

Religion Today

July 9-15, 1999

God in the Fast Lane: Religions of the Information Super Highway

Paul Flesher

Do you know what type of site is the most numerous on the World Wide Web? If you guessed sites that want to sell you something, you are right. But what about the second most numerous type of site? Not so obvious.

Well, it's religious sites. All over the world, it seems that religions and religious individuals are constructing sites about religious beliefs, practices, and issues -- usually their own. So what's out there? Let's start with the basic stuff. Nearly every denomination and branch of Christianity has erected at least one website, from the Catholics and the Orthodox to the Methodists, Baptists, Anglicans, and Presbyterians. And don't forget smaller denominations like the African Methodist Episcopal and the Assemblies of God.

Most religions around the world likewise have websites. Some of the best-designed sites are Buddhism's site for the Dalai Lama of Tibet, the Shiva site for Hindu worship, and the Moslem site helping pilgrims organize their trip to Mecca.

But the Web also has less-official sites. Need to pray, but forgot how many "Hail Marys" there are in the Rosary? There is a site that not only tells you how many, but furthermore helps you count them. It also gives you the history of the Rosary and some information about why people pray it. Want to check out who is praying at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, the most holy site in all of Judaism? Look at the webcam (web-camera) that takes a picture of it every minute and sends it out into cyberspace to anyone who wishes to see. The activity ranges from thousands of people crammed into the site on holy days to absolutely no one at 2:30 a.m.

Speaking of prayer, when Princess Diana died, someone created a site that depicts Diana with angel wings and gives prayers for her in eight different religions although it no longer plays "Ave Maria." Did the odd suicide of the so-called Heaven's Gate group strike you? You can still check out their beliefs on the Heaven's Gate website-now hosted by an "anti-cult" group called Trancenet. This is just the smallest of samplings of what is available on the Web about religions. To find out more, visit Yahoo's directory of over 26,000 religious sites (www.yahoo.com). To see some of the sites mentioned above, visit:
www.august.uwyo.edu/ReligioNet/rsp/PT.htm