
This book links two fields of research for the benefit of both: the study of information communication technologies (ICTs) and the study of religions. This review focuses only on these chapters and aspects which are of primary interest to historians of religions. In seven chapters, Anastasia Karaflogka provides a set of methodological tools and reflections for investigating “e-religions”, that is the many forms of religious discourse in and on cyberspace. Karaflogka’s study will benefit researchers who already have experience in studying religions and ICTs, and it will help those in need of a coherent and pragmatic methodology to manage the study of religions on the immensity of the World Wide Web. Whatever your domain of study, knowing how search tools work will help make you an efficient user and facilitate your research.

The first chapter retraces the history of the Internet and its spread, recalling the hidden values linked to its creation. Karaflogka exposes the many ways in which the Internet, the Web and cyberspace have been perceived by society in general and by religious groups in particular. The subtitle specifies that the object under appraisal is religious discourse, which she understands in the Foucauldian sense and with a polythetic definition of religion. Karaflogka retraces the historiography of religious discourse and cyberspace. She recalls her own experience of “being online” as a student and how she started her investigation on religions and the Internet. From the beginning, she framed typologies of the websites she visited, but soon enough, she realized that the categories she first shaped were inadequate. Therefore, she reduced these more and more and ended up with two broad but useful categories which are worth quoting here in extenso:

What I called “religion on cyberspace” referred to the information uploaded by any religion (institutionalized or not), church, individual or organization which also exists and can be reached in the offline world. In this sense the Internet is used as a tool. “Religion in cyberspace”, on the other hand, denoted a religious, spiritual or metaphysical expression, which is created and exists exclusively in cyberspace. The Internet in this case is used as an environment. (14)

Chapter 2 is a state of the art of literature on religion and the Internet. It helps the author to shape the epistemological, theoretical and methodological aspects of her study, but it is too detailed and technical to be discussed at any length in this review.
Chapter 3 is mostly about the epistemology needed to understand the Web in general and is not much concerned with religion (except on page 67). This part of the study deals with the accessibility and structure of the Web. Karafl ogka recalls important facts about worldwide accessibility and the multiplicity of users, providing recent data and numbers to document it. Indeed, most people on the planet are excluded from the Web, whereas others have privileged access. This enables them to dominate the e-religious discourse. The discrepancy in the global and local access to the Web (“digital divide”) depends on many factors such as income, age, disability, gender, localization, education, or infrastructure. Karafl ogka highlights the problems of access in terms of physical access (computer and connection) and in terms of ability to efficiently use ICTs. Literacy and the overwhelming use of English on the Web pages are key factors in this. Karafl ogka then discusses access to the Web as a political or religious weapon against governments and organizations, its corollary being the many forms of censorship and control by political and religious entities. Her insistence on these issues will prove pertinent for the study of religions in a global context, thinking for example of recent events surrounding the preparation of the 2008 Olympics in Beijing and control over the Internet in China (images of riots in Tibet or of incidents during the passage of the Olympic flame, censorship or auto-censorship of specific websites such as YouTube and Google).

To fully understand what it means to access information through the Web, its content must not be isolated from the technical foundations which support it because these have implications for researchers. By explaining technological subtleties such as the difference between “deep Web” and “surface Web” and by providing a survey of familiar terminology and technical definitions, Karafl ogka demystifies the way search engines work, along with their indexing and ranking processes. She justly points out that the Web gives access to resources and specialized tools (including some that facilitate the study of religions, the exact names of which she could have mentioned explicitly at this point). This might be of interest to those who teach to undergraduate students, some of whom have a regrettable tendency to use Wikipedia as a first resort when searching for information about religions, when other, better, resources are available. Whatever the performance of these search engines, we must know their limitations and understand the ways in which these tools find the requested information that is their operationality.

Like the term “religion”, “communication” has many definitions and the author surveys some of these in the very dense chapter 4, along with theories of communication. For instance, she recalls the distinction between “time-biased” and “space-biased” media (89). According to the author, computer