.

Štivić's deconstruction of Neuralink's religiously inflected marketing finally reminds us that the language of salvation and transcendence is not confined to explicit religious institutions. It permeates technological imaginaries and can be deployed strategically in the service of market and power interests. A critical theology of technology must therefore be sensitive to these symbolic economies.

Concluding Reflections: Why These Articles Matter

This thematic block shows that questions about digitization and AI cannot be left solely to engineers, economists, and policymakers. They touch on fundamental issues of human identity, community, meaning, and hope—core concerns of philosophy, theology, religious

studies, and the broader humanities. The articles gathered here make at least three original contributions.

First, they articulate a *thick anthropology* for the digital age. Against both reductive dataism and purely instrumental views of technology, the authors insist on the irreducibility of embodiment, vulnerability, and relationality. Whether it is Žalec's critique of mind uploading, Klun's theology of incarnation, Simonič's analysis of empathy, or Prijatelj's account of holistic healing, the message is clear: no fully adequate discourse on AI as a factor of human condition is possible without a nuanced philosophy and theology of the human person.

Second, the issue advances a *refined understanding of religious and spiritual dynamics* in digital culture. Globokar, Platovnjak and Brumec, Miklavčič, Zalta, and Štivić, each in their own way, show how religious categories—mortality and transcendence, the sacred, re-enchantment, salvation—are being reinterpreted, displaced, or instrumentalized in digital environments. This enables a more precise critique of techno-soteriological narratives and a more discerning appreciation of new spiritual searches, whether explicit or implicit.

Third, the block offers *practically oriented frameworks* for key domains such as education and mental health, and more broadly for epistemic and ethical life with AI. Centa Strahovnik and Strahovnik's focus on epistemic virtues, Kraner's reflection on teacher formation, and Prijatelj's emphasis on virtue ethics in mental health all move beyond abstract principles to consider how human agents can live and act reasonably in AI-mediated contexts.

These contributions are of interest not only to a narrow circle of specialists. They speak to teachers wondering how to accompany students who use AI daily; to clinicians navigating digital tools in therapy; to religious leaders discerning how to respond to online radicalization or new forms of spiritual search; to policymakers grappling with the social consequences of platformization; and to all those who sense that something essential is at stake in our relationship with technology. By bringing theological and philosophical perspectives into conversation with psychology, sociology, feminist theory, and cultural studies, this thematic block of *Poligrafi* models the kind of interdisciplinary work that our time urgently requires.

If there is a unifying intuition running through these pages, it is perhaps this: AI and digital technologies are neither neutral instruments nor autonomous destinies. They are woven into the drama of human freedom, vulnerability, sin, and grace. They can intensify alienation and depersonalization, but they can also, when critically appropriated, support new forms of care, learning, and spiritual search. The task of the humanities—and of philosophy and theology in particular—is to help us discern the difference.

Bojan Žalec,
Guest Editor