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Research Article

Religious Education in the Digital Age: Digital Culture, Artificial Intelligence, and the Polish Context

Edukacja religijna w erze cyfrowej: kultura cyfrowa, sztuczna inteligencja i kontekst polski

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Abstract
This article examines how digital culture and artificial intelligence reshape the opportunities and challenges of contemporary religious education, with particular attention to the Polish context. The study adopts a conceptual and qualitative document-analysis approach, drawing on selected scholarly literature and Catholic Church documents concerning digital culture, artificial intelligence, catechesis, and education, pertaining to the 2025 Core Curriculum for the Teaching of Roman Catholic Religion in Poland. The analysis identifies the ambivalent educational impact of digital technologies: they can broaden access to information, support teaching processes, and provide new tools for teachers and learners, while also contributing to information overload, weakened interpersonal relationships, virtualisation, and difficulties in assessing the reliability of digital content. In response to these tensions, the principle of "limited trust" as a framework for religious education has been proposed. This approach combines openness to the educational potential of digital technologies with critical attention to their anthropological, relational, and formative limitations. The Polish case illustrates an emerging institutional recognition of AI as an educational tool, while also indicating the need for further reflection on its age-appropriate and pedagogically responsible use.

Keywords
artificial intelligence; religious education; catechesis; digital culture; Catholic education; digital pedagogy; Poland

Abstrakt
Niniejszy artykuł analizuje, w jaki sposób kultura cyfrowa oraz sztuczna inteligencja zmieniają szanse i wyzwania współczesnej edukacji religijnej, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem kontekstu polskiego. Badanie opiera się na podejściu koncepcyjnym oraz jakościowej analizie dokumentów – literatury naukowej i tekstów

Kościoła katolickiego dotyczących kultury cyfrowej, sztucznej inteligencji, katechezy i edukacji, ze szczególnym odniesieniem do *Podstawy programowej nauczania religii rzymskokatolickiej w Polsce* z 2025 roku. Analiza wskazuje na ambiwalentny wpływ technologii cyfrowych na edukację: mogą one poszerzać dostęp do informacji, wspierać procesy nauczania i dostarczać nowych narzędzi zarówno nauczycielom, jak i uczniom, a jednocześnie prowadzić do przeciążenia informacyjnego, osłabienia relacji międzyludzkich, wirtualizacji oraz trudności w ocenie wiarygodności treści cyfrowych. W odpowiedzi na te napięcia, w artykule zaproponowano zasadę „ograniczonego zaufania" jako fundament edukacji religijnej. Podejście to łączy otwartość na potencjał edukacyjny technologii cyfrowych z krytyczną refleksją nad ich ograniczeniami w wymiarze antropologicznym, relacyjnym i formacyjnym. Na przykładzie Polski ukazano rodzące się instytucjonalne uznanie sztucznej inteligencji za narzędzie edukacyjne, jednocześnie zwracając uwagę na potrzebę dalszej refleksji nad jej wykorzystaniem w sposób dostosowany do wieku odbiorców oraz odpowiedzialny z pedagogicznego punktu widzenia.

Słowa kluczowe
sztuczna inteligencja, edukacja religijna, katecheza, kultura cyfrowa, edukacja katolicka, pedagogia cyfrowa, Polska

Introduction

Education, including religious instruction, cannot be viewed in isolation from the contexts in which it takes place. These contexts include geopolitical, social, generational (particularly regarding the learners) and cultural factors. There is no doubt that for around 20 years (and some 15 years in Central and Eastern Europe), the phenomenon of digital culture has been a significant educational context, one which has intensified in recent years due to the rapid development of the so-called artificial intelligence.

Against this background, the aim of this article is to examine how digital culture and artificial intelligence reshape the opportunities and challenges of contemporary religious education, with particular attention to the Polish context. The study addresses the following research question: How can digital technologies and artificial intelligence be incorporated into religious education while preserving its relational, formative, and personal character? A conceptual and qualitative document-analysis approach, drawing on selected scholarly literature and Catholic Church documents concerning digital culture, artificial intelligence, and catechesis, with particular attention to the 2025 Core Curriculum for the Teaching of Roman Catholic Religion in Poland, has been adopted. The subject of digital culture was addressed in a comprehensive and competent manner in the 2020 *Directory for Catechesis*; it also appeared in Pope Francis's teachings—particularly those directed toward young people—as well as in recent documents issued by Pope Leo XIV, who extends the discussion to include the phenomenon of artificial intelligence. These documents are highly relevant to the themes explored in this article, as they analyze broad-reaching phenomena and situate them

within the specific educational context of transmitting and shaping the faith. They are also normative in nature and do not constitute an empirical description of educational practice.

The analysis is based on a purposive selection of documents and scholarly publications directly relevant to the research question, particularly those addressing digital culture, artificial intelligence, catechesis, and religious education. The selected materials have been examined qualitatively and conceptually in order to identify recurring opportunities, risks, and normative assumptions associated with the use of digital technologies in religious education. Particular attention has been given to the anthropological, relational, and formative dimensions of these sources, as these provide the analytical framework for assessing their educational implications. The study does not constitute a systematic literature review or an empirical investigation; rather, it offers an interpretive analysis of selected normative and scholarly sources relevant to the problem under consideration.

In the available literature, the Directory has received comparatively limited attention as a source relevant to the Church's reflection on artificial intelligence (Corpuz 2025; Özgü 2026), possibly because the applicable passages are framed primarily in terms of digital culture. Nevertheless, given the continued technological development seen in recent years, these passages remain highly relevant, mainly within an educational context. The analysis first outlines the principal features of digital culture and artificial intelligence, then examines their educational opportunities and risks, and finally considers their implications for contemporary religious education in Poland.

It is worth noting that, while there is no shortage of studies focusing on the methodological and didactic implications of digital culture and the use of AI in religious education, there is a need for a broader reflection—a "meta-reflection," if you will—on the fundamental impact of these phenomena on religious education from anthropological, relational, and formative perspectives. This article aims to serve as a modest contribution to such a reflection. Within this framework, the principle of "limited trust"—discussed in the text—proves useful; it is characterized by a hopeful outlook toward new technological possibilities, yet it is not an uncritical hope—one that would turn a blind eye to the potential dangers and the chaos inherent in the coexistence of the real and digital worlds, as well as human and artificial intelligence.

1. Digital Culture

This term is used in the 2020 *Directory on Catechesis*, in which the authors subjected this phenomenon to a thorough and rigorous analysis (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020,

359–372). It corresponds to the existing concept of cyberculture, which was used in a somewhat futuristic and prophetic context in 1963 by Alice Mary Hilton (Hilton 1963; Zawojski 2010). Here we can site a definition by Czesław Marcinkowski, describing cyberculture as: "a new face of popular culture, utilising multimedia, mainly computer networks and connections, to present humanity's achievements in various areas of life" (Marcinkowski 2019, 171). As the author notes, the emergence and widespread adoption of the smartphone as a kind of multi-tool providing unlimited access to digital cultural resources was of decisive importance for the development and ubiquity of cyberculture (Marcinkowski 2019, 170; Twenge 2017, 5).

As the authors of the catechetical document note: "Digitality, which is not limited merely to the presence of technological means, de facto characterises the contemporary world, and its impact has, in a short time, become so commonplace and constant that it is perceived as entirely natural" (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020, 359). The interpenetration of the real and virtual worlds is increasingly recognised to such an extent that this duality is no longer adequate (along with the associated division between digital immigrants and natives), and the lives of individuals and societies are characterised by ever-advancing digitalisation (Huczek 2023, 416). As the authors of the Directory state: "Digitality […] is not only part of existing cultures, but is imposing itself as a new culture, changing language above all, shaping mentalities and establishing a new hierarchy of values. This is happening on a global scale, because the elimination of geographical distances through the ubiquitous use of networked devices affects people in all parts of the world" (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020, 359). Since digital culture has such a global impact on people's lives and functioning, with its characteristic digital abundance (Schlag 2019), it cannot fail to influence education as well (Suhner and Schlag 2025, 186).

In a sense, the next step or stage of digital culture is the increasingly widespread presence of the so-called artificial intelligence. Following Krzysztof Różanowski and agreeing with him regarding the difficulty of defining the essence of artificial intelligence, one may assume that it is "a branch of computer science concerned with the construction of machines and algorithms whose operation exhibits characteristics of intelligence. This is understood to mean the ability to adapt spontaneously to changing conditions, make complex decisions, learn and engage in abstract reasoning" (Różanowski 2007, 111). As the authors of a Vatican note on the relationship between artificial intelligence and human intelligence point out, the very term "artificial intelligence" is somewhat misleading. For whilst intelligence in humans is personal in nature, in the case of devices it is merely functional, regardless of the occasionally impressive scope or pace of that

functionality (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and Dicastery for Culture and Education 2025, 10). The use of this term can lead to anthropological confusion, on the one hand, suggesting the anthropomorphisation of tools, and on the other, contributing to a utilitarian view of humanity.

A sign of the times, but also a testament to the Church's responsibility regarding the emerging tools of artificial intelligence, is Pope Leo XIV's first encyclical, which focuses precisely on this phenomenon. In it, the Pope observes: "It is not possible to provide a single, comprehensive definition of AI. What can be stated, however, is that we must avoid the misconception of equating this type of 'intelligence' with that of human beings. These systems merely imitate certain functions of human intelligence. In doing so, they often surpass human intelligence in speed and computational capacity, offering tangible benefits across many fields. Yet this power remains entirely tied to data processing. So-called artificial intelligences do not undergo experiences, do not possess a body, do not feel joy or pain, do not mature through relationships and do not know from within what love, work, friendship or responsibility mean. Nor do they have a moral conscience, since they do not judge good and evil, grasp the ultimate meaning of situations, or bear responsibility for consequences" (Leo XIV 2026, 99). This fairly lengthy passage reflects both the hopes associated with new technologies and the anxiety regarding the potential chaos arising from the incompatibility between artificial intelligence and human intelligence.

With regard to both digital culture and artificial intelligence, the position emerging from the analysed Church documents may be described as a principle of "limited trust." In the present article, this expression denotes an approach that combines openness to the educational potential of digital technologies with a critical assessment of their anthropological, relational, and formative limitations.

These three dimensions provide more specific criteria for applying the principle of "limited trust." The anthropological dimension concerns whether the use of digital technologies preserves the primacy, dignity, and agency of the human person rather than reducing human activity to functions that can be technologically reproduced. The relational dimension asks whether technology supports rather than replaces interpersonal relationships, particularly the teacher–student relationship and the communal dimension of religious education. The formative dimension concerns whether digital tools foster reflection, discernment, responsibility, and personal development instead of substituting technological efficiency or ready-made answers for the learner's own formative process.

It is therefore neither a condemnation—which would, in any case, be difficult, since these are realities irreversibly present in human life, as has already been mentioned—nor is it the uncritical admiration characteristic of those for whom the development of new technologies represents an opportunity for profit or a hope for manipulation. Another pattern that can be observed is the similarity of the guidelines concerning digital culture and artificial intelligence, which seems to suggest that these phenomena are perceived as a single, deepening process. These guidelines promote the so-called digital humanism, that is, an approach to technical and IT capabilities designed to make them an increasingly functional tool that assists humans and stimulates their own potential.

Here it is worth mentioning the 2020 Rome Congress on Artificial Intelligence, which resulted in the *Rome Call for AI Ethics*. This document sets out six principles that should be respected to ensure the ethical and fair use of artificial intelligence. These are: transparency—understanding how it works; inclusion—accessibility for all; accountability—there is always a human behind machine processes; impartiality—freedom from bias and stereotypes; reliability—ever-improving quality; security and privacy—ensuring safety and respect for users (Bielinowicz and Bilicka 2025, 15). The congress in question was an initiative of the Pontifical Academy for Life, but it quickly became an interdisciplinary and interfaith appeal (Pontifical Academy for Life 2020), which indicates that the question of how to approach artificial intelligence is not merely a dilemma for Catholics or Christians, but a universal human issue, raising questions, doubts and hopes across all geographical regions and within every culture and religion.

Admittedly, the above principles relate to the use of artificial intelligence, but given what has already been written, they can be extrapolated to the entire realm of cyberculture or digital culture.

2. Opportunities and Risks of Digital Culture for Religious Education

A defining feature of digital culture—and of artificial intelligence—is the ambivalence in how it can be assessed, often in relation to the very same areas. For example, with regard to building relationships between people, it can form and expand these relationships, breaking down geographical or economic barriers, but it can also foster alienation from relationships built in the real world, detachment from real communities, loneliness, or the superficiality of relationships. As for the use of information, on the one hand, access to information is improving, and it is possible to circumvent censorship; however, there is also a flood of unverified and unreliable information, as well as the phenomenon of information overload—a veritable

bombardment of information that does not make it easier to navigate the world (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020; Francis 2019).

As Magdalena Bigaj aptly observes: "New technologies are neither good nor bad. They are simply tools that we can use to our advantage or disadvantage" (Bigaj 2020, 10). The author also offers a valuable perspective in the introduction to the book she co-authored with Maciej Dębski: "Aware that we are still at the beginning of the 'digital journey' and do not yet know where it will end, let us acknowledge that our behaviours (including forming relationships with others and building our identity via the internet) remain enigmatic, and the mechanisms of our online participation often remain unclear and, in a sense, irrational. And even if we do acquire such knowledge, let us remember that the rapid development of new technologies (in particular the development of mobile devices whose functioning is based on applications) will continue to present us with new challenges, including ethical ones. And although it is difficult for us to predict the direction in which new technologies will develop, or to what extent they will be an opportunity for the human race and to what extent a threat, we can say without a doubt that, year on year, they will permeate further areas of our lives" (Dębski and Bigaj 2019, 10).

The catechetical document incorporates a passage from Pope Francis's earlier exhortation addressed to young people, which offers a positive assessment of the opportunities for interpersonal dialogue created by the internet and social media. Cyberspace enables encounters, the exchange of experiences, and access to information and knowledge. It also allows for educational activities, as we have experienced in recent years due to the health restrictions associated with the coronavirus pandemic (some of these solutions have now become an irreversible part of educational practice). Functioning within digital culture in this way can broaden and enrich cognitive abilities, support memory, and facilitate decision-making—in other words, bring about positive digital enhancement (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020, 360; Francis 2019, 87). Activity on the global web also enables greater engagement in socio-political life, fosters civic attitudes, and, particularly in undemocratic states, facilitates the circulation of independent information and helps protect the most vulnerable (Francis 2019, 87). The "virtual hangout" is also a contemporary space where young people can satisfy their curiosity about the world and experience it together with their peers (Bigaj 2020, 8).

When considering the benefits of digital culture, one cannot overlook the opportunities it offers for education, including for a living and mature faith. In the *Directory*, this theme is addressed when discussing

the specific nature of catechesis "in the world of young people" (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020, 244–256). In characterising this group of recipients of catechesis, the authors of the document note the strong influence of social media and the so-called virtual world on today's young people and assess that this offers "opportunities that previous generations did not have," whilst also recognising the risks. A similar assessment is also expressed in the papal exhortation, which notes that cyberspace is a place "where young people spend a lot of time and easily come together" (Francis 2019, 87). It can therefore be concluded that this "world of young people", in which the Church is to be present with her catechesis, is largely a world of digital culture (Wyżkiewicz and Gospodarek 2020, 22–26; Springmann 2015, 15). The importance of cyberspace for the lives of today's recipients of catechesis is also discussed in the section of the Directory devoted to the methodology of catechesis. Virtual space is presented there as no less important to many young people than the real world, as a source of knowledge, a forum for expressing opinions and participating in discussions, and a space for conversation and seeking answers to pressing questions (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020, 213). Addressing communities engaged in catechesis with young people, the authors of the document express the desire that they should not only make an effort to engage with new cultural challenges, but also that they should "keep pace with the younger generation in terms of the tools that are now commonly used in teaching" (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020, 216).

It should be noted that, at present, both the internet and cyberspace in the broader sense constitute a new forum in which educational content and resources—including those for religious education—are intended to be present and are, in fact, becoming increasingly abundant (Kopiczko 2017, 177; Gogolik 2017, 264–267). As already mentioned, the prevailing pandemic forced a whole host of teachers to quickly learn how to use this space. The experience of distance learning also contributed to the wider use of digital tools in educational practice, some of which have remained in use after the lifting of pandemic-related restrictions.

While recognising the hopes that the use of digital culture holds for education, one cannot turn a blind eye to the dangers associated with it. The value of digital culture as a space for dialogue, encounters and the exchange of thoughts and views has already been mentioned; it may therefore seem surprising to portray this environment as a realm of loneliness, manipulation and violence. This is an example of the ambiguity of digital culture's impact on the individual, but also of its illusory impact, where, for instance, the illusion of numerous acquaintances and friendships in the virtual world leads to increasing isolation and an inability to function in

the real world. As Pope Francis emphasises: "it is unhealthy to confuse communication with mere virtual contact" (Francis 2019, 88), and it seems that this is becoming an increasingly serious problem, especially for today's young people. It is no coincidence that the generation of digital natives is also increasingly becoming a generation of solitary and individualistic people, which is reflected in their attitude towards faith, or even a distancing from religiosity, and also from spirituality (Twenge 2017, 119–142).

Another danger is linked to the specific nature of the language used in digital culture, which is the language of stories and narratives, rather than argumentation (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020, 363). There is a clear resurgence of this very style of language in contemporary culture, a good example of which is the speech given by the Polish Nobel laureate Olga Tokarczuk on the occasion of her receiving this prestigious award (Tokarczuk 2019). The themes outlined in the speech were also explored in greater depth in her book entitled *The Tender Narrator* (Tokarczuk 2020).

While acknowledging the appeal of narrative language, which engages intuition and emotions, the authors of the Directory also draw attention to its inadequacy for describing extreme or problematic situations. The use of storytelling language can lead to the formation of merely subjective opinions about reality, creating linguistic and intellectual experiments in which "everything is possible and anything can be said, and the truth has no existential weight" (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020, 364). Furthermore, adopting this style of thinking and speaking does not entail the need to argue one's case or work out compromise solutions, which fosters subjectivism and individualism, traits that are already characteristic of today's teenagers. The issue of language is also linked to the phenomenon of social aggression. This involves verbal aggression, insults, bullying, and belittling, to the point of destroying the other person. As Pope Francis points out, this phenomenon could not occur in real-life interactions, but in virtual reality it finds scope for unlimited expansion (Francis 2020, 44). When applied directly to activity in the digital world, this concept is known as cyberbullying or online aggression, which is reinforced by a (false) sense of anonymity online (Bąkowska 2019, 218; Siemieniecka et al. 2020, 19–29). Furthermore, there is a clear transfer of verbal aggression from the virtual world to the real world, as if virtual "training" emboldened users and removed boundaries in real-life encounters and exchanges as well.

Further dangers associated with digital culture could be summarised under the common heading of an information overload. The first problem stems from the sheer volume, or indeed the excess, of information. As Pope Francis rightly observes: "the overwhelming excess of information that floods us does not equate to

greater wisdom" (Francis 2020, 50). The overabundance of information that is not always necessary or relevant can even lead to an inability to properly select and prioritise content, where the sole criterion becomes first impressions and emotional responses (whether I like something or not), which reinforces what is "external, immediate, visible, fast, superficial and makeshift" (Francis 2013, 62; Sproncel 2022). Another issue is the quality and reliability of information available in the digital world. The authors of the Directory even warn against modern illiteracy, which they define as the inability to distinguish digital content in terms of quality and truthfulness (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020, 368). This danger necessitates preparing future generations to engage with digital media through proper media literacy, which will help them distinguish genuine information from fake news, as well as reliable material from manipulated content.

The information overload is also linked to a phenomenon known as the creation of information bubbles (Malinowski 2016, 19–20). Contrary to assurances of openness and broadening horizons supposedly resulting from participation in the digital age, particularly on social media, many platforms tend to bring like-minded people closer together, hindering the opportunity to engage with other views or positions. This leads to an inability to seek compromise solutions, develop common positions or look for common ground. Furthermore, these "closed information loops" facilitate the spread of fake news, which in turn reinforces stereotypes, prejudices and hatred (Francis 2019, 89; Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020, 361). On social media, there is a marked over-representation of extreme and simplistic positions on social, political and religious issues, which does not encourage people to "sit down and listen to others" in the real world either, and thus to maintain an openness that accepts others and learns to overcome one's own narcissism (Francis 2020, 48).

Moreover, digital culture can be described as a kind of religious phenomenon. The authors of the Directory note that what is radically new is the granting of trust and authority to artificial intelligence, entering into a specific relationship with a machine and expecting answers from it. This pseudo-religion contains a reference to a source of authority, possesses elements of religious ritual, and also a semblance of awe of the absolute (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020, 365–366; Ramelow 2024).

It is also worth noting the dangers that relate directly to religious education. The first of these is the temptation to transfer the way one operates in the virtual world to participation in the Church community. Yet "the dynamics of being a disciple are, after all, not the same as the relationship that develops between an

influencer and their virtual followers" (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020, 370). On the one hand, authority and obedience to the faith are necessary here, as they enable one to be a disciple; on the other, there must be a shift in thinking from an individualistic mindset focused on virtual popularity toward a more communal and social way of thinking. The second danger, however, is the virtualisation of catechesis, that is, the reduction of catechetical activities to digitisation and the use of new technologies. Understood in this way, catechesis will not create the conditions for experiencing the presence of God, which has a binding power, transforms life and provides the key to its interpretation (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020, 371).

3. Digital Culture and Artificial Intelligence in Religious Education: The Polish Context

Faith and religion (or religions) are present in cyberspace in a variety of ways. Religious organisations, including the Holy See, have their own websites. Many bishops and priests are active on social media, creating videos or even video series on YouTube, writing blogs, and broadcasting religious events, catechesis or liturgical celebrations. It is also possible to pray online, including by submitting a personal intention, and to take part in online retreats. The specific nature of this communication is significant, since it takes on a hypertextual character, which means the possibility of personalisation, as well as temporal flexibility and the ability to revisit content and materials available online (Springmann 2015, 22–23). It is also worth mentioning the tool known as Magisterium AI, which, based on artificial intelligence mechanisms, can help provide answers to questions related to faith and morality and, importantly, these answers are based on the teachings of the Catholic Church (Bielinowicz and Bilicka 2025, 24).

Furthermore, there is no shortage of resources on the internet specifically related to catechesis. Religious education textbooks may be supplemented by online platforms offering additional teaching materials, opportunities for the exchange of ideas among teachers, and forms of interaction with publishers or authors of catechetical resources.

Many ICT tools are also designed either specifically for teachers or can be easily adapted for educational purposes. Using them can support teaching effectiveness (e.g. Kahoot!, Labirynt, LearningApps, Nearpod, Padlet, Pomodoro, or Quizizz). They can reinforce standard educational content and diversify the ways in which it is delivered through Facebook groups and fan pages, mobile apps, blogs, vlogs, and websites, while also helping teachers develop digital skills (Ligęza and Wilk 2016; Bilicka 2015). The Polish context

provides a useful example of how these broader developments are beginning to be incorporated into formal frameworks for religious education.

On the basis of the preceding analysis, several good educational practices can be proposed for the use of artificial intelligence in religious education. These include, among others: critically comparing AI-generated responses with reliable sources; analysing the anthropological assumptions underlying the generated content; maintaining a dialogue between teacher and student; treating AI as a supportive tool rather than a substitute for interpretation, reflection, and human connection; and developing "religious digital literacy" (Janas 2026).

In the 2025 revised Core Curriculum for the Teaching of Roman Catholic Religion in Poland, the authors note the educational potential of multimedia methods, including those utilising artificial intelligence. Referring to the educational stage of grades 4–6 of primary school, they write: "Nowadays, both in lesson preparation and delivery, it is worth using tools based on artificial intelligence, as well as applications with AI functions that help create, among other things, multimedia presentations. It is worth keeping an eye on the development of this technology, as it offers ever-greater educational opportunities" (Polish Bishops' Conference 2025, 40). It is important here to highlight AI not only as a useful tool for working with pupils, but also as a resource for teachers to aid in the effective preparation of lessons. Referring to the next stage of education (grades 7–8), the authors of the document add: "In modern teaching, it seems beneficial to use various tools based on artificial intelligence both during lesson preparation and delivery. These may include modern search engines or chatbots, which allow for the preparation of source materials, tests, photographs, graphics, etc." (Polish Bishops' Conference 2025, 50). The same recommendation is repeated at secondary-school level. This suggests that the curriculum recognises the educational relevance of AI across different stages of schooling, although it does not yet substantially differentiate the expected forms of AI use according to learners' age, growing autonomy, or level of digital competence (Polish Bishops' Conference 2025, 62).

While acknowledging the presence of themes related to the phenomena under discussion, one might still feel a certain sense of incompleteness—particularly regarding issues of ethics and anthropology in the context of digital culture and AI. It is worth noting that the document in question serves as a set of theoretical guidelines; practical ideas for leveraging technological capabilities will emerge at the level of textbooks and through the personal experiences of religious education teachers. Addressing these themes will undoubtedly

require various forms of training for teachers—and it would be unfortunate if such training were to focus solely on the didactic aspect, while overlooking the fundamental nature of the phenomena being discussed.

Conclusions

The analysis indicates that digital culture and artificial intelligence should neither be treated as external additions to religious education nor accepted uncritically as neutral educational tools. They increasingly constitute part of the cultural environment in which children and young people learn, communicate, form relationships, and develop their understanding of themselves and the world. Therefore, religious education needs to engage with this environment, while preserving those dimensions of formation that depend on personal presence, interpersonal relationships, accompaniment, and witness.

The principle of "limited trust" proposed in this article provides a useful framework for such an approach. It combines openness to the educational potential of digital technologies with critical attention to their anthropological, relational, and formative limitations. From this perspective, artificial intelligence may support teachers in preparing educational materials, diversifying teaching methods, and facilitating access to information, but it should not replace the personal and relational dimensions of religious education.

On the one hand, this principle entails the need to courageously engage with the possibilities offered by a new culture, to benefit from its advantages, and to continuously evaluate the tools it provides to educators. On the other hand, it calls for critical reflection—a perspective capable of looking beyond immediate gains or mere utility. Such reflection inquires about the role of the human person in religious education, the significance of personal witness, the master-disciple relationship, spontaneous creativity, and the concept of "accompaniment"—a theme strongly emphasized in the teachings of Pope Francis. This approach guards against both a panicked fear of the new, the unknown, or the potentially revolutionary nature of these phenomena, and an excessive optimism that might lead to the hasty abandonment or rejection of established practices for passing on the faith to future generations. In this sense, the principle of "limited trust" seeks to maintain a constructive balance between openness to technological innovation and the preservation of those relational, personal, and formative dimensions of religious education that cannot be reduced to technological efficiency.

The Polish case illustrates an emerging institutional recognition of this challenge. The 2025 Core Curriculum for the Teaching of Roman Catholic Religion in Poland explicitly acknowledges the educational potential of AI-based tools across several stages of schooling. At the same time, the analysis suggests a need

for further pedagogical reflection on how the use of these technologies should differ according to learners' age, autonomy, and digital competence.

Further research should therefore examine not only the technical effectiveness of AI-supported religious education but also its impact on teacher–student relationships, religious formation, critical digital literacy, and the capacity of young people to distinguish technological assistance from the personal and communal dimensions of faith formation.

The conclusions drawn from this article are limited due to its analytical nature. They could be supplemented by wider analysis, for instance, by examining the religious education textbooks currently being developed on the basis of new documents, or by investigating the actual presence, understanding, and significance of artificial intelligence in religious education classes, a topic that is being explored (Chrostowski and Mąkosa 2026).

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