



# DNC TIMES

---

2024 | Vol IV

# DIGITAL SPIRITUALITY



SCH. ASHISH LAKRA, SJ



We live in a world where digital technology has become an integral part of our daily life. Whether we are digital natives or digital immigrants, we are all connected, if not dependent, to our digital devices. Advanced digital technology has made a tremendous impact on various aspects of society. Pope Francis, in his address to the 'Minerva Dialogues' (a high-level annual gathering of scientists and experts), acknowledged the prominent contributions technology has brought to the human family, especially in the fields of medicine, engineering and communications. In fact, he said, "We also see them as evidence of the creativity of human beings and the nobility of their vocation to participate responsibly in God's creative action."

The development of *Artificial Intelligence (AI)* is another significant milestone in human technological progress. Pope Francis, in his address to the G7 Summit, said that the birth of AI represents "a true cognitive-industrial revolution" which will lead to "complex epochal transformations". Indeed, modern technology has profoundly impacted different aspects of human life. For instance, AI recommendation systems, which suggest customised services and contents based on user history, have become integral to our daily life. This has a significant influence on how we interact with the world, especially for the younger generations. Many people, especially among the youth, often find their identities and values shaped by algorithms designed to maximise engagement and consumption. Many find themselves confined to what we call the *algorithm echo chamber*. This has subtly influenced human decisions and experiences.

Pope Francis expresses his conviction that the development of AI and machine learning has the potential to contribute positively to the future of humanity.



But he also insists that this is possible only if this potential is realised in an ethical and responsible way. In other words, the Pope calls for an ethical and responsible use of modern technology.

One way of ensuring the ethical use of AI is by prioritising the well-being and rights of every individual in society. This means that the development and implementation of advanced technology should be focused on achieving common goals that promote and enhance the quality of life for all humans rather than mere meeting of market needs. This is in line with the principles of spirituality. Therefore, we can term the use of digital technology to improve the quality of life as 'Digital Spirituality'.

The advancement of technology can bring about changes in various aspects of life, including spirituality. Today, technology plays an important role in promoting spirituality. The COVID-19 situation is the best example of how digital technology can foster and make spiritual experiences more accessible. Online meditation apps, virtual spiritual meetings and spiritual conversations are some of the virtual platforms that bridged the gap when traditional spiritual practices were disrupted. These connections allowed individuals to stay connected with others and draw spiritual experiences. Today, AI technology has made it easier for people to access spiritual teachings, practices and communities. AI-powered apps and platforms offer tools for meditation, mindfulness and prayer, making these practices more accessible to a wider audience. In short, modern technology has created new avenues for spiritual participation and connection in the digital world. It has the potential to enrich spiritual experiences and bring individuals closer in their spiritual journey and search for meaning in life.

Pope Francis, when referring to AI as ‘a tool’, used the term ‘techno-human condition’ to highlight that humans’ relationship with the environment has always been mediated by the tools that they have produced. Modern technology is a human-made tool that stems from this condition, which in turn underlines the radical openness of humans to the beyond and their search for transcendence. This tool, if ethically applied, can help human beings explore ways and means to facilitate their relationship with one another and with the Divine. It can serve as a medium for their search for truth and meaning in life. Therefore, by integrating digital technology into spiritual practices, it is possible to create enriching and transformative spiritual realities in the digital realm. This can help human beings transcend their limitations and embrace a life that is both technologically advanced and spiritually fulfilling.



SCH. DANIELSON C. SYIEMLIEH SJ  
EDITOR, DNC TIMES



# CONTENTS

Embracing the Divine in the Digital Age: Exploring Digital Spirituality	6
- FR. ALPHONSE KISPOTTA, SJ	
Click to Download God	8
- FR. NITHIN MONTEIRO, SJ	
Pixels of Faith	10
- SCH. THOMAS J PHILIP, SJ	
The Evolving Nature of Spirituality in the Digital Age	11
- MR. AMARDEEP MANI PITAPALLIL	
Father, Can I Pray While Scrolling?	12
- SCH. SAVY GEORGE, SJ	
Exploring Digital Spirituality in the Post-COVID-19 Era: A Personal Journey.	14
- DN. SANJIBAN TIRKEY, SJ	
Digital Spirituality:Prospects and Challenges	16
- SCH. GOLDENSTAR DKHAR SJ	
Cyber Sanctuaries: Finding Faith in Digital Spaces	18
- SCH. THOMAS J PHILIP, SJ	
Digital Spirituality: The Intersection of Technology and Faith	20
- BRO. ATHUL VINOD, CST	
Mobile, Me and God	22
- SCH. VALERIAN, SJ	
A Search for Meaning: Integrating Technology and Spirituality	23
- BR. JOHN K	
Navigating Faith in a Digital World	25
- SCH. BIPIN TIRKEY, SJ	
Where am I?	28
- DN. VYSAKH TITUS, SJ	
Spirituality Transcends the Digital Divide	29
- SCH. PAUL PRADEEP RAJ, SJ	
Thank You	31
- SCH. ISHAK EKKA, SJ	

## EDITORIAL BOARD

Daniel SJ, Vysakh SJ, Stephen SJ,  
Princen SJ, Marconi SJ, Pawan L SJ,  
Anoop K SJ, Sawan R SJ, Steven J. SJ,  
Alex G SJ, Agil R. SJ & Gabriel MCBS

Fr. Francis Pudhicherry, S.J.,  
The Rector  
Fr. Dolichan Kollareth, S.J.,  
The Animator

# Embracing the Divine in the Digital Age: Exploring Digital Spirituality

In contemporary society, where technology permeates every aspect of human life, spirituality has found a new dimension through - *digital spirituality* (DS). This emerging phenomenon of the intersection of *artificial intelligence* (AI) and *spirituality* represents a renewed paradigm as how humans perceive and interact with technology and the divine, offering a unique path to enlightenment in today's hyper-connected world. Technology as a tool can be highly effective and efficient, but

driven society, many individuals turn to spirituality to find balance, peace, and a sense of fulfilment. However, will the DS be capable of satisfying the longing of such individuals longing for meaning in life? Pope Francis in his message for the 57<sup>th</sup> World Day of Peace, on the theme “Artificial Intelligence and Peace” states that “progress in developing forms of artificial intelligence will ultimately serve the cause of human fraternity and peace” (AIP 8). However, he also expressed his concerns to have a



remains irreplaceable of humans' role in certain domains of human life.

Today, AI has become an integral part of modern human life, influencing and enhancing efficiency, and opening new possibilities for innovation in various sectors including healthcare, finance, education, defence, communication, entertainment, and likewise many. AI-systems, powered by machine learning algorithms are capable of performing tasks that traditionally required human intelligence. Spirituality, on the other hand, deals with the search for meaning, purpose, and connection beyond the material world.

discerning approach utilizing the data and content collected by AI, as well as “an algor-ethics – in which values will shape the directions taken by new technologies” (AIP 6-7). Pope invites the whole humanity to “work together in harmony to embrace the opportunity and confront the challenges posed by the digital revolution and thus hand on to future generations a world of greater solidarity, justice and peace” (AIP 8). If advancement of AI is to be beneficial for people and planet, multiple challenges must be addressed. In this regard, religion-and-science dialogue needs to be strengthened in making things, not only intellectually but also spiritually fit. Certainly, good-will and faith communities have a prophetic, diaconal, ethical, and theological role to play.





Today, the phenomenon of DS, which encompasses the use of digital tools, platforms and technologies, facilitates and enhances traditional spiritual practices in multiple ways: Digital platforms make spiritual resources accessible to a global audience, transcending geographical barriers. Individuals from remote areas can access or participate in spiritual practices, and teachings. In addition, some technical issues, such as app malfunctions, internet outages, or software glitches, can disrupt spiritual practices, leading individuals to frustration and disengagement.

The integration of artificial intelligence and spirituality today is a testament to the dynamic nature of human innovation and the enduring quest for meaning. As AI continues to evolve, its role in spiritual practices and guidance will likely expand, offering new opportunities for connection, reflection, and growth. By navigating the challenges thoughtfully, ethically and collectively, humanity can harness the power of AI to enrich spiritual lives, while maintaining the authenticity and depth, the hallmarks of true spiritual experiences. Indeed, AI can achieve a prominent place in serving spiritual needs of humanity through DS; nevertheless, it can't replace or substitute the role of humans in matters of authenticity and ethics concerning humans' spiritual experiences and meaning of life.



FR. ALPHONSE KISPOTTA, SJ  
Jnana-Deepa, Pontifical Athenaeum  
Institute of Philosophy and Theology

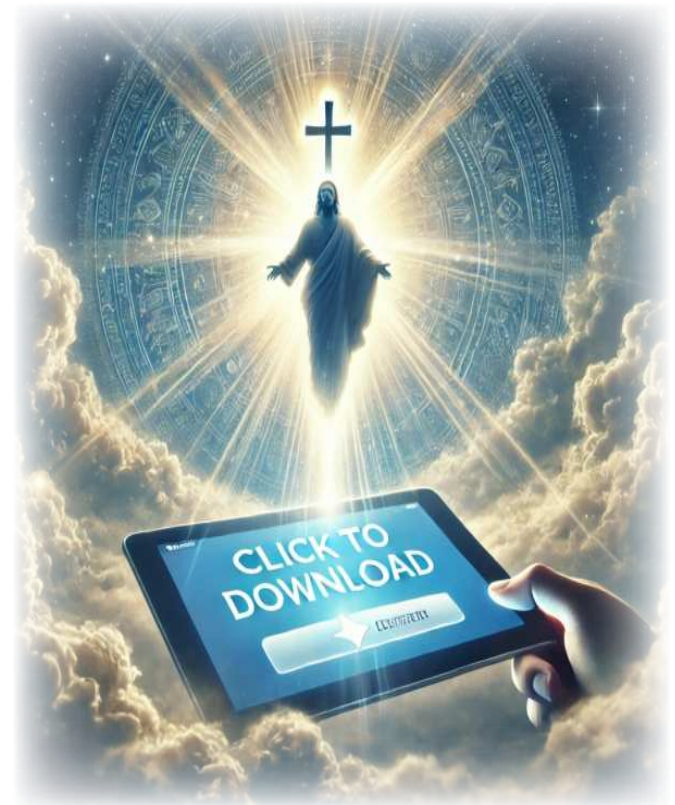
# Click to Download God

The technology of faith and faith in technology have grown side by side, becoming an interface for transcendence—call it mysticism or transhumanism. Technology and Faith are interfaces between divinity (superhumanity) and humanity. Consider the core metaphor of our salvation- the cross. It is a technology of faith and yet a technological product that we consider sacred. The copper serpent in the Old Testament and the cross in the New Testament stand tall as examples of the salvific value placed in technological artefacts—faith in technology. Moreover, technological artefacts throughout history have also helped faith progress worldwide. From the printing press to the internet, innovation has disrupted faith, leading to creative reforms that have rediscovered Jesus and his message.

This disruption is also a phase of what I call a ‘sacred discomfort.’ It is sacred because it’s a phase of continued rediscovering of faith in God through the Church and its sacraments. It is a discomfort because it simultaneously destroys, constructs, adulterates, purifies, and redefines the practice of faith. With the advent of Artificial Intelligence, we are at the cusp of such a sacred discomfort. As Jesuits, who *were* once known to be the masters of the heart, can we transform this sacred discomfort into a *Kairos* moment?

The pandemic and emerging technologies have aided the careening of spiritual practices in the virtual space. From streaming sermons to masses, broadcasting the word of God to short videos, virtual churches (e.g., VR Church) to virtual pilgrimages, and Religious Large Language Models (LLMs) (e.g., BibleGPT, JesusAI), mobile games and wearable gadgets (JC Go, Click To Pray eRosary) to robot priests (e.g., BlessU-2, SanTO, Mindar) spiritual practices have gone digital. This phenomenon has been referred to as Digital Spirituality (DS). Many consider it a code,

a way of life or a framework to find transcendence, interconnectedness, meaning and innerness using ‘virtual space’ as a medium. Popular mechanisms of DS include virtualising prayer, remixing sacred rituals, and gamifying sacramentals such as rosaries and blessings. It is fueled by content that is digital, snackable, accessible, animated and, in some cases, immersive.



Many claim that using the virtual medium connects disparate communities to God. Others insist that DS offers novel opportunities to experience a personalised (customised?) God. A few emphasise the accessibility of God at one’s fingertips. Given the traction DS has received in the public sphere, the Church and many religious orders, including the Society of Jesus, are going digital to cater to the spiritual needs of the faithful.





While it is a good sign of progress, there must be more evidence of its positive contribution to spiritual growth. In addition, monetising spiritual content reinforces a capitalist co-option of wellness. Tech gurus, self-styled god-people, naïve priests and nuns reduce ‘spirituality’ to neo-liberal hyper-individualistic ideas of self-improvement through a daily dose of ‘dopamine’ intake in the virtual space. Concerns about using AI in extracting ‘intimate data’ and recommender systems to nudge users towards spiritual choices that aid ‘businesses’ are emerging. A naïve embrace of digital spirituality only puts God on the market.

As socio-ethical issues arise, Jesuits must act quickly. Entering the discourse on DS is the initial step. It all begins by asking the fundamental questions: what is the end goal of digital spirituality? Is it just the use of the virtual space for proselytisation? Or is it just a trend we wish to follow? If one of the two is the case, it’s superficial and does no good to the spiritual accompaniment of the faithful. I suggest an invitation, reminder, call and request.

Firstly, an invitation to Jesuit philosophers and theologians. We badly need a ‘network theology’ for the infosphere. The shift from an exclusive focus on ‘transcendence’ to ‘inclusive immersion’ is the need of the hour. This networked theology needs to direct us to a God who is not high ‘above’ or a God ‘inside’ who needs to be searched, but to a God in the networked relations of our embodied and virtual lives who needs to be connected to. Monotheism, or the axial religion, and enlightenment or progress provided the explanatory framework for the agricultural and industrial ages, respectively. Jesuit philosophers should also work on metaphysical frameworks that provide an explanatory framework for the information age.

Secondly, a reminder to Jesuit leaders. The digital is a networked sphere. It is open, flexible and ready to change for the better. AI, blockchain technology, and other emerging technologies are products of constant resistance to hierarchy, monopoly,

conformity, centralisation and concentration of power. If your ideas are outdated, if you cannot reimagine the future, if you insist on conformity, if you disregard the fundamental processes of the Society or emphasise factory production of the young, say a big ‘no’ to lead.

Please remember, ‘fish rots from the head.’

Thirdly, a call for Jesuit educators, activists, formators and retreat preachers. Integrate digital and AI literacy into everything we do in our institutions and centres. Let them become laboratories for a hopeful future fueled by futuristic technologies.

Finally, a request to every Jesuit—young and old. Let us be disruptive innovators. Jesus was a disruptive innovator. He rocked the boat for good reasons. He innovated ways to access a loving God. He let go of oppressive traditions and rituals. Consider Ignatius, another disruptive innovator. His innovative spiritual exercises and the idea of discernment were so radical that they were doubted to be heretical. Recently, Pope Francis, another disruptive innovator, keeps bringing together people from all walks of life to deliberate and protect our common home. Through his lifestyle, exhortations and writings, he keeps reforming the idea of the Church for our times. Let’s stand on the shoulders of these giants and other mystics who were disruptive innovators in their ways and reimagine our future.

Digital spirituality is here to stay. Let us follow the Ignatian insight of *Tantum Quantum* as we embrace the digital to connect with God and relate to our neighbours. If not now, when, and if not us, then who?



FR. NITHIN MONTEIRO, SJ  
DOCTORAL STUDENT  
(RESEARCH AREA: AI GOVERNANCE, ETHICS OF AI,  
DIGITAL GOVERNANCE)  
XIM UNIVERSITY, BHUBANESHWAR

# Pixels of Faith

In cyberspace where data flows,  
 Digital spirit seeks repose.  
 Bytes of faith, electrons glide,  
 Across screens where souls abide.  
 From ancient paths to virtual light,  
 Techno-hymns in silent night.  
 Prayers whispered through Wi-Fi air,  
 Connecting hearts with digital care.

Through pixels bright, we find the way,  
 In virtual realms where spirits play.  
 Robotic priests and AR quests,  
 Navigating modern tests.

Yet dangers lurk in shallow streams,  
 Where clicks replace profound dreams.  
 Superficial, swift and fleet,  
 Lost in bytes, incomplete.

But heed the call, the ancient lore,  
 Blend the sacred, digital core.  
 Ignatian wisdom guides our path,  
 "Tantum quantum," in the aftermath.

For technology, a double edge,  
 Both servant true and titan's pledge.  
 To co-create, with conscious mind,  
 In digital sanctuary, we find.  
 So let us navigate this maze,  
 Where faith and bytes, in dance, embrace.  
 Cyber sanctuaries, new and old,  
 In digital spirit, hearts unfold.



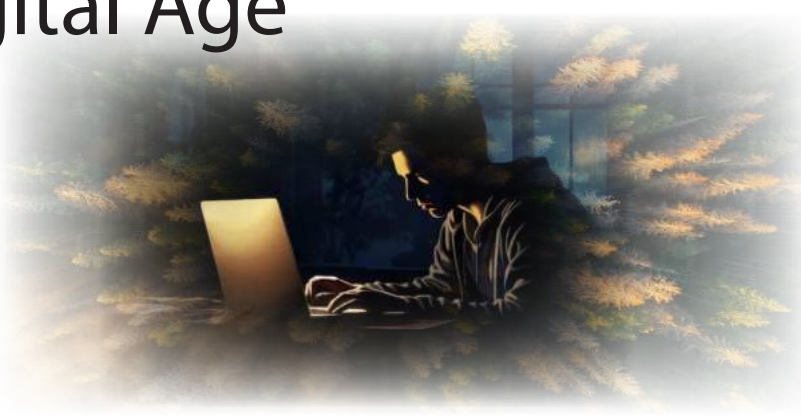
SCH. THOMAS J PHILIP, SJ

# The Evolving Nature of Spirituality in the Digital Age

Spirituality can be understood as an awareness or sensitivity to the larger picture of life. It involves recognizing our place in the grand scheme of things and being conscious of our impermanence. At its core, spirituality drives us to explore the big questions of existence. This sensitivity is inherent in every human being, although various practices can help enhance it.

Over the centuries, as our understanding of the world has evolved, so too have our spiritual practices. Yet, in many ways, they remain unchanged. Even today, when we are sad, we may still kneel down and pray. Human beings have always been moved by beauty and inspired by the world around us. As the 14<sup>th</sup> century Christian mystic Meister Eckhart beautifully said, “Every single creature is full of God and is a book about God. Every creature is a word of God. If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature – even a caterpillar – I would never have to prepare a sermon. So full of God is every creature.”

Spirituality is more about experience than comprehension. I recall Fr. Kurien Kunnumpuram SJ once telling me, “If something is comprehensible, it is not God.” This highlights the profound mystery that spirituality often embodies. A striking example of this is a video I once watched featuring David Attenborough. In it, he points to a small mound of termites and muses about whether the termites, going about their business, are aware of the human observing them. This moment captures the essence of our own search for understanding within the vast universe.

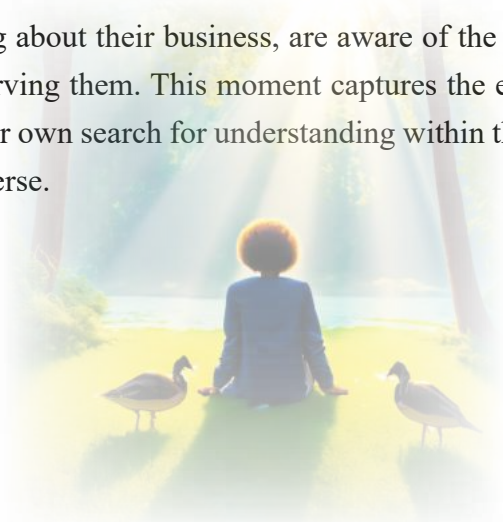


In today’s world, digital technology has transformed how we experience spirituality. We can now listen to a spiritual podcast or chant a mantra, no matter where we are. Modern technology also offers new insights into spirituality. For instance, we can now observe how the brain functions during meditation or prayer, giving us a deeper understanding of these spiritual practices. The tools we use to experience spirituality have changed, but the essence remains the same.

In the digital age, spirituality continues to be about connection, reflection, and finding meaning in our lives. The ways we connect with our spiritual selves might look different, but the fundamental human desire for understanding and connection with something greater than ourselves remains constant. Whether through an app, a podcast, or a virtual community, digital spirituality offers new avenues to explore the timeless quest for meaning.



**MR. AMARDEEP MANI PITAPALLIL**  
MASTER DEGREE IN ENGLISH AND CULTURAL STUDIES  
UNIVERSITY OF POTSDAM, GERMANY





# Father, Can I Pray While Scrolling?

There are quite a few jokes about Jesuits and their sense of humour. One of the most well-known jokes is about asking for permission to smoke. The story goes like this: A Franciscan and a Jesuit were friends. They were both smokers who found it difficult to pray for a long period of time without having a cigarette. They decided to go to their superiors and ask permission to smoke. When they met again, the Franciscan was downcast. “I asked my superior if I could smoke while I pray, and he said ‘no,’” he said. The Jesuit smiled. “I asked if I could pray while I smoke. He said, ‘Of course’.”

In this digital era, one can very well reformulate this joke by asking, Can I pray while I scroll? In the realm of digital spirituality, Saint Ignatius of Loyola could scarcely have foreseen the myriad ways in which we now distract ourselves with pocket-sized devices. Recent studies reveal that the average smartphone user checks their device a staggering 85 times each day. This constant connectivity often renders us oblivious to the immediate physical world and the presence of those around us.

Yet, Saint Ignatius, renowned for his spiritual discernment and emphasis on finding God in all things, would likely not advocate for a complete abandonment of these technological marvels. In today’s world, where a significant portion of humanity dwells in digital spaces, these devices have become integral to our daily lives.

During my time studying philosophy at JD Pune, I encountered the book “Digital Minimalism,” which explores the pervasive distractions of the digital world in our lives. Inspired by its message, I embarked on a six-month digital detox, abstaining from social media. Initially, this led to more meaningful conversations and friendships. However, I found myself replacing social media with YouTube and movies during my free time. This experience prompted me to ponder where one can find balance in today’s digital age. While social

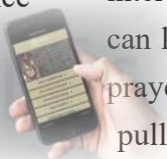
media is omnipresent and unavoidable, completely disconnecting may not necessarily enhance attentiveness or spirituality. Instead, I believe the key lies in learning to integrate mindfulness into our digital interactions, perhaps even finding moments of prayer while scrolling.

Even though there is a potential for distraction, there is an incredible opportunity for digital spirituality. Our smartphones and tablets need not solely be avenues for diversion; they can also serve as tools for fostering meaningful connections and deepening spiritual practices. Through apps, social media platforms, and digital communities, individuals can engage in prayer, meditation, and reflection, connecting with others who share similar spiritual journeys across vast distances.

Just as Saint Ignatius encouraged and propagated a discerning approach to spirituality in his time, we must navigate the digital realm with mindfulness and intentionality. By harnessing the potential of our devices for spiritual growth and connection, we can weave together the digital and spiritual dimensions of our lives. This integration enriches our journey towards a deeper understanding of ourselves and our place in the world.

Bringing our ministry online allows us to reach a global audience and understand what resonates with people. In the past, writers may have received limited feedback from a few magazine subscribers without knowing how many actually read their work. Today, digital platforms show us exactly how many views and shares an article or video gets, reaching people worldwide.

However, digital ministry and online connections have their limitations. The most precious gift we can give each other is our undivided attention, which is often lacking when screens mediate our interactions. The constant possibility of notifications can keep our conversations superficial, and during prayer, smartphones tempt us with distractions that pull us away from reflection.



In today's digital frenzy, where scrolling through endless content is the norm, it's crucial for us to shed a light of positivity sharing the uplifting message of Jesus. We have a responsibility to inject creativity and substance into the online world, turning it into a space that's both sacred and inspiring. It's time to tackle the digital challenge head-on, offering messages that resonate deeply enough to captivate and engage the waiting audience. Ignatian spirituality teaches us to infuse prayer into our daily routines, including our digital interactions, and empowers us to create content that's not just scrolling material but something that sparks genuine inspiration in others. There is a large crowd waiting for something meaningful to follow and swipe right if the message is presented well in their feeds. As we navigate this intersection of faith and technology, let's lead the way in enriching the digital landscape with the authentic spirit of our Jesuit values. Ignatian spirituality encourages us to pray while we scroll and inspires us to create content that inspires others to scroll their hearts to God.



SCH. SAVY GEORGE, SJ

# Exploring Digital Spirituality in the Post-COVID-19 Era: A Personal Journey.

The global pandemic has not only reshaped the way we live but has also transformed our spiritual practices. In the wake of COVID-19, many individuals have turned to digital platforms to seek solace, connection, and spiritual nourishment. This shift has given rise to the concept of digital spirituality, wherein people engage with their spiritual beliefs and practices through online means. One notable aspect of digital spirituality during the pandemic is the rise of virtual religious services, enabling individuals to participate in religious activities from the comfort of their homes. Social media plays a crucial role in connecting individuals spiritually, turning the digital space into a virtual temple for many.

I want to share with you my family's experience of digital spirituality before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. I come from a devout Catholic family where daily prayers sustain our spiritual and moral lives. Due to the old age and ill health of my parents, they were unable to attend any spiritual activities at the church, as our parish is far from our village. Occasionally, a priest from our parish used to go to the village church for Mass, but rarely did he visit my house to administer Holy Communion to my parents.

Due to COVID-19, all spiritual activities came to a standstill, even within my family. This unfortunate circumstance made everyone feel lost, confused and filled with a sense of spiritual emptiness. Deep down in their hearts, they greatly longed for the Holy Eucharist, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and spiritual activities. As the world grappled with COVID-19, social media became a powerful medium to fulfill the spiritual needs of the people. Various spiritual activities were live-streamed, and my family members and villagers were introduced to various channels for online

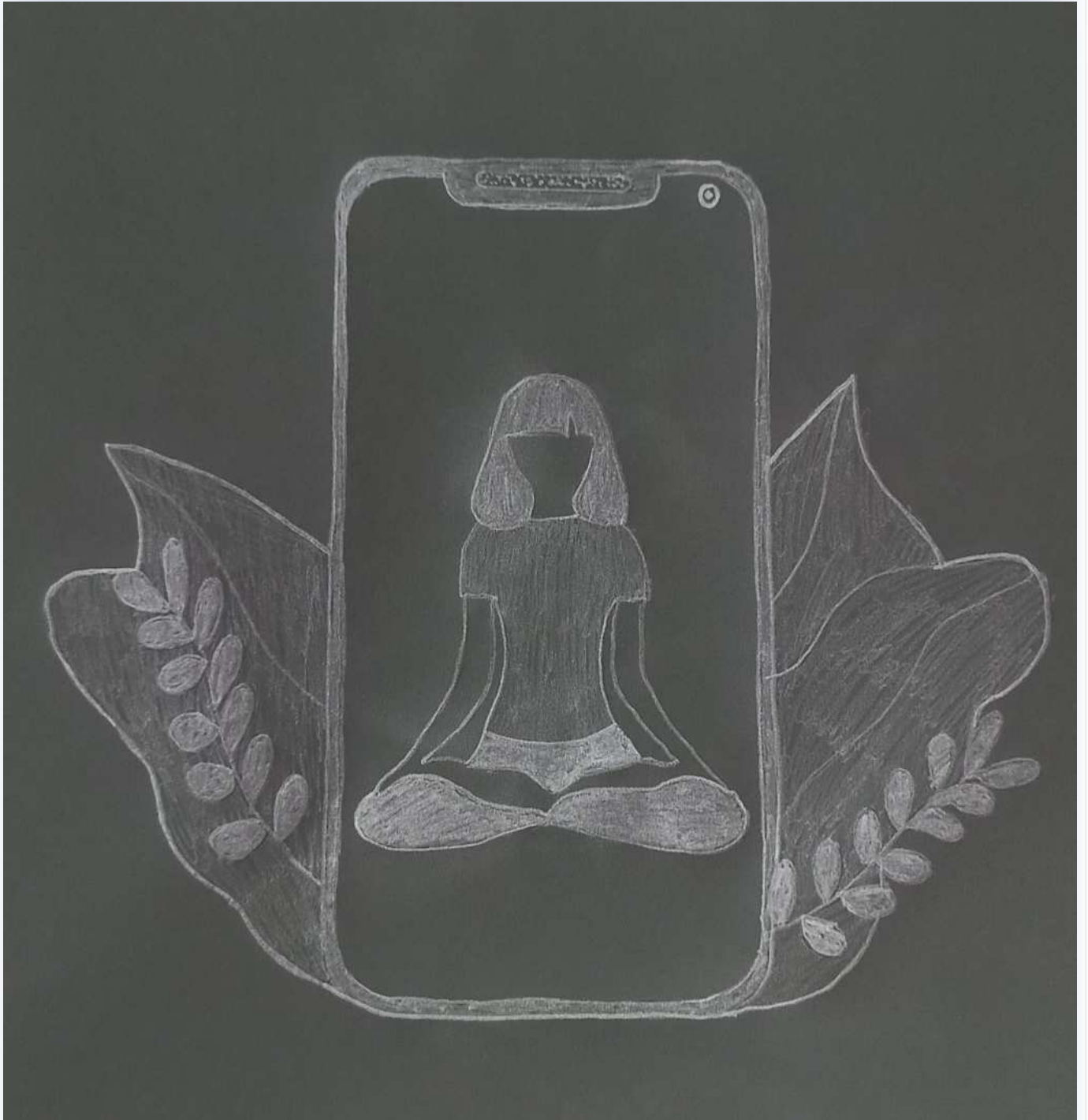
Eucharist, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, sermons, motivational talks, etc. I was surprised to see my parents spending their entire time in front of the TV, watching keenly, listening attentively to all the spiritual activities, and praying earnestly. Not only my parents but also my villagers used to join them for prayers. They all recited the rosary and sang Bhajans together with the sisters of Atma Darshan TV. Gradually, this process became a daily routine for them, and this virtual spirituality helped them experience Jesus more closely. As they cannot go to church, they continue to listen to the Word of God and participate in all the spiritual activities online every day.

I feel that digital platforms have played a vital role in shaping my spiritual life as well. It enhanced my spiritual growth by providing access to online spiritual reading materials, allowing me to listen to the Word of God, watch spiritual films, and attend online seminars and prayers. Digital spirituality has become one of the best means to spread the message of Christ to all, and I am sure this will provide opportunities for deepening Christian faith and building good relationships with all.



DN. SANJIBAN TIRKEY, SJ





SCH. DEEPAK INDWAR, SJ

# Digital Spirituality: Prospects and Challenges

The definition in the prologue of St John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Internet, and then the world appeared (Welsch, 1995).” Along with this quotation, we can extend the list to additional creations of the digital age such as social media, artificial intelligence, prayer apps, spiritual podcasts, and metaverse. These have occupied our spaces in all spheres. A few decades ago, no one ever thought digital creations would accelerate virtual communications and realities. It is an unprecedented, fast-paced development; and, one of the aspects of human existence that is affected is *spirituality*. Pope Francis has already implied the importance of technological progress in his speeches and writings but warned about the ‘absence of ethics and spirituality’ in technology (Pope Francis, 2015). Whether we appreciate technological or digital advancements, we are already in an era of digital activism that will present prospects and challenges in the intersection of humanity and the divine in the age of cyberspace.

## **Carlos Acutis and The Eucharistic Project Prospect**

We could say that Bl. Carlos Acutis was a person who bridged the gap between spirituality and modern innovation. His passion and exceptional aptitude for technology became his main pillar to serve the Lord. A lover of the Eucharist, he saw a good prospect in modern innovation, and perhaps, the very Beauty he loved, might have inspired him to see how technology can be harnessed to promote faith and spirituality through digital platforms. Just at the age of 11, he started cataloguing *Eucharistic Miracles* around the world. In two and a half years, he completed his project. Thus, he made an important contribution to the evangelising work of the Church and the promotion of devotion to the Holy Eucharist. Similarly, each one can creatively think of making a difference in the digital world.

## **Social Media Tools as Prospects for Evangelization**

Undoubtedly digital platforms facilitate communication with hundreds and thousands of people receiving the same news at a time across geography, languages and cultures. Today, to continue to spread the good news means to adapt and use technology to the Church’s advantage. Therefore, digital platforms could be utilized to create content that suits the tastes and preferences of different groups. For example, instead of the traditional classroom teaching of catechism, animation would be much more interesting to children. However, this may have its limitations such as reaching remote areas, or language barriers could be a hindrance to understanding content. There are already prayer apps and spiritual podcasts with helpful content to help people encounter God where they are. Creative Digital Priests and Digital Sisters use social media and websites to share the message of Christ in crisp forms. There are also many active Catholics who use Instagram, and YouTube to express and engage in spiritual practices, or convey their conversion stories and deepest spiritual sentiments. However, despite the efforts of people to bring spirituality to the virtual space, there are questions as to what extent can technology facilitate religious experience or engagement.

## **Possible Challenges**

1. Publishing false information and spreading misleading content related to matters of faith, tradition and others can lead to confusion and misunderstanding.
2. There is a growing tendency to prefer cyberspace over real space. The young generation enjoys free online conversations. This type of culture will pose a challenge to make the people ‘move from the virtual world of cyberspace to the real world of the Christian community’ (Pope John Paul II, 2002), which is one of participation and communion, or that emanates community spirit.

3. Overutilisation of social media can lead to distraction and over-reliance on digital technology can lead to isolation, avoiding real human interaction. Escape from reality can sometimes be in people's minds, and digital space is the haven that can substitute spiritual or human interactions.
4. There is a shallow spirituality dictated by algorithms. Dictums of algorithms may replace meditation through which humans experience God. In interacting with the virtual world, there is a possibility that one gets lost in the labyrinth of cyberspace. On the other hand, a search for meaning through a direct experience that can be attained through interaction with others and nature may not have a place anymore.
5. Developing digital literacy and ethics will pose a challenge. Not everyone is educated or has critical thinking. In the modern context, people can easily be swayed by a plethora of information that can seem to be compelling and appetising for consumption. Extensive education on the use of digital technology may be necessary to help others distinguish the *weeds from the wheat*, to evaluate truth and to maintain a balance between cyberspace and reality.
6. Reaching the periphery, and that too in the underdeveloped language, poses significant challenges. If the Church has to take advantage of technology and cyberspace to spread the good news, then it must fill the lacunae in reaching the peripheries, especially in transmitting the message of the Gospel in the unwritten language.

### Future Considerations

Digital technology has transformed humans in a significant way, but there are still many questions left unanswered. Will digital technology replace spiritual mentors or counsellors? Can technology maintain the sacred and spiritual presence in online experiences? How can we ensure that what is shared online will not be misused or abused? How deep and authentic can a virtual spiritual experience be? Will religious formation integrate digital literacy in training the present and future generations?



SCH. GOLDENSTAR DKHAR SJ  
LOYOLA COLLEGE CHENNAI,  
BERCHMANS ILLAM



# Cyber Sanctuaries: Finding Faith in Digital Spaces

## Introduction

Digital spirituality, the integration of spiritual practices and beliefs with digital technology, is becoming increasingly significant in a world dominated by instant communication and fast internet speeds. This evolution presents the challenge of reconciling the inherently slow and profound nature of spirituality with the rapid pace of the digital world. Yet, it also offers unprecedented opportunities for personal spiritual growth and community connection.

## Technology Transforming Faith Practices

Historically, technological advancements have significantly impacted religion. The printing press revolutionised religion 500 years ago, accelerating the Reformation and demonstrating the powerful relationship between technology and faith. Today, with the declining church attendance, this association is evident once again. Theologian Sabrina Müller notes that, while people may not attend traditional religious services as frequently, their need for spirituality remains. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital means by religious institutions to reach their congregations. Churches and other religious organisations began offering online masses and virtual gatherings, providing spiritual nourishment during a time of physical isolation. This shift highlighted the potential of digital technology to support and enhance spiritual practices.

As technology advances, so do religion and faith. The digital era offers a more diverse and individualised approach to spirituality, with prayer apps, spiritual podcasts, and websites catering to specific beliefs. For instance, controversial robot priests like *BlessU-2*, *Santo*, and *Mindar* raise questions about humanity's relationship with AI, while transhumanists envision a future where humans merge with technology, potentially

replacing traditional religious beliefs with faith in technological omnipotence.

Technological innovations are transforming how people engage with religion. The Church of England's Alexa Skills-based offering allows worshippers to pray using smart speakers. The VR Church, founded by Kari Soto and her husband, D.J., conducts virtual reality services attended by people worldwide. Similarly, apps like Follow JC GO! and the Click to Pray eRosary combine fitness and faith, offering new ways to engage spiritually.

## Challenges of Superficial Engagement

One significant challenge of digital spirituality is the risk of superficial engagement. Digital media's instant gratification can sometimes lead to shallow interactions with spiritual content. To counter this, individuals must practice mindful engagement with digital tools, ensuring they use these resources to deepen, rather than dilute, their spiritual experiences. History teaches us that technology is a two-edged sword, capable of both good and harm. To ensure digital spirituality does more good than harm, we must understand our motivations for integrating it into our spiritual lives. The temptation to "play God" by prioritising technological advancement over spiritual growth must be resisted. Instead, we should use technology to consciously grow into our divine human nature, fostering a responsible co-creation relationship with the Divine. This approach allows us to experience our spirituality in meaningful, digitally-enhanced ways.



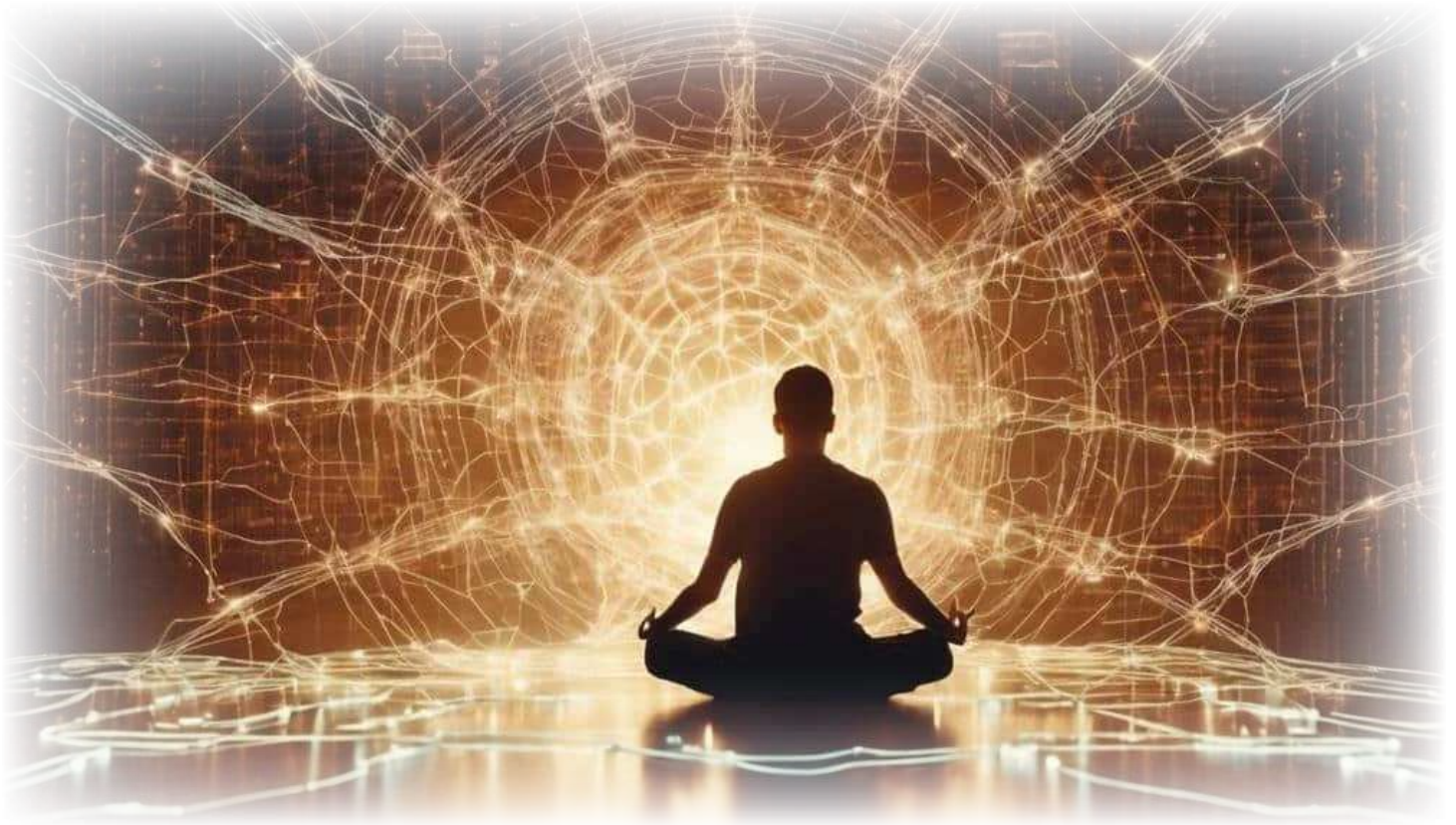
**Engaging Faith in a Digital Age**

-Dr. SHANTANU DUTTA

### **Responsible Co-Creation with Technology**

Ignatian spirituality, rooted in the teachings of St. Ignatius of Loyola, provides valuable insights into integrating digital technology with spiritual life. The principle of “tantum quantum” — “as much as” — advises using resources and tools to the extent that they help us grow closer to God. Applied to digital spirituality, this means leveraging digital technology to aid our spiritual journey without letting it become a distraction or a source of superficial engagement.

Digital spirituality offers a unique opportunity to integrate faith with modern technology, making spiritual practices more accessible and engaging in the digital age. By mindfully and responsibly leveraging digital tools, we can enhance our spiritual journey, connecting more deeply with our beliefs and communities in a fast-paced world.



SCH. THOMAS J PHILIP, SJ





With VR technology, users can now immerse themselves in virtual environments that simulate religious experiences. For example, some VR apps allow users to visit holy sites around the world, while others offer guided meditations in virtual settings. While these experiences may not be a substitute for real-life religious experiences, they can help users deepen their understanding of their faith and connect with a higher power in new and innovative ways.

However, with all of these advancements in digital spirituality, there are also concerns about the impact of technology on traditional religious practices. Some worry that virtual religious experiences may not be as meaningful as real-life experiences, while others fear that social media and other online platforms may be distracting people from their spiritual lives. Additionally, there are concerns about the potential for technology to be used for nefarious purposes, such as spreading hate speech or promoting extremist views. Despite these concerns, digital spirituality is a rapidly growing trend that shows no signs of slowing down. As technology continues to advance, it will likely play an increasingly important role in how people practice their faith and connect with others who share their beliefs. Whether it is through virtual reality, social media, or meditation apps, digital spirituality offers a new way for people to connect with their inner selves and find meaning in a world that can often feel disconnected and chaotic.

In conclusion, digital spirituality is a fascinating and complex phenomenon that is changing the way we think about religion and spirituality. While there are certainly challenges associated with the rise of technology, there are also many exciting opportunities for people to connect with their faith in new and innovative ways. As we continue to explore the intersection of technology and spirituality, it will be important to remain mindful of the potential risks and benefits of these new forms of religious expression. Ultimately, the key to successful digital spirituality will be finding a balance between embracing new technologies and staying true to the timeless values and traditions that have guided people's spiritual lives for centuries.



BRO. ATHUL VINOD, CST

# Mobile, Me and God

In my hand, my phone, so small,  
It helps me feel close to God, standing tall.

With every swipe and every tap,  
I feel God's presence, like a gentle pat.

When I'm quiet and alone with my phone,  
I find peace and comfort, not feeling alone.

Through messages and apps, God shows the way,  
In life's ups and downs, He guides me every day.

In the digital world, I feel God's love,  
Like a warm hug from above.

On my screen, I see God's reflection,  
A reminder of His divine connection.

So, in my phone's embrace, I find,  
God's love and presence, all the time.



SCH. VALERIAN, SJ



# A Search for Meaning: Integrating Technology and Spirituality

In this era of performances and excellence, we are quite concerned about ourselves. This age has called a few ‘*Masters or Pioneers*’ - those who have proved their abilities and lived in an integral way. Here, spirituality acquires an enormous meaning. Obviously, spirituality is not concerned with presenting oneself to others successfully; rather, it deals with one’s human experiences. That’s why Raimundo Panikkar credited spirituality as “*one typical way of handling the human condition.*” We are also struggling to have a meaningful life, enjoying each and every moment. It implies that everyone is spiritual in their own way of living. Spirituality is concerned with individuals becoming integrated persons. So, this article tries to find ways in which one can lead an integral life in the digital age.

According to Sandra M. Schneiders, “*spirituality in the broadest sense refers to the experience of consciously striving to integrate one’s life in terms of not isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.*” Digital spirituality also embodies the aspects found in this definition, enabling individuals to consciously strive for spiritual growth, integrate their practice into daily life, transcend boundaries, connect with others over shared values, and expand their perceptions. By harnessing digital tools and resources, individuals can deepen their spiritual journeys, cultivate self-transcendence, and move toward their ultimate values. We can discuss the points in the above definition from the perspective of digital spirituality.

**Conscious striving:** In the digital age, conscious striving takes on new dimensions. Individuals can access a vast array of spiritual resources online, enabling them to intentionally seek out knowledge, practices, and communities that align with their values. Digital tools like meditation apps,

online courses, and podcasts facilitate deliberate spiritual growth, helping individuals cultivate mindfulness, self-awareness, and purpose.

**Integration of life:** Digital spirituality allows individuals to integrate their spiritual practice into daily life seamlessly. Mobile apps like Headspace and Calm offer guided meditations for stress reduction, sleep, and focus, making mindfulness accessible anywhere, anytime. Online communities and forums provide support and encouragement, helping individuals apply spiritual principles to real-life challenges.

**Self-transcendence:** Digital spirituality enables individuals to transcend geographical and cultural boundaries, connecting with others worldwide. Social media platforms and online forums facilitate sharing personal stories, struggles, and triumphs, fostering empathy and understanding. Virtual events and webinars bring together spiritual leaders and practitioners, promoting collective growth.

**Ultimate value:** The digital realm exposes individuals to diverse spiritual perspectives, enabling them to explore and discover their ultimate values. Online resources like spiritual blogs, podcasts, and videos offer insights into various traditions and philosophies, helping individuals discern their beliefs and principles. Digital communities and forums provide a safe space for individuals to share their values and connect with others who resonate with their vision.

**Perception:** Digital spirituality influences how individuals perceive themselves, others, and the world. Social media platforms can also shape perceptions by exposing individuals to diverse perspectives, fostering empathy and broadening worldviews.



During Covid-19, many people have used digital media that could help them nurture their spiritual experience and faith. Thus, many religions, especially the Catholic Church, have understood the significance of media as a tool to nourish spirituality. Today, many use WhatsApp statuses, Instagram reels, and YouTube platforms for spreading the word of God and values.

Today, the traditional notion of spirituality as a personal, introspective journey has evolved, encompassing online communities, digital practices, and virtual experiences. Digital spirituality has become a powerful tool for those seeking meaning, purpose, and connection. Ultimately, digital spirituality is not a replacement for traditional spiritual practices but rather a complementary extension. It offers a unique set of tools and opportunities for individuals to integrate their lives, cultivate self-transcendence, and connect with others who share similar values and aspirations. Embracing digital spirituality helps individuals harness

its potential to deepen their spiritual journeys and foster a greater sense of unity and understanding in the global community.

However, digital spirituality also presents challenges and limitations. The virtual nature of online interactions can lack the depth and intimacy of in-person connections. The abundance of information online can lead to spiritual overwhelm, making it difficult to discern what resonates with one's values and beliefs.



Moreover, the constant stream of digital notifications and distractions can hinder mindfulness. It also raises important questions about the nature of spiritual experience and community. Some critics argue that digital spirituality can be superficial and lacks the depth and authenticity of traditional spiritual practices. Others are concerned about the impact of technology on our mental and physical health and the possibility that digital spirituality can worsen existing social inequalities.

Despite these concerns, digital spirituality is likely to continue growing and evolving in the coming years. As technology becomes increasingly integrated into our daily lives, it is likely that we will see new and innovative forms of digital spirituality emerge. These may include virtual reality experiences that simulate sacred spaces, AI-powered spiritual direction, and social media platforms that connect people across different spiritual

traditions.

In conclusion, digital spirituality is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that offers both benefits and challenges. While it has the potential to increase accessibility and connectivity, it also raises important questions about the nature of spiritual experience and community. As we move forward in this rapidly changing landscape, it will be important to approach digital spirituality with an open mind and a critical eye, recognizing both its potential and its limitations.

BR. JOHN K

PAPAL SEMINARY, PUNE

In an era characterized by rapid technological advancements and global connectivity, the landscape of spirituality is undergoing a profound transformation. The emergence of digital platforms has revolutionized the way individuals engage with their faith, providing new opportunities for connection, worship, and reflection. From online masses and confessions to virtual communities and digital homilies, the digital age has ushered in a new era of spiritual exploration and expression. In this article, we explore the concept of digital spirituality, drawing on examples from Vatican II, the legacy of Bishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Second Vatican Council, convened by Pope John XXIII in the early 1960s, marked a pivotal moment in the history of the Catholic Church. One of its key objectives was to bring the Church into closer dialogue with the modern world and adapt its teachings and practices to meet the needs of contemporary society. Among the many reforms introduced by Vatican II was a recognition of the importance of using modern means of communication (media) to spread the Gospel message.

The legacy of Bishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador serves as a powerful example of the intersection between spirituality and social justice. Throughout his ministry, Bishop Romero spoke out against the injustices perpetrated by the government and military in El Salvador and advocated tirelessly for the rights of the poor and marginalized. Despite facing threats to his life, he remained steadfast in his commitment to the Gospel values of love, compassion, and solidarity.

One of the most influential aspects of Bishop Romero's ministry was his weekly radio broadcasts, in which he delivered homilies

that addressed the social and political issues facing El Salvador. Through the radio transmission, Bishop Romero was able to reach a wide audience and inspired countless individuals to join him in the struggle for justice and peace. Today, his legacy lives on in the digital realm, as his homilies continue to be shared and disseminated online, inspiring new generations of believers to work for social change.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which swept across the world in 2020, brought with it extraordinary challenges for religious communities worldwide. In an effort to curb the spread of the virus, churches, mosques, temples, and synagogues were forced to close their doors temporarily, depriving believers of the opportunity to gather for worship and fellowship in person. However, out of necessity, many religious institutions turned to digital platforms to continue their ministries and maintain connections with their congregations.

One of the most notable developments in digital spirituality during the pandemic has been the widespread adoption of online masses and confessions. Churches around the world began livestreaming their services on platforms like YouTube, Facebook Live, and Zoom, allowing believers to participate in worship from the safety and comfort of their homes. Similarly, priests offered virtual confessionals via phone calls or video chats, providing individuals with the opportunity to receive the sacrament of reconciliation remotely.



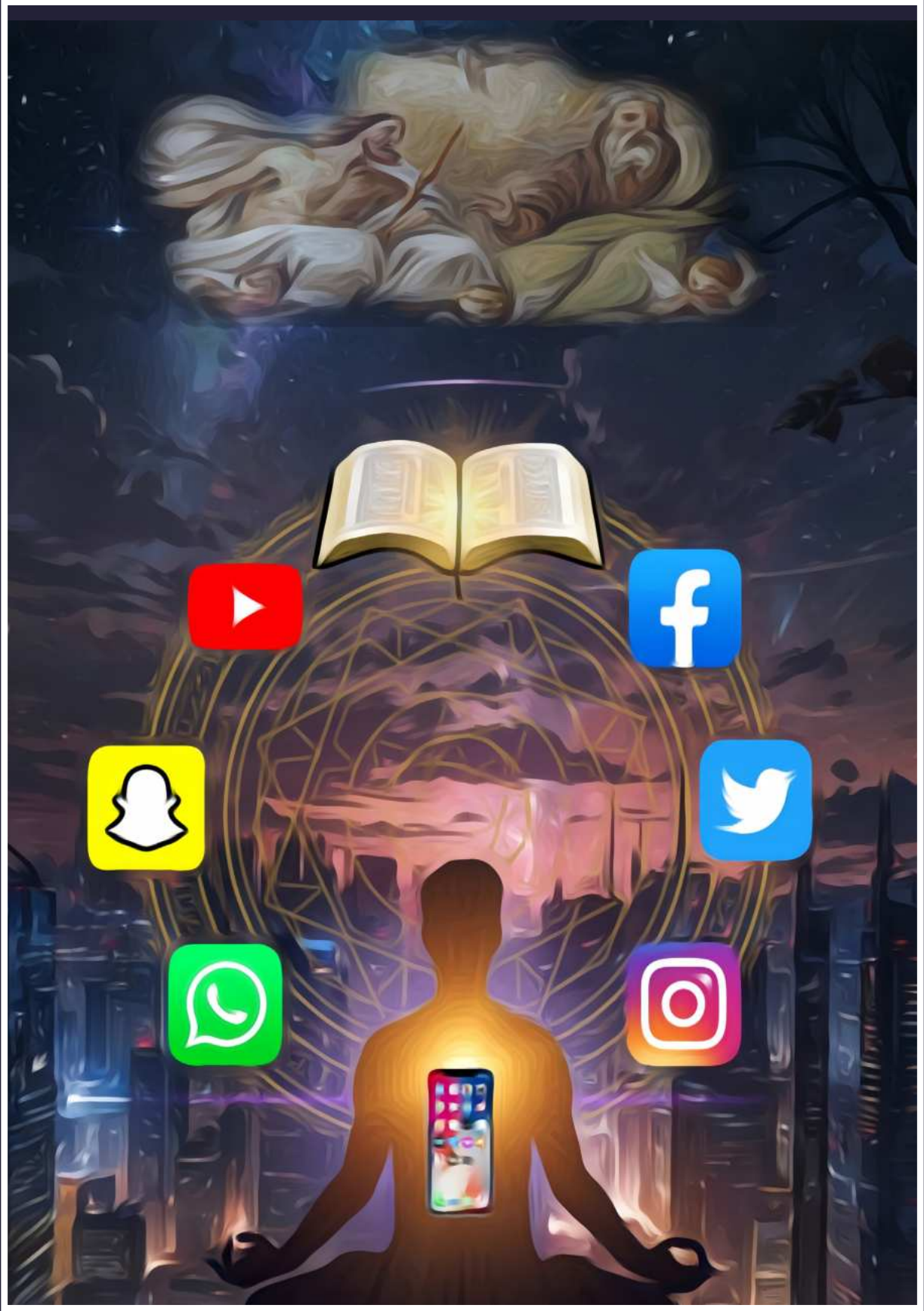


In conclusion, digital spirituality offers believers new opportunities for connection, engagement, and growth in their faith. From online masses and confessions to virtual communities and digital homilies, the digital age has transformed the way individuals experience and express their spirituality. As we wade into the challenges and opportunities of the digital realm, may we draw inspiration from the teachings of Vatican II, the legacy of prophetic voices like Bishop Oscar Romero and the resilience of communities during the pandemic. By embracing the potential of digital spirituality, we can continue to deepen our relationship with the divine and work together to build a more just and compassionate world.



SCH. BIPIN TIRKEY, SJ





SCH. RAHUL RANSHUR, SJ

# Where am I?

Where am I,  
In this vast ocean of space and time?  
Where are you,  
In this vast ocean of 1's and 0's?

Where am I,  
In this metaverse of Id's?  
Where are you,  
In this metaverse of http's?

Where am I,  
In these mystical clicks?  
Where are you,  
In these browsing tabs?

Where am I going,  
In these infinite scrolls?  
Where are you going,  
In these countless reels?

Where am I going,  
In this world of post-reality?  
Where are you going,  
In this creation of whataboutism?

Where am I,  
In the endless loop of Algorithms?  
Where are you,  
In the myriad sphere of AI's?

Where am I,  
In these windows of texting.  
Where are you,  
In these emotions of emoji?

Where am I,  
In Local disks?  
Where are you,  
In Big data?

In this omni-channel services,  
To un-buy un-selflessness,  
Where am I,  
To love the other?

In this phygital experience,  
To love seamlessly,  
Where are you,  
To journey divine.



DN. VYSAKH TITUS, SJ

# Spirituality Transcends the Digital Divide

In pixels and screens, where data streams flow,  
The essence of Spirituality begins to glow.

Beyond the divide of the digital realm,  
Lies a sacred space where souls overwhelm.

Through clicks and swipes, in cyberspace's dance,  
We seek deeper truths, a spiritual chance.

In virtual temples and online retreats,  
We find solace and grace in digital beats.

The internet's vastness, a boundless sea,  
Holds pathways to truth, for you and for me.

In shared moments of love and of light,  
Spirituality transcends the digital flight.

Through pixels and algorithms, we navigate,  
Finding serenity, amidst the digital state.

For in this wired world,  
where connections abide,

Spirituality thrives,  
transcending the divide.



SCH. PAUL PRADEEP RAJ, SJ





## Orientation Days

— Sch. Sebastian Baskey, SJ



The DNC Orientation Days from June 4-6, 2024, ushered in an exciting new chapter for scholastics, theologians and philosophers. This event, organized by the DNC community, aimed at familiarising the scholastics with the house program and preparing them for academic undertakings during the year.

The first day began with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, a moment of spiritual reflection that brought the scholastics together. This was followed by an ice-breaking session where the vibrant groups got to know each other and bond over shared interests. Mealtimes and evening games further fostered camaraderie and friendly competition. The second day featured informative sessions by DNC staff, equipping the scholastics to thrive in their new environment. The highlight was an exhilarating basketball tournament, where the groups faced off with unwavering determination, deepening their bonds through victories and losses. The basketball finals were a flurry of activity, with the crowd's roar echoing through the court. The third day started with an inspiring address by the Rector, who lit the path ahead and instilled a renewed sense of purpose in the scholastics. In the evening, the groups showcased their talents and creativity in a delightful array of performances. The orientation concluded with a fellowship meal, a sumptuous moment that helped strengthen the bonds forged and memories created among the scholastics.

The DNC Orientation Days had been a wonderful experience, laying the foundation for a transformative and informative journey at DNC. The energy, camaraderie, and sense of purpose that had blossomed would carry the scholastics forward, ready to embrace the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead.



# Thank You

Thank you, thank you, Thank you,  
Heartfelt gratitude is a 'thank you'.  
"Thank you," spoken, a heartfelt token,  
Appreciation which is softly spoken.

A smile appears on the face when we hear thank you,  
We feel sad when we don't hear thank you.

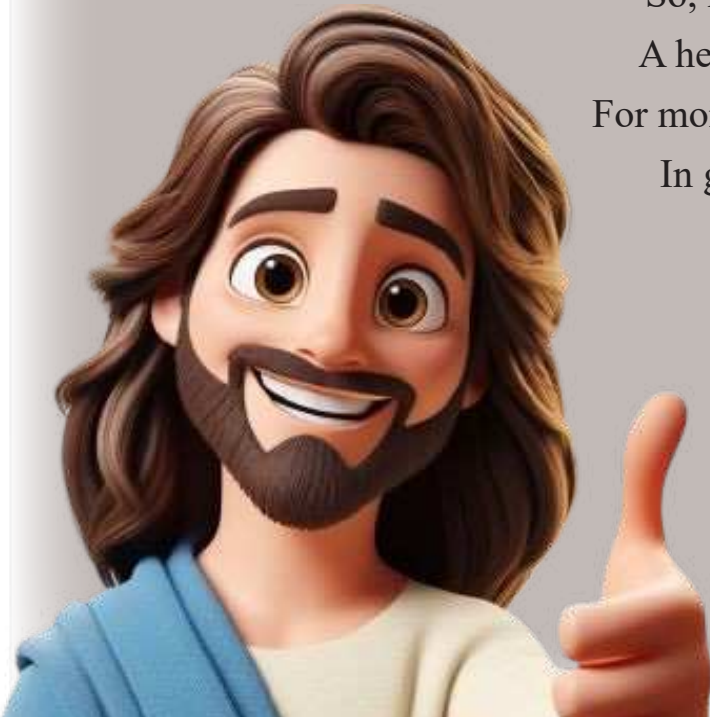
For kindness given, a helping hand,  
A bridge of gratitude, so beautifully spanned.

In small moments, in gestures we say thank you.  
A simple phrase, like grains of sand we feel thank you.  
Thank you, words so sweet, in deeds so true,  
Expressing thanks, is a heartfelt cue.

In smiling face is unspoken word thank you,  
Echoes in the beating heart is thank you,  
A silent "thank you" takes its flight,  
For every help, we say thank you! Right.

For a little kind work we expect thank you,  
We feel boosted up when we hear thank you.  
For lessons learned, both joy and strife,  
A grateful bonding, which embraces life.

So, here's my poem, in a simple view,  
A heartfelt "thank you" to each of you.  
For moments cherished, for memories sown,  
In gratitude's garden, love is grown.



SCH. ISHAK EKKA, SJ





**THANKS TO THE OLD  
DNC TIMES TEAM**



**WELCOME NEW  
DNC TIMES TEAM**