



## DOSSIÊ - EVANGELIZAÇÃO NOS MEIOS DIGITAIS

### Spirituality and digitality: a difficult relationship

*Espiritualidade e digitalidade: uma relação difícil*

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**Abstract:** Digitization is ambivalent: on the one hand, it offers enormous opportunities for freedom, networking, and communication; on the other hand, digitization is associated with subjectification, constraints, and pressure to capitalize. This has an impact on spirituality in the public sphere. It develops great dynamics, is promising, and yet remains problematic. The present research, of theoretical-bibliographical bias, starts from the reality of digitization as a challenge for theology. It then works on contours of Christian spirituality and its relationship with the digital context. Finally, it proposes a critical discussion on the subject.

**Keywords:** digitization; spirituality; subject; virtuality.

**Resumo:** A digitalização é ambivalente: por um lado, oferece enormes oportunidades de liberdade, networking e comunicação; por outro lado, a digitalização está associada à subjetivação, constrangimentos e pressão para capitalizar. Isso tem um impacto na espiritualidade na esfera pública. Desenvolve uma grande dinâmica, é promissor, mas continua problemático. A presente pesquisa, de viés teórico-bibliográfico, parte da realidade da digitalização como desafio para a teologia. Em seguida, trabalha contornos da espiritualidade cristã e sua relação com o contexto digital. Por fim, propõe uma discussão crítica sobre o tema.

**Palavras-chave:** digitalização; espiritualidade; sujeito; virtualidade.

**Resumen:** La digitalización es ambivalente: por un lado, ofrece enormes oportunidades de libertad, trabajo en red y comunicación; por otro lado, la digitalización está asociada con la subjetivación, las restricciones y la presión para capitalizar. Esto tiene un impacto en la espiritualidad en la esfera pública. Desarrolla una gran dinámica, es prometedor y, sin embargo, sigue siendo problemático. La presente investigación, de sesgo teórico-bibliográfico, parte de la realidad de la digitalización como desafío para la teología. Luego trabaja contornos de la espiritualidad cristiana y su relación con el contexto digital. Finalmente, propone una discusión crítica sobre el tema.

**Palabras clave:** digitalización; espiritualidad; sujeto; virtualidad.

### Introduction

I greet you, angel of appreciation  
and gratitude  
asking for your company  
I turn to you  
who teaches me  
life is good  
life is beautiful  
life is true



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who teaches me that respect and turning towards

life are the first step

to recognize and live

the wonder of life

the happiness of life

and its diversity

so it calls from the bottom of my heart (TROST, 2022).

What we are hearing here is a guide to spirituality on the Internet. On the website „Spirit online“ you can find a wide variety of offers for spirituality in digitality. These are offers from the esoteric. The offers are manifold. Here one finds Mantras, here one finds practical exercises for Channeling, for the increase of the own well-being. Mind and health, Success, and health, they say, are not coincidences. They are „to be ordered“ from the universe, but require a change in one's own attitudes, practices and attitudes.

If you want love in your life, *be* love.

If you want peace, live peacefully.

If you want happiness, then be happy.

And if you want better, remember that you are already the best (TROST, 2022).

This esoteric spirituality on the Internet is available anytime and anywhere. It is easily manageable. For this reason, it is very widespread. It is a spirituality of everyday life, of everyday attitudes; it is a spirituality of the art of living. Digitality is the forum of this spirituality, which connects human beings with the depths of the cosmos.

„He purifies the water of his being by paying attention to the messages of his subconscious in order to direct his superconscious in a balanced way. [...] On this path of purification and reintegration into the Cosmic Order, the human being recognizes himself and his connectedness with the creative forces, just as the upper and lower worlds are always in living relationship with each other. The more the human being works on himself, the more he comes into contact with this order of the cosmos and his personal consciousness rises to be what the Creator intended him to be. The ennoblement of spirit and consciousness

make the human being realize what he has always been and will be forever, a mediator between the worlds...“ (TROST, 2022).

What is striking here is that this spirituality is a cosmic spirituality. It is oriented toward the universe, is highly individualized. In the categories of Thomas Luckmann's sociology of religion, one would speak here of a middle transcendence. Ultimately, it remains immanent. It is not oriented toward a personal You, toward a God who, for a Christian mysticism, is the infinite loving mystery.

If you would now think that digitality would be primarily the space for esotericism, you are mistaken. Of course, you could assume that digitalization triggers the very spirituality of esotericism. The high degree of individualization, the unboundedness by institutions, traditions, the free availability, these are definitely moments of esoteric spirituality that seem to have a strong inner and formal connectivity to digitality. One could assume that esotericism is so widespread because it can use digital media and forums. On the other hand, the Internet is also a space for Christian piety. Germany's largest archdiocese, the Archdiocese of Cologne, has many digital offerings for spirituality on the Internet. Two examples:

a) „Simply pray like the Pope, and do it on the train, on the beach, or during a break at the rest area or at work: The Catholic „Book of Hours“ can be downloaded from the app stores.

Together with the German Liturgical Institute, supported by the Foundation Center of the Archdiocese of Cologne and by the German Bishops' Conference, the Catholic Press Association is making the German short version of the Roman Breviary of the universal Church (the „Little Book of Hours“) more accessible“ (GÖD).

b) “Dear praying man, dear praying woman, interrupting or consciously shaping everyday life with a prayer is sometimes a challenge. Where can I find an impulse when I need it? The Archdiocese of Cologne has developed an app to help people turn to God in the busyness of everyday life. We wish you a blessed time! Your Department for Adult Pastoral Care in the Archdiocese of Cologne“ (GÖD).

Similar things can be found for young people. There are spiritual Internet blogs, there are hashtags that call for common prayer, for contemplation, for spiritual meditation; there are individual spiritual companions, even in Catholic Christianity, that enable a spirituality for the pocket. There are confession machines on the Internet, there are the possibilities of spiritual conversations. Ignatian retreats are conducted digitally. There are online cemeteries on YouTube, rosary groups, Eucharistic adoration, or Benedictine prayer times to pray along with, Internet baptisms and Facebook services. I could name countless examples.

If we take this symptomatically, the Internet thus offers a place for an addressee-oriented spirituality and at the same time the space for an addressee-oriented pastoral care: whether directed at young people, at adults, digitization offers the promise of providing addressee-oriented and subject-oriented spiritual pastoral care. If we look at this spirituality from the other side, from the side of the subjects, it seems to offer great opportunities: available anytime, livable anytime and anywhere, applicable everywhere: whether on the beach, in the hotel room, in the apartment or in the pub, or in between on the train or at work. Digitization offers great opportunities for spirituality because it is low threshold, it requires little apart from the technical resources and the financial ability to have such a digital device. It offers a high level of accessibility.

But aren't there also risks here? Aren't there negative effects? Doesn't the Internet already change or shape the way of spirituality? The old Master of Media Research Marshall McLuhan once made his research on the term: The medium is the message (McLuhan, 2011). He related this to television in the 1970s, and from this he also derived the conclusion that television, because of the way it shapes its viewers, poses a threat to the process of democratic decision-making and to an informed public. But what does this mean for the Internet, what does it mean for digitality? When it comes to discussing the contribution of spirituality in the public sphere in our lectures, this critique should be of particular interest to us.

Therefore, I will take three steps with you in the following: firstly, I will reconstruct the processes of digitalization and focus on the consequences for religion; secondly, I will then give a short insight into a proper understanding of Christian spirituality; thirdly I lead a critical discussion on the basis of concrete examples before I conclude.

## 1 Digitization, a challenge for theology

Digitization has become a matter of course. This is true not only in exceptional situations such as the pandemic corona crisis, where digitization has become the condition for the possibility and implementation of communication, social contacts, self-image construction, education and entertainment, in short, of the creation of meaning and orientation. This is no less true for everyday situations. Digitization has become a defining feature of communication, behavioral regulation and identity formation for adults, young people, and children (LEVEN; SCHNEEKLOTH, 2015, p. 111-151; GRÜMME, 2021, p. 268-316). Only older people remain at a distance here. Digitization has long since left its instrumental character behind and has become more than a mere tool. It is an essential element of social and anthropological, economic, political, and religious processes.

As a background, a clarification of terms is necessary, which elaborates four principles: Digitization is based firstly on the principle of „binarization“, which translates all analog signals into 0-1 logic and thus constructs reality algorithmically; digitization is thus seen as a digital representation of the analog; secondly, on „variability and simulation“, according to which artifacts can be changed at will or even created anew. This extends to the virtualization of experiences and the virtual construction of identities or multiple identity ascriptions; thirdly, on the principle of „instantaneity“. The boundaries between space and time change, everything becomes simultaneous, everything becomes present in real time; everyone is always and everywhere accessible; and finally fourthly on the principle of „miniaturization of individual building blocks into functional blocks“, which refers to the arbitrary interchangeability of ele-

ments and their unlimited compilation (NIESYTO, 2017, p. 18). Digitization has a technological and a sociocultural side, in which the anthropological, philosophical as well as religious transformations become clear.

A profound difference in reality construction between digital thinking and thinking in the analog world becomes visible. „While in algorithmic logic modeling is representational and rule-guided, human thinking and acting is situated and interactional“ (SIMOJOKI, 2020, p. 61). One thinks in the analog world with and between people. In view of the wholeness of human existence, it thus becomes apparent that identity, cognition feeling and intercommunication are always bodily-bodily mediated. Humans are equally conscious and corporeal living beings. An unbroken trust in the technical possibilities of artificial intelligence and digitalization „underestimates this complex unity of consciousness, embodiment and embedding of our existence in a natural and social environment“ (GASSER, 2021, p. 384).

In this context, it is crucial that digitization itself obviously becomes a site of difference, a site where differences between people are generated or reinforced. To the extent that subjects are digitally active, construct themselves in the mode of the digital, and at the same time find themselves in digitized life worlds, the debates about identity, personhood, and being a subject gain new quality. On the other hand, the intersubjective-social constitution of the subjects changes both the community and society in its political, cultural, and economic structures.

That this is a theological problem per se is obvious. It is the „signs of the times“ (Gaudium et Spes 4) to which a contextual theology in late modernity has to orient itself (PIRKER, 2020, p. 147-155). Anthropological categories, however they are concretely unfolded in each case, are principally affected: the relationship between freedom and determination, between body, mind and body, between freedom and history, between self-reflexivity and reason in the context of artificial intelligence (PLATOW, 2020, p. 37-47), between experience and virtuality, between re-

ality and fiction, between acceleration and the fluidity of space and time that is dynamized by it (PIRKER, 2021, p. 420-426). This raises questions about avatars, cyborgs, robotics and enhancement, about self-tracking, about the possibility (GRÜMME, 2012) of digitally simulating feelings and identities in the context of capitalistically enriched self-optimization strategies. This leads into the temptation of transhumanism, all the way to a „digital capitalism“ (Betancourt, 2018, p. 14) that intricately drives subjectivation processes forward once again: „The work on the self-image, the 'creative' shaping of one's self with the help of image techniques is therefore constantly exposed to the possibility of 'merely being the reproduction of a foreign image', since the 'actors orient themselves to the self-designs of the market', which are embodied by role models and adopted as their own self-designs with reference to common market-shaped aesthetics (NOVAKOVITS, 2020, p. 49). For some, this digital capitalism has long since found worldwide dissemination in the form of digital colonialism, since according to this conjecture it is a matter of the „codification of knowledge according to Western and established narrative patterns“. According to this, all knowledge on the Internet remains „bound up in hierarchical culture, as a 'colonial' interwoven in 'technology'“ view (HOLEV, 2019).

Because of the explosive nature of the phenomenon, theological anthropology is dealing with it, but so is ecclesiology (GRÜMME, 2019, p. 133-141). It becomes a topic of pastoral theology, because completely new possibilities of pastoral care arise here, which go far beyond the ways of media pastoral care (DEEG; LEHNERT, 2019). Christian influencers are gaining new formats, certainly with questionable emotionalization and mass popularization in the spirit of financially strong Pentecostals (KRAIN; MÖBLE, 2020, p. 161-178). Liturgy generates new forms and ways of access, which became significant for many people, for example, in the period of the Corona crisis and will certainly influence the search for contemporary forms of liturgy and pastoral ministry thereafter, questions about how, for example,

active participation (*participatio actuosa*) is to be thought of as a condition of the possibility of the Eucharist on the Internet in particular (Kopp; Krysmann, 2020); religion is transformed by digitization in its public sphere, as a public theology elaborates (MERLE, 2020, p. 52-56), just as the character of the public sphere as a whole is changing (GRÜMME, 2018; BEDFORD-STROHM; HÖHNE; ZEYHER-QUATTLENDER, 2019; SEELIGER; SEVIGNAN, 2021).

How is the Internet shaping itself as a public sphere? Enormous dynamics can be found here, as is already evident in the Arab Spring, as in Fridays for Future, or in the great mobilization of solidarity during the Corona crisis. Who has power, how does authority or even democratically legitimized authority construct and legitimize itself? What influence do influencers, bots, fake news have? Findings about massive data theft, commercialization, ubiquitous surveillance in the context of big data are provocations by which the Christian social sciences are therefore just as affected as theological ethics (WIEMEYER, 2018, p. 36-39); JÄHNICHEN; WIEMEYER, 2020). To what extent is the relationship between technology and humans changing? Insights from the philosophy of technology and ethical reflections are used, especially in the question of responsibility, freedom, and accountability. To what extent can robots even be evaluated as "moral actors" (BRAND, 2018, p. 3)? Digital religious education should enable adolescents to make their own critical judgments. On the other hand, this digital education also stands in the context of a digital capitalism that further supports the well-off and makes the disadvantaged weaker. Digital religions and a cyber theology are emerging that attempt to think the Christian message of God incarnate in the context of the Internet. Antonio Spadaro in Italy and Aline Almaro in Brazil are making important contributions here (da Silva, 2021). But what are the consequences for Christian spirituality?

## 2 Christian spirituality. First contours

To discuss the implications for Christian spirituality we have at first to clear the understanding

of this term. This could be the first approach: Christian spirituality is a "smelling and hearing that there is something greater" (WILMER; WOLFERS, 2022, p. 4). This shows us the way to distinguish Christian spirituality from other spiritualities. It is not a matter of devaluing them. It is about working out the profile of a Christian spirituality, from which standards of a critique of other forms of spiritual experience become possible. Therefore, I do not want to make this profiling in a strict antagonism, but dialogically. In this way, the specificity and perhaps also the added value of Christian spirituality might gain clarity. I want to do this in the form of theses (LEPPIN, 2021, p. 9-22; WENDEL, 2004; RUHBACH; SUDBRACK, 1989):

a) Christian spirituality wants to bring a more, a deeper, a further into human existence. It is a passion for the possible, for the view that there is more, deeper, different than what our everyday experience and our life worlds tell us. Christian spirituality wants to be attentive to the traces of this reality, cultivates mindfulness exercises, perception exercises, wants to feel this deeper, higher reality in meditation wants to feel it in contemplation, in sensual interaction with oneself, with others and with things;

b) This reality, the way we deal with it, is supposed to give meaning, support, orientation, significance, it is supposed to provide security in the conspicuous processes of alienation of everyday life, the self-optimization compulsions of an accelerated society in the dynamics of global capitalism;

c) Christian spirituality is in dialogue with other spiritualities, especially those of the Far East. Buddhism in particular shows ways of mindfulness, of personality training, of connection to the whole and to the depths of the cosmos. In this, it differs from the spiritual fast-tracks, from the superficial utilitarian spiritualities, as they are currently claimed in various ways. These are spiritualities without depth, which are supposed to increase the well-being, which are supposed to round off a life. But they do not irritate, they do not challenge, they do not provoke to a confrontation with one's own self. They leave everything as it is, it

is a feel-good spirituality, a wellness spirituality. This is quite different in Buddhist traditions. But in contrast to this, the Christian heritage must be emphasized more strongly, as it can be found in Christian forms of prayer, in Christian mysticism and Ignatian spirituality, in order to sense the hidden closeness of God. Here the God-relationship is more in the center than the self-relationship (UTSCH, 2022, p. 15);

d) Christian spirituality is shaped by this personal structure. It looks for the presence of an unconditional You, not primarily for security in a universe without countenance, as esoteric mysticism also and especially in spirituality on the Internet articulates. However, this Christian spirituality is characterized by the fact that it does not start from an exaggeration of the self, but knows itself – endowed. It acts out of the experience of being given, of giving oneself to a You who is there namelessly, who withdraws, and yet who is experienced in immediate proximity. Christian spirituality is therefore not an impudent grasp for the depths of being, it is not a technique of power, of domination and of instrumental reason that wants to subjugate everything. On the contrary, it interrupts. It is not the extension of the already lived existence into something greater. It is only rightly understood when it expropriates itself, when it gives itself away from itself, leaves itself to the stranger, to the other, to the dark, because it has discovered at least traces of a loving closeness of the unconditioned;

e) Christian spirituality is holistic. Body and spirit are interwoven; the spiritual senses are fullness to make these deep experiences. This avoids two extremes: on the one hand, it contradicts an esoteric neo-gnostic hostility to the body; on the other hand, it avoids a pure fixation on the body. Heart and reason, mind and body, emotion and cognition are connected here for mutual completion and deepening. This prevents an over-emotionalization, an ecstasy, which in the end alienates people from themselves and turns them into compliant tools of third parties;

f) Christian spirituality is not simply already there; it is not simply already given. It needs

a mystagogy, an initiation, it needs the will to engage in it. Christian spirituality is practical. Experiences have to be made, have to be allowed. In short: Christian spirituality can only be lived, spiritual experiences can only be made, if the human being gets involved in it. And this does not happen primarily in dealing with oneself. It is not a private act of self-centered inwardness. Spiritual experience happens in the loving encounter with the other. The biblical figure of the unity of love of God and love of neighbor is also the figure of Christian spirituality. Christian spirituality thus gets its structure from following Jesus Christ. It is based on conversion, on transformation. In Catholic terms, referring to the closeness of Christ in the Eucharist, one could say: "You now sense that underneath everything lies the possibility of transformation. And that rather transformation than preservation activates the great promise of the presence of the Spirit. Concretely: You meet Mr. Müller or Mrs. Yilmaz, and your passion for possibility says: He can be your brother, she is your sister. You are walking through the forest, looking at the sea or the skyline of a city, and your passion for the possible says: This is creation, this belongs to someone else; we can use it, but not own it. You are there when someone is buried, and your passion for the possible says: He is not always gone" (SELLMANN, 2022, p. 10);

g) Christian spirituality is thus historically situated and has a deep social and political structure. Thus, from the dynamics of this Christian spirituality, its relation to the public becomes clear. It pushes into the public sphere.

### **3 The "medium is the message" (McLuhan). Digitization and spirituality**

In relation to the field of religion and spirituality digitization has quite significant consequences. Digitization is particularly driving those theologies and didactics of religion that emphasize the role of the subject. Established approaches such as youth theology, media pedagogy, Bible didactics, or performative religious education should be brought into play in the context of digitality, taking the constructional achievements of the subjects

and the mediality of reality constructively-critically as the starting point and reference point of religious learning processes and accentuating them in a new way (SCHLAG, 2019, p. 45-52). Some people speak of a wild theology here, because young people can express themselves, articulate their religiosity and spirituality, without control by parents or authorities such as schools or churches – in other words, a wild theology. Platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, or Instagram are thus places of digital self-construction as well as religious practice, where proclamations of faith, catecheses, and communal as well as individual prayer practices can be observed (PIRKER, 2019, p. 143). When we look for Christian spirituality on the Internet, this is the background. Digitalization dynamizes spirituality. Therefore, digitalization is understood as an opportunity for a spirituality to have other experiences, experiences of dissolution of boundaries, of alterity, of the utopian, of being withdrawn, of imagination and thus – of transcendence. "Virtuality can contribute to taking a new look at everyday experiences and the underlying understanding of reality. Under certain circumstances, they can represent an emancipative, even utopian correlate to an increasingly disillusioned world. For this, however, both worlds are needed, and a subject is required that measures anew the boundaries of the virtual provinces of meaning that are opening up" (MEYER; MISERA, 2020, p. 36). The Internet thus drives a spirituality out of itself through virtualization.

But there is another point of view that we have not considered so far. For many *users*, the Internet itself has a religious and spiritual quality. In the light of a functional and sociological concept of religion, research is working out the religious and religion-analogous character of digital media and is also showing the new formatting of religion as online religion. There is a new form of religion called online religion. The Internet itself is becoming productive of religion and is thus proving to be an "increasingly religious place of refuge in which performative activities are a matter of course" (MENDL, 2008, p. 402). New forms of prayer and liturgy are emerging, old forms of liturgy are being

rediscovered and - as during the corona pandemic - reformulated on the Internet. Of course, this digitization of religion is also changing religiosity. The Internet reinforces a subject-centered and individualized approach to faith and religion. The USER moves into the role of an autonomous actor who sovereignly assembles, weights or reconstructs religious content as he or she sees fit. USERS become independent of religious or ecclesiastical authorities, establish new religious and spiritual networks with a low threshold, often only temporarily effective degree of commitment, or further individualize themselves religiously (NEUMAIER, 2018, p. 175-178).

Semantic shifts in religious content and spirituality can be observed. Faith on the Net is often presented "as lifestyle and life help immediately", and a "functional-pragmatic view of religion and faith" dominates (HURTH, 2020, p. 40). Questions of identity assume central importance (MENDL, 2020, p. 143-160).

#### 4 Critical discussion

Against the background of these remarks on digitization, we now have a clear view of the implications of spirituality on the Internet. We can now better understand and classify it. Research identifies four elements of this spirituality: "This spirituality is firstly *translocal*, it enables a certain independence from local religious institutions and authorities. It provides insights into practices, traditions, and ways of thinking that do not exist locally. Digital spirituality is secondly *anonymous*, anyone can, for example, express intimate or church-critical concerns without being identified. The spaces of this spirituality are thirdly *not hierarchical*, at least not in the same way as the religious institutions on site. More diversity of opinion is possible and fourthly a visible *independent participation*" (FINDL-LUDESCHER, 2018, p. 62-67). This makes it clear that the spirituality of people who move around a lot spiritually on the Internet (who, for example, follow church services and prayer meetings via livestream, participate in discussions in online forums or follow the blog of a spiritual teacher) differs from the spiritual life of

those who are mainly on the move in analog form and are involve in local congregations and groups (FINDL-LUDESCHER, 2018, p. 62-67; NEUMAIER, 2018, p. 176). In terms of the sociology of religion, it cannot be said that an Internet spirituality produces the tendencies toward individualization, deinstitutionalization or even the temporalization of ties. These tendencies were already there before, but they are intensified and dynamized by the Internet.

Digitization is thus profoundly ambivalent. On the one hand, it has considerable effects of liberation and individualization; on the other hand, it has contrary processes of hegemonic formation of difference, of inequality, and of reifying subjectivation. Identities as well as normative determinations are getting weaker, even more fluid. Who can say that they are dealing with people on the Internet and not with bots? The Internet itself is driving a certain understanding of individuality. The fixation on a self that constructs and creates itself at will, as well as changing ego identities, are at the center. The medium is the message: according to this, technology itself generates a certain form of subject, of normativity and also of self-understanding.

But this also concerns theology (BECK, 2021). One shouldn't be naive about this. Digitization is not just a tool. It changes our perception, our understanding of ourselves, of others and of the world, it changes the way we deal with society, with the Internet itself and thus also with religion. Digitization, algorithmization and medialization fundamentally change the relationship between humans and machines as well as the structure of knowledge orders. In the context of critical theory, digitization practices are discussed as a conversion from normative orders to smart orders. Their logic is the conversion from a normative order oriented toward a critical-reflexive attitude to a "cognitive norm-following mode" (GÜNTHER, 2021, p. 523-552). The Internet itself changes the order of democratic coexistence and the normative determination of coexistence. Education, for example, is being changed because it is oriented more toward the goal of upbringing

than toward education as a critical formation of judgment that can also decide against the structures and persons forming it. Digitization always has a strong affirmative orientation, regardless of all the liberating impulses that make the Internet so dangerous, especially for those in power and dictators around the world, and which are often intended to be channeled.

This ambivalence of the digital also shapes spirituality. I'll skip esoteric spirituality, which is problematic for many reasons. I will concentrate on Christian spirituality, which is clearly to be taken more seriously. In it the spiritually relevant contents are selected and constructed in such a way that they fit the personal feeling, the own authenticity construction and identity. Critical parts, critical moments of spirituality, moments that remain foreign, that irritate, are becoming comparatively unimportant. The degree of commitment decreases because I can change everything at any time, including my own identity construction - and remain anonymous. No one can blame me. Certainly, there is a much higher mobilization power to spirituality or also to acts of Caritas that are stimulated by spirituality. I become attentive to things, to people, to contexts that I would otherwise never experience without the Internet. Pictures from Ukraine, of starving people and those who have been killed, have an influence on spirituality and also the giving of donations motivated by faith. "I can then feed the hungry by supporting initiatives on the internet that are working to do so, but I have never shared a loaf of bread in real terms. That probably has consequences for self-esteem. Practicing hospitality challenges and gratifies differently than digitally signing a petition or transferring money. But the degree of effectiveness is another matter.

It's probably much higher in the digital world because the reach is greater" (HEINZE, 2018, p. 70). On the other hand, you have to be fast on the Internet; you can try out many things without risk, including yourself. In the view of some researchers, this tempts people "not to take responsibility in the analog world either, to let the law of large numbers rule, to become superficial



because you don't have time, and to be attentive only to things that happen on the network, but to become blind and deaf to everything else" (HEINZE, 2018, p. 71).

In this respect, a deep ambivalence of digital spirituality manifests itself: on the one hand, the Internet can motivate and guide care for the other, compassion and spiritual self-care; on the other hand, people can also be stigmatized precisely by the Internet in their particular form of living spirituality. On the one hand, spirituality becomes free, unbound, fit for me and my life, and precisely for the situation in which I find myself; on the other hand, there is also an undertone of the seriousness of volatility, of weaker attributability and responsibility. The possibility of instrumentalization, manipulation, alienation increases. The theologian Barbara Henze therefore emphasizes: "Dealing with the technologies of the digitized world is different from dealing with those of the analog world. In the digitalized world, I have the feeling that I am the master of the situation, because my button press decides, including not using certain programs. To what extent we decide for ourselves or are manipulated on the network is still an open question. For religious people, it is more problematic that the chance for a real counterpart who resists me and from whom I nevertheless cannot escape by pressing a button decreases" (HEINZE, 2018, p. 72). One can therefore understand that this digitalized spirituality has a high affinity or connectivity to the dissolution of claims to validity and universal truth claims in the present, both in terms of content and form.

## Conclusion

To sum up: Digitization is of great importance for a christian spirituality. The relevance of the subject is striking. On the other hand, digitization is a huge challenge. In my view, there seem to be certain deficiencies in Digital Spirituality. We cannot neglect it; we cannot ignore it. We have to take it is a sign of the times. Hence, we have to deal with it, productively and critically, out of the perspective of the gospel. More research is demanded on this field.

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