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The Internet as an Ethical Challenge for Religions

Call for Papers for Vol. 9 (01/2008)

- **Deadline for extended abstracts:** April 1, 2008
- **Notification of acceptance to authors:** April 15, 2008
- **Deadline for manuscript submission:** June 15, 2008
- **Deadline for revised manuscript:** July 15, 2008
- **Publication:** July 2008

Introduction

Religions are not only communities of faith but also of communication. Religious communication takes place vertically between human beings and a transcendent holy entity. It also occurs horizontally among individuals and groups. This is the reason why religions can not remain unaffected by the development and the future directions of the global digital network.

Communication does not take place only within a single religious community but also among several ones and between them and the secular world. Functional, structural, communicational and occasionally ethical commonalities between religions cannot hide the fact that there are a lot of deep differences as well as particular interests. This is the reason why these forms of religious communication are characterized by all kinds of tensions and conflicts. Mistrust, fear of living under constant threat, a hermeneutics of suspicion, and strategies of domination are common sources of potential conflicts in the present time.

In view of this situation, religions experience the challenge of giving ethical answers to pressing questions particularly in the field of information and communication technology that is at the same time an important instrument for religious communication:

- Do religions conceive ICT inventions and innovations as a threat or as a benefit?
- Do they see the opportunities offered by ICT as a possible avenue to communicate their contents and values?
- Or do they, on the contrary, see ICT as a threat arising from the free access to information that allows alternative groups to offer different kinds of meanings to texts and events?
- Which kinds of relations are being addressed by religions, in general, towards the media?
- Which principles of information ethics are being applied or betrayed?
- Which kinds of political, economic or ideological movements can become a threat for these principles being misused or undermined?
- How do religious institutions (such as churches, local communities, charity organizations, religious orders, religious groups, religious media institutions, etc.) use and evaluate ICT?
- To what extent can religious groupings contribute to the international ethical debate regarding ICT and its application?

Topics

We are looking for contributions on this topic for our next IRIE issue. Authors are invited to send an article from the perspective of one specific religion – among them, the abrahamic-prophetic in addition to Asian sage-oriented religions, “traditional religions” such as African or Western ones, and other indigenous religious (excluding sects). We may also accept comparative studies. We welcome speculative as well as empirical analyses. This IRIE issue is devoted to Topic 3 but combinations with the other topics, particularly with Topic 4q/r/u, are welcome:

1. Religions and ICT
 - a. Views of religions and their theologies on IT and the Internet
 - b. Impact of ICT on religious power structures (centralization vs. decentralization, vertical hierarchies vs. horizontal networking)

2. Religions inside Networks
 - c. Basic questions concerning the presence of religions on the Internet
 - d. Theological discourses on the Internet
 - e. Presence and presentation of religious communities on the Internet
 - f. Religious and theological conflicts on the Internet
 - g. Comparative analyses on the presence and use of the Internet by religions and religious communities
 - h. Religious offers on the Internet
 - i. Digital networks as a missionary strategy
 - j. The Internet as a medium of political presence and the influence of religions
 - k. The critique of religion on the Internet
 - l. ICT as platform for antireligious perspectives/activities
 - m. Religious Contributions to ICT for Development (ICT4D)

3. Religion and Information Ethics
 - n. Information ethics theories about the presence of religions in the digital network
 - o. Theological information ethics
 - p. Changes of religious-based ethics as a consequence to the Internet

4. Theological Theories
 - q. Religious paradigms on the digital network
 - r. The Internet as religion or as an ersatz religion
 - s. The Internet as a place for religious community
 - t. Apocalyptic potentiality of the digital network / Apocalypse on the Internet
 - u. Theological enlightenment through the Internet

Contributions to some of these topics were published in the journal *Concilium* (Vol. 41, March 2005): "Cyber Space – Cyber Ethics – Cyber Theology" (Erik Borgman, Stephan van Erp, Hille Haker, Eds.) as well as in the special issue of the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* (Vol. 12, issue 2, 2007): "Cross-cultural Perspectives on Religion and Computer-Mediated Communication" (Charles Ess, Ed.) available online at: <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol12/issue3/> We want to highlight particularly the *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* <http://online.uni-hd.de>.

The Rules of the Game

Potential authors must provide an extended abstract (max. 1500 words) by April 1, 2008. The abstract can be written in the native language of the author though an English translation of this abstract must be included if the chosen language is not English. IRIE will publish articles in English, French, German, Portuguese or Spanish. The author(s) of contributions in French, Portuguese, or Spanish must nominate at least two potential peer reviewers.

The abstracts will be evaluated by the guest editors. The authors will be informed of acceptance or rejection by April 15, 2008. Deadline for the final article (3.000 words or 20.000 characters including blanks) is June 15, 2008. All submissions will be subject of a peer review. Therefore the acceptance of an extended abstract does not imply the publication of the final text (July 2008) unless the article has passed the peer review.

For more information about the journal see: <http://www.i-r-i-e.net>

Contact

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