Rewiring the House of God:
Religious Self-World Relations in the Digital Environment

Online Workshop, 15th – 17th September 2021

organized by Fouad Gehad Marei (University of Birmingham)
and Gabriel Malli (University of Graz / University of Erfurt)

Call for Papers

The outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic and ensuing lockdown measures disrupted many aspects of social and economic life and imposed new social realities. Digital technologies provided alternative avenues for social interactions and became central features of the 'New Normal'. Communities and people of faith were no exception in these trying times. Worldwide, houses of worship closed their doors and urged the faithful to obey social distancing measures. In response, wo/men of faith exploited digital technologies and virtual platforms to worship and to observe time-honored rituals cultures.

This online workshop capitalizes on the amplified importance of faith-related digital practices and devices, recognizing that people of faith have been entangled with the effects and conditions of the digital environment for decades. It seeks to engage with scholarly works concerned with 'digital religion', mediatization of religion, and religion on the Internet. The workshop will examine the mutually transformative relationship between digital technologies and contemporary modes of religiosity, with a particular interest in three broad themes:

- *Religious subjectivities and digital technologies:*
  Digital environments are a site for the articulation and performance of religious subjectivities. These religiously informed modes of self-understanding and conduct inform individuals' moralities and practices. Religious self-presentation on social media, participation in online rituals and the promotion of pious lifestyles through online and digital media are only some of the manifold digital practices by which new possibilities for the formation of religious subjectivities are created.

- *Communities of faith in an era of digital culture:*
  By enabling new forms of social interaction, digital technologies effect processes of community-building and alter the ways in which people experience religious socialization. Given their global reach, they embed community members in life-worlds that extend trans-locally, far beyond their immediate surroundings. In some contexts, the use of digital technologies by religious elites re-affirmed and expanded their reach and claim for authority. In other contexts, these technologies broadened participation in processual constructions of faith communities as well as the production and circulation of religious knowledge, thus transforming relations among social actors.

- *The occult and other-worldly in the digital environment*
  Digital devices generate novel ways of conjuring the emotive power of the sacred in the everyday lives of pious individuals. Livestreaming technologies connect wo/men of faith with sacred sites in faraway lands at the touch of a screen and bring the occult to their laptops and smartphones. Meanwhile video games and virtual realities allow them to 'live' events from hagiographic pasts and eschatological futures, offering emotive and corporeal experiences of the other-worldly.

Call for papers:

We invite scholarly contributions that interrogate the relationship between digital technologies and religious life-worlds. We understand 'religion' broadly and welcome contributions examining different religious traditions. Scholars of all career levels and disciplinary and interdisciplinary backgrounds are encouraged to apply, including from anthropology, sociology, religious studies, political science, media studies, cultural studies, and related disciplines.

We encourage empirically informed contributions which engage with and contribute to the theoretical debates on one or more of the thematic areas outlined above, namely:

- The role of digital media in processes of religious subjectivation;
- The impact of digital media on processual constructions of imagined communities of faith and the political and socio-religious life of the religious community; and
- The relationship between digital technologies and imaginal engagements with the Elsewhere and the other-worldly.

Speakers and panel discussants:

We are pleased to announce that **Prof. Gary R. Bunt** (University of Wales Trinity Saint David, UK), **Dr. Tim Hutchings** (University of Nottingham, UK), and **Prof. Mia Lövheim** (Uppsala University, Sweden) will discuss and provide feedback on workshop papers.

To apply:

Applications should be sent to mwk-ifaith@uni-erfurt.de by the 2nd of April. They should include the **full title of your paper**, an **abstract of 350 words**, **six keywords** describing your research, and the **names and affiliations** of the author(s). Papers must be unpublished. Published articles and articles in print will not be considered.

Decisions will be made and a notification of acceptance will be given by mid-April.

Submissions and publication:

Authors should submit full-length draft articles by the 16th of August. Articles will be pre-circulated to workshop participants and discussants for in-depth comments and feedback. While the emphasis is on scientific quality, articles should be approximately 7,500 words (including all notes and references).

Selected papers will be included in a special issue of a peer-reviewed journal, tentatively planned for autumn 2022. Workshop participants should be willing to revise their papers and resubmit them for inclusion in the special issue.