

# THE RELEVANCE OF SLAVIC SPIRITUALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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**Abstract:** HOSPODÁR, Michal. *The Relevance of Slavic Spirituality in the Context of Artificial Intelligence*. Since the beginning of the third millennium, the lives of people in developed countries have been increasingly influenced by artificial intelligence (AI). It currently represents one of the most significant technological revolutions since the emergence of the Internet. It is a modern technology that in many ways resembles and imitates human activity, particularly creativity and decision-making processes. On the other hand, the risks of its overuse are also widely discussed in the professional world. The article first presents basic knowledge of Slavic spirituality, where the central role is played by the human person. Only a person is capable of a living relationship with another person and with God, as only a person possesses a “heart” capable of authentically and comprehensively perceiving surrounding reality. The second part briefly defines what artificial intelligence is and outlines the limits of its applicability. When comparing the capabilities of a human person and artificial intelligence, a person remains irreplaceable. Moreover, according to the document of the Church Magisterium *Antiqua et nova*, a person is rooted in an ethical and moral tradition that guides and binds human action, whereas AI technology itself does not possess this ability. Therefore, Christian, and especially Slavic, spirituality, as the article emphasizes, serves as a counterbalance and potential remedy for human entanglement in the unknown waters of increasingly advanced technologies.

**Keywords:** *spirituality, artificial intelligence, heart, person, communication*

## Introduction

At the core of Slavic spirituality, which we want to discuss in this article, is the concept of the heart. The human heart is a symbol of the inner world that is invisible to physical sight. Moreover, only in the depths of this heart is real contact with God possible, which is the basis of personal spirituality. The French physicist and thinker Blaise Pascal expressed this idea as follows: “God, whom the heart feels” (Pascal 2002, 277-278). The creative activity of the heart is manifested not only in feelings, as is often expressed today in electronic communication through so-called emoticons.<sup>1</sup> In the biblical sense, the heart is the very center of a person, his reason (thinking) and will (decision-making), as well as the mysterious sanctuary that we call conscience.

The aim of this reflection is to provide an argumentative grounding for the claim that man, in his personal equipment and integrity, is irreplaceable and unique in the face of any technology. Artificial intelligence, as an increasingly sophisticated tool capable of imitating human beings, their appearance, voice, and aspects of the inner world, requires a factual and critical approach in this context, so that, instead of being a helpful aid, it does not turn into a force that undermines the “heart” of the individual and of humanity as a whole. The starting point for our investigation is the basic anthropological truth: man is a person, created in the image of God (Lat. *imago Dei*) and

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<sup>1</sup> Emoticons are graphic signs used to express human emotions.

likeness (cf. *Gn* 1:27). All attempts to technically replicate or surpass human capacities necessarily fail, because man is a person (Lat. *naturae rationalis individua substantia*), elevated above all other creation. As such, man is oriented toward living in interpersonal relationships with other people and with God (Krupa 2024, 1-15). In this, his ontological greatness and responsibility are most evident (Řebíková 2025a, 53-67).

## Spirituality and its specifics

At the beginning, it is necessary to define what we understand by the term spirituality, or the adjective 'spiritual'. Despite its antiquity, there is still a very lively discussion about the various forms and meanings of spirituality, and it is often not even clear what is hidden behind this term. Today, spirituality is considered to be everything that is not material or tangible. This is based on the etymology of the Latin word *spiritus* – spirit, which has both religious and secular semantic content. The religious concept of spirituality has its basis in the relationship of the human person to God (Plašienková 2013, 665-687; Adam – Trstenský 2024, 53-67).

It is therefore important to clarify the understanding of this term at the outset, or to try to define its Christian content in what follows. If we look at a person in his classical trichotomous structure (body, soul, spirit), then spirituality encompasses all three of these “levels” of the human person. Lexically, spirituality is defined “as every person’s inherent ability for self-transcendence, that is, the ability to overcome oneself in the form of one’s own desires or efforts [...]” (Ďurica 2015, 858). In other words, spirituality is the ability to enter into the depths of one’s own soul and use its power for a deeper, more beautiful, and more meaningful life, thereby transcending its material substance and limitations. Human spirituality is ambiguous; to a large extent, it is a subjective – personal and therefore also individually variable – side of human life (Hospodár 2025, 50-54; Maturkanič et al. 2023b, 20-32).

Christian spirituality belongs to the domain of theological science. It deals with the practical principles of real piety (spiritual theology, asceticism, mysticism). In doing so, we distinguish between early Christian, eremitical, monastic, medieval, and *devotio moderna* spirituality; we also differentiate between Western and Eastern spirituality, and within its framework we identify Slavic or Cyrillo-Methodian spirituality. The expert on the East, Tomáš Špidlík (1919–2010), used to say that: “The goal of Christian life is the perfect spiritualization of man: his mind, will, emotions, and body. And this is also the goal of human society” (Špidlík 1993, 13).

In the tradition of the Christian East, spirituality is understood as a way of life in the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit and His mysterious workings in the soul (the ‘breathing’ of the Spirit) constitute an inexhaustible source of spiritual dynamics. Through the gift of infused grace, the Holy Spirit elevates man to a supernatural level and conforms his life to that of Jesus Christ. The human subject is expected to cooperate humbly and not to resist the action of the Holy Spirit. Tomáš Špidlík, a great authority on the subject, states that the Eastern Fathers identified Christian spirituality with monastic spirituality in terms of both its goals and its means. They considered it a mistake to overemphasize the differences (Ambros – Karczubová 2010, 161). The spirituality of the laity is not fundamentally different in character from the spirituality of the clergy; both grow from a common source, which is the Gospel, and differ only in the conditions of their realization and in the forms of spiritual life (Maturkanič et al. 2023a, 58-72). The diversity of types of Christian spirituality is not harmful; on the contrary, it is enriching.

In summary, it can be said that the basis of every spirituality that claims to be Christian is the effort to faithfully follow the Son of God, Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The degrees of this perfection can be recognized:

- according to the desire to know God through study, prayer and contemplation (Gr. *θεωρία*);
- according to the effort to overcome imperfection;
- according to a virtuous life (Gr. *πρᾶξις*).
- holiness is a synthesis of *theoria* and *praxis*.

In the Christian West, holiness is usually viewed through morality moral lens. In the East, however, holiness is understood ontologically, because God is Holy,<sup>2</sup> and the holy person is the one who bears the Holy Spirit within.

## Slavic spirituality

Christian spirituality in our territory is linked to the evangelizing mission of the brothers Constantine-Cyril and Methodius to Moravia in the second half of the 9th century (Hetényi – Ivanič 2017, 77-91). It was deeply rooted in the Eastern, Byzantine tradition, combining intellectual education with an ascetic life and missionary zeal (Adam 2025, 132-143). Its key elements were:

1. Eastern spirituality (a way of life in the Holy Spirit);
2. Liturgy in a living vernacular language (Old Church Slavonic, Church Slavonic, Slovak);
3. Unity with the Roman Apostolic See – with respect for subordination to the Roman Pope (Vasil' 1999, 5).

This spirituality is alive and promising even today (Ďurková – Kondrla 2025, 144-153). Its roots are common to both the East and the West, but just as we see specific features among individual nations, we should also characterize the distinctive features of Eastern and Western spirituality in the same way. Its importance and meaning result from its subject, i.e., the pursuit of supernatural perfection. Building Christian perfection means creating a concrete model of inner work that is able to direct the efforts of the soul (Kondrla – Ďurková 2023, 1433). From an emotional point of view, Slavic nations are more similar to Eastern nations and share their inclinations toward poetry, singing, music, and reflective thought. This spiritual quality has also penetrated into church life, the external manifestation of which is reflected precisely in the rite. In the Western (Roman) rite, by contrast, rigor, determination, and practicality are manifested. There is much less emotional expressiveness in the Western rite than in the Eastern rite. It seems that in Slovakia we are precisely at the frontier where these two models intersect. The liturgy, which is a celebration of God, has a theocentric character. The liturgy should also include a contemplative attentiveness that goes through two stages: contemplation of God's glory, which prepares the Christian for perfect communion, and contemplation of the beauty of nature, which presents the world to us as an "endless ocean of symbols" (Clément 2004, 211). The earth appears as an infinite sacred relic, as the tomb in which Christ was buried, or as the earth from which He rose from the dead to give us new life. It is the tree of the cross, which has become the tree of life. Through it, the earth is mystically identified with the land of Paradise and brings into our awareness the sacredness of things.

At the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the Western Church greatly appreciated the beauty of the Eastern tradition (cf. PO 16; LG 69), emphasizing this appreciation by adopting some Eastern elements, rich in theological symbols, into the Western liturgy, such as the solemn elevation of the Gospel book in a theocentric manner (Judák et al. 2025, 104-118).

<sup>2</sup> Currently, there is increasing interest in ontological theology in the West as well (cf. Coda 2022).

## Spirituality of the heart is personal

The concept of “heart” occupies a central position in the mysticism, religion, and poetry of all nations (Komorovský 2011, 365). This symbolic concept appears in the Bible more than a thousand times. The heart thinks, considers, makes plans, makes decisions, leads to action, and assumes responsibility. The heart is the seat of moral and religious life. The heart feels the fear of God. Even though the heart is hidden, a person’s behavior reveals something about it. We recognize a person by the expression of their face and by their actions (Máhrík et al. 2024, 34-43). In the Holy Scripture, the heart integrally encompasses the fullness of spiritual life, and this includes the whole person with all their abilities. Loyalty to God resides in the heart. “In a concrete and global biblical anthropology, the heart of a person is the very source of their unconscious, cognitive, and free personality, the place of their choice and decisions, the place of the unwritten law of God (cf. *Rom* 2:15) and the mysterious activity of God” (Léon-Dufour 2015, 812).

We encounter the term “heart” particularly often in the works of spiritual authors of the Christian East. They speak of guarding the heart, of attention focused on the heart, of purity of the heart, of the prayer of the heart, of God’s presence in the heart, etc. Cardinal Špidlík emphasized that the ability to perceive reality with the heart in a special way characteristic of Slavic peoples (Šatura 1995, 23-31). Everything is marked by a personal relationship, where the heart is an organ that feels everything that touches a person. “In the theology of the Christian East, and especially in the Slavic East, the heart takes on a dual meaning: it is both the center of human existence and the place of encounter between the human being and God. The heart is thus at the same time the place of the ecstasy of the human person, who overcomes *φιλαυτία* (love of self), and it is also the place of the “transcendence” of God, of his kenosis, where God becomes close to the human person” (Mojzeš 2018, 98).

In the article *Lidské srdce ve spiritualitě křesťanského Východu* [Man’s heart in the spirituality of the Christian East], Špidlík mentions a similar “admirable difference” between spiritualities when he writes that if we compare Eastern spirituality with books on morality widespread in the West, we can conclude that Eastern spirituality is increasingly focused on the state of the heart [...]. Western moralists often analyze the perfection of concrete moral acts without taking into account the personality as such. The Christian East is characterized by a kind of ontological spirituality (Ambros – Karczubová 2010, 74). Špidlík emphasizes the central role of the human person and convincingly demonstrates this based on Russian religious philosophers in his work *Russian Idea*. “Russian thinking is anthropocentric [...]” (Špidlík 1996, 14). “An unusually characteristic peculiarity of Eastern Christianity lies in the fact that for it the mind, intellect, and reason are never the ultimate basis or the foundation of life; rational reflection on God is not the true source of religious reception. The Eastern Church Fathers and Russian monks-elders give the following instruction for a true, genuine religious experience: ‘The mind should dwell in the heart’” (Komorovský 2011, 371).

## Artificial intelligence and its risks

Technical progress and the development of contemporary civilization, which is characterized by the dominance of technology, require an adequate development of moral life and ethics in the diverse practice of life (Králík et al. 2024, 44-52; Řebíková, 2025b). Therefore, it is important to focus our attention primarily on the human person within these achievements of our time, as Pope John Paul II already expressed in his first encyclical *Redemptor hominis* in 1979: “As we observe these processes and share in them, we must not allow ourselves to be carried away by excessive

enthusiasm, nor by one-sided zeal for what we have achieved. Rather, all of us must honestly, objectively and with a sense of moral responsibility ask the fundamental questions concerning man's situation today and in the future" (RH 1979, 15).

In recent years, we have also included artificial intelligence, often referred to as a new global technical revolution, among these developments. Artificial intelligence (AI) is a field of computer science that seeks to imitate human thinking and decision-making through computer systems. Unlike humans, it works with large amounts of data rather than its own intelligence. The year 2022 marked a turning point in the advancement of AI applications, as the American research laboratory OpenAI released ChatGPT, a publicly accessible generative language model. ChatGPT, which stands for Generative Pre-trained Transformer, is an AI-based chatbot capable of generating contextually appropriate and coherent texts based on user prompts, and of maintaining interactive communication (Andok et al. 2025, 3).

It should be emphasized that artificial intelligence is not a person; it does not have a mind or consciousness. Nevertheless, it has significant potential for practical application. From this perspective, AI poses new challenges for humanity, which were succinctly expressed by the late Pope Francis when he called artificial intelligence and peace the two most important issues of our time (Francis 2023). We will not describe in detail here the advantages and possibilities of AI applications. Rather, let us focus on the argument supporting the thesis under consideration, namely, that AI cannot replace humans in their integral value and integrity.

The leading Slovak AI scientist Daniela Vacek clearly rejects the anthropomorphization of artificial intelligence. "It is a technologically complex tool with great potential for use. It is not a person or a moral actor, it does not understand, it does not have real intentions, it does not have a mind, it is not conscious," she emphasizes. According to her, the problem arises when we assign to AI roles that it cannot actually carry out. "I mean roles such as a friend, partner, advisor, or therapist" (Dzurjovčinová 2026). When asked what the ideal relationship between a person and AI should look like, she answers straightforwardly: "Ideally, it would be the relationship I have with my coffee maker, washing machine, or laptop. Thanks to them, I do not have to grind coffee in the morning with my eyes barely open, I do not have to wash in the stream or write articles on a typewriter. Similarly, artificial intelligence should serve as a useful tool" (Dzurjovčinová 2026).

AI leaders abroad have found a new strategy: to scare investors. By portraying AI as a technology that can bring humanity to its knees, they are also positioning themselves as the only ones capable of controlling this force. The latest example is Dario Amodei, co-founder of Anthropic. Amodei's main thesis is alarming: "In 2026, we are significantly closer to real danger than we were in 2023" (Amodei 2026). In his text, he tries to alert humanity and defines the main risks that threaten us if the development of AI gets out of control:

- Biological weapons: AI could help develop dangerous pathogens or "enhanced" military technologies.
- Loss of control: A scenario in which AI gains control over human decision-making.
- Global totalitarianism: Countries with technological superiority could establish a "global totalitarian dictatorship" and dominate other nations.
- Economic collapse: Massive job losses and an extreme concentration of wealth in the hands of a handful of companies (Murgáš et al. 2024, 10045; Kučera 2025, 250-263.)

The integration of AI into theological education has sparked both optimism and critical reflection among scholars and practitioners. Guo et al. (2021, online) explored the incorporation of AI technologies into classroom teaching, academic research, and pedagogical strategies, highlighting their growing influence in educational settings. López-Sánchez et al. (2023) underscored the potential of AI-driven tools—such as chatbots and virtual tutors—to personalize learning

experiences and enhance student engagement. At the same time, they emphasize that while AI can assist pedagogically, it cannot replicate the relational, dialogical, and formative dimensions essential to faith development, which require human accompaniment and personal witness (Corpuz 2025, 4).

## The teaching of the Church's Magisterium on AI

The current Holy Father, Leo XIV, follows his predecessor and actively intervenes in the area of the ethical regulation of artificial intelligence. In his media message in defense of the human person, he writes: "Faces and voices are sacred. They were given to us by God, who created us in his image and likeness and called us to life through the Word he addressed to us" (Leo XIV 2026). From this perspective, the protection of human faces and voices has a deep spiritual meaning. It is not just a question of ethics or the regulation of technology, but of protecting that which carries the trace of God's presence in the human person (Plašienková 2020, 505-510).

This development is followed by another risk that the Pope considers particularly serious: the uncritical entrustment of authority to artificial intelligence as if it had answers to everything. It is a shift in attitude towards knowledge, not just a change of tool: "A naïve and uncritical trust in artificial intelligence as a 'friend' that knows everything can further weaken our ability to think analytically and creatively, to grasp meaning, and to distinguish between syntax and semantics" (Leo XIV 2026).

At the same time, digital environments are increasingly blurring the line between authentic relationships and their imitations. In the US, it is estimated that over one million people have a "deep" personal relationship with AI. In everyday communication, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish who is on the other side. The Holy Father warns of this fact: "It becomes increasingly difficult to determine whether we are interacting with other human beings or with 'bots' or 'virtual influencers'" (Leo XIV 2026).

Leo XIV also appealed to responsibility in his first meeting with journalists after being elected head of the Church, when he said: "To promote a communication that can lead us out of the 'Tower of Babel', out of the chaos of loveless, often ideological and biased languages. Communication is not only the transmission of information, but it is also the creation of a culture, of human and digital environments that become spaces for dialogue and discussion. And given technological development, this mission becomes even more urgent. I am thinking in particular of artificial intelligence and its enormous potential, which, however, requires responsibility and discernment, so that these tools are directed towards the good of all and benefit all humanity" (Gaeta 2025, 109-110).

The result of the joint effort of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Culture and Education is a note on the relationship between artificial and human intelligence. The note, entitled *Antiqua et nova*, was published in January 2025 and summarizes the teaching of the popes in this area to date. It states that intelligence in the true sense belongs to human beings, not machines. According to the note, the characteristics of human intelligence and the differences in comparison with artificial intelligence are clearly evident. The note states that "[...] the very use of the word 'intelligence' in connection with AI can prove misleading and risks overlooking what is most precious in the human person. In light of this, AI should not be seen as *an artificial form* of human intelligence but as a *product* of it" (Hospodár 2025, 35). The human person has the ability to relate, to feel, to perceive, to seek truth, etc. The human person is rooted in an ethical and moral tradition and, in addition, has the ability to enter into a relationship with God.

The note devotes a separate Chapter V to the positive use of AI in various areas of life. The most serious applications appear to be its use in healthcare, especially in diagnostics, in education, and in environmental protection, etc. At the same time, it can replace qualified jobs. Specifically in the area of work, it is stated that while on the one hand artificial intelligence has the “potential” to increase skills and productivity, on the other hand it can “deskill workers, subject them to automated surveillance, and relegate them to rigid and repetitive tasks” (Hospodár 2025, 67).

## Conclusion

The Church is obliged to watch over the entrusted treasure of faith and to seek the signs of the times and their interpretation in order to fulfill its mission. Even in today's digital age, many people hunger for God, or rather for a life grounded in personal relationships and truth. The use of AI does not replace the building of a personal relationship with either God or the human person. In fact, AI is unable to behave like a human in solving certain types of problems. One of the significant results of the theory of computability (theory of algorithms) states that there are strictly more mathematical functions (problems) that are not computable by a computer or a Turing machine than those that are computable (Rogers 1987). This result does not prevent competent authorities from seeking possibilities for its broad application. On the other hand, however, the use of AI calls for ethical regulation in accordance with the Decalogue and the true good of the human person. Artificial intelligence will always remain an imperfect human work that will not surpass its creator.

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