

## ***EDITORIAL NOTE***

### **Mapping Contemporary Currents in Religion and Communication**

The contributions in this issue of *Religion and Social Communication* explore the evolving intersections of religion, culture, spirituality, and the digital world. The authors pay particular attention to the ethical and practical challenges that arise from contemporary communication technologies. Taken together, the articles examine the relationship between digital communication, cultural identity, institutional trust, and philosophical interpretation. Although the studies come from different contexts and methods, they share a concern for identifying vulnerabilities and offering ethical or methodological responses to rapid technological and social change.

To help readers appreciate the wider significance of this issue, the contributions can be grouped into four clusters: (1) digital communication, competency gaps, and ethical frameworks; (2) cultural identity, faith, and the challenge to authenticity; (3) governance, trust, and accountability; and (4) philosophical and hermeneutical foundations.

#### **1. Digital Communication, Competency Gaps, and Ethical Frameworks**

Several contributions look at how religious institutions, especially within the Catholic context, try to communicate ethically and effectively in digital settings. Bartolome identifies notable competency gaps among parish social-communication volunteers. He points out that many volunteers feel confident in ethical practice but less so in theology or digital analytics. His proposed “SOCCOM Academy” responds to this need by combining formation in theology, analytics, and crisis readiness.

Navas develops a framework for managing the Church’s digital reputation during sexual abuse crises. Her approach stresses empathy, accountability, transparency, and steady digital monitoring. In a related way, Redubla examines how Pope Francis includes principles of Media and Information Literacy in his encyclicals through strategies of discernment, dialogue, advocacy, and media sustainability.

Taguitag examines the narcissism and addictive behavior seen in digital culture by drawing on Ferdinand Ulrich's concept of Being. He suggests a more charitable and purpose-centered approach to online life. Paul shows how new technologies such as AI, drones, and virtual queue systems are reshaping pilgrimage experiences in Kerala. These developments suggest growing institutional capacity to use technology within sacred settings. Desfianti, Annabel, and Angelina also study digital communication and highlight its mixed effects in Indonesia's religious governance. They note that digital media can both promote inclusion and increase polarization.

In various ways, these studies point to the need for ethical formation, technological literacy, and stronger institutional preparation in a society where digital communication is becoming central to religious practice.

## 2. Cultural Identity, Faith, and the Challenge to Authenticity

The second theme pertains to how cultural identity shapes religious authenticity in today's social and media environments. Jin and Xu show that Malaysian Buddhist youth continue to view temple life and direct interactions with monastic leaders as the most authentic forms of religious practice. Digital platforms may be convenient, but they do not replace embodied experience.

Cadingpal, Lazaga, and Sampayan study the Ilokano expression *Makaammo'n ti Apo* ("God will take care of it"). They interpret it as a cultural expression of spirituality that contrasts with more individualistic Western ideas. Nguyen explores similar tensions in Vietnam. He argues that collectivist cultural patterns can overshadow personal faith development and present challenges for building a more synodal Church.

Taguitag's reflection on Being also contributes to this conversation. He warns that digital narcissism threatens the integrity of Catholic identity. Paul identifies shared motifs in Hindu and Catholic pilgrimages in Kerala. These motifs include embodied movement, communal travel, and cultural ethos. He notes that physical pilgrimage remains central to spiritual identity even as digital tools assist with logistics.

From their respective contexts, these contributions show how cultural norms and communal identities in Filipino, Vietnamese, Malaysian, and Indian milieux shape the lived expression of faith. They also reveal the tension that emerges when culturally embedded practices meet digital or institutional structures.

### **3. Governance, Trust, and Accountability**

The third theme discussed in the contributions looks at how institutions build, lose, and rebuild trust. Drawing on Public Trust Theory, Desfianti, Annabel, and Angelina argue that fairness, procedural legitimacy, transparency, and inclusive representation are key to public trust in Indonesia's religious governance. Trust weakens when governance appears inconsistent or influenced by majority pressure.

Navas also focuses on accountability in her study of crisis communication within the Catholic Church. She argues that victim-centered communication and transparent truth-seeking are necessary to restore credibility. Bartolome adds to this conversation by identifying gaps in parish communication governance. These include informal crisis responses and a lack of clear policies. He recommends formal communication protocols and crisis drills to strengthen accountability.

Trust, as demonstrated in the cited articles, depends on more than communication skill. It rests on ethical governance, consistent action, and structural integrity.

### **4. Philosophical and Hermeneutical Foundations**

The final theme considers deeper questions of interpretation, knowledge, and metaphysics. Liu critiques Zagzebski's virtue responsibilism and argues that intellectual virtue alone cannot resolve the classic tensions raised by the Gettier problem.

Taguitag presents a metaphysical reading of Ulrich's concept of Being. He describes Being as a divine gift and uses this idea to respond to the distortions of selfhood seen in digital culture. Abraham introduces performance criticism as a useful hermeneutical tool for today's digital environment. He notes that the Bible's roots in oral performance make this method valuable in a time when digital media has created something like a "second orality." Cadingpal, Lazaga, and Sampayan employ hermeneutical phenomenology to interpret Ilokano spirituality as a valid source of theological insight. Redubla uses a socio-cultural discourse approach to show how Pope Francis includes media literacy in his theological communication through careful strategies of reflection and dialogue.

While seemingly diverse in their approaches and contexts of examination, these contributions remind us that philosophical and hermeneutical methods continue to shape how religious communities understand meaning, identity, and existence.

Despite not having a designated theme for this issue of the journal, when all the contributions are considered in their relationship to one another as well as individually, this issue reveals the many ways religion now engages with swiftly changing communicative, cultural, and technological environments. They show the ethical demands of modern communication technology, the cultural factors that influence authentic expressions of faith, the conditions needed for building and restoring institutional trust, and the philosophical questions that ground reflection in religious life. We hope that this collection encourages further research, conversation, and creativity in the study of religion and social communication.

***Anthony Le Duc, SVD***

Chief Editor