**Religion and Technology
in an era of
Rapid Digital and Climate Change**
(RaTiRDaCC 2023)

Organized by: RWTH Aachen University (Germany) and IIT Madras (India)

November 21-23, 2023, IIT Madras, INDIA

Call for Papers

Papers are invited (from early researchers, post-doctoral scholars, Faculty and practitioners), for an International Conference to be held from November 21 to 23, 2023 at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Chennai, India. This conference aims to discuss the interplay and adaptation strategies in, and between, the realms of religion and technology in an age of tremendous transformations. Among the transformations, we particularly wish to emphasize the rapid developments with regard to the digital world and the climate, and the considerable global changes and challenges they have produced. We think of 'religion' in this context as a key source for value-based solutions, and of 'technology' as a specific approach to the world. We regard religion and technology as mirror image twins and thus envisage projects on the changing forms of impacts through both of them.

Recent trends in religious studies have emphasized "material religion" - with focus on the material elements of practice rather than just on theological or doctrinal matters. This turn opens up the way for the history of technology productively to intervene in a number of ways. Historians can illuminate the way objects exist in public performances of religious identity and belonging, and the changes in religion and religious practices, riding on technological advances (like online darshans/meditations, social-media channels, online groups, 'Apps', etc.). Beyond organized mainstream religions, papers can also look at the interface of technology and the 'magical' (acts, spirit possession, black magic), and other so-called 'demonic' work. Others may put the spotlight on the architecture of religious structures, the spiritual character of engineering works, the changing light, sound and other aesthetic elements, and how these changes reshape public participation both in terms of religion and technological usage and challenges. Ethical challenges

like loss of privacy, anxiety about the human person's distinctiveness and dignity, and mankind's handling of the environment need to be discussed too with regard to increasing digitization and climate change. With the above broad lineaments, proposals can relate themselves to any of the following specific themes:

1. Religion and the Digital World – the Digital as a method to capture and describe the world and our livelihoods; vast increase around the world in the use of telecommunication and digital technologies for promotion of both traditional and new-age faiths – their increased valency especially amidst the Covid-19-induced restrictions on physical gatherings; ways in which pilgrimages have been transformed due to the new digital facilities (from travel planning to booking darshans); theological/philosophical re-orientations and reflections centered on these new openings.

2. Technology and Religion in the Context of Climate Change – possible solutions to the challenge of climate change from religion/theology; their distinctiveness from secular thought/debates; how climate change has impacted on the self-understanding of religions, their dogmatic, social and moral positions; the climate discourse as a modern form of apocalypticism; practical manifestation of ecological sensitivity - influencing the building of mosques, churches, and temples; influence of local communities and indigenous knowledge systems.

3. Artificial Intelligence – philosophical and spiritual/theological reflections touching on fundamental questions of Being, Consciousness and the (Post)human; parallelism in the 'transcendence' sought to be attained by spiritual efforts/exercises and those wrought by new spatial categories like 'metaverse' (going beyond our understandings of the 'cyberworld'), and other such ontological questions and dilemmas.

4. Technology and Religious scholarship/pedagogy – from printing press to online theology classes; role of technology in preservation of religious materials and creation of religious repositories like digitisation of palm leaf manuscripts, building devotional hymns database; the regional variations in approach and content; the various innovative practices in creation, delivery and marketing; the subjectivity of technology and its power to include and exclude.

5. Representation of Religious-Technological life worlds – in literature, arts and films including science fiction/ climate fiction; representations of knowledge in policies and practices affecting the lives on the ground.

In terms of methodology, it is hoped that the various proposals and papers would throw forth a rich mix of different approaches and source materials - including intercultural theology, oral history, decolonizing research methodologies, archival work, textual and media analysis, ethnographic research, social analysis, theoretical formulations and ethical/philosophical reflections.

To submit a paper proposal, please send the following information on a single-sided document **in English,** before **23 May 2023** to **ratirdacc23@gmail.com**

- A provisional Title and the Theme Number it would fit under (nos. 1 to 5 – see above)

- Full name and academic post/institutional affiliation of the author/s

- Full postal and email-addresses

- An outline of about 400 words, highlighting the relevance of the paper to the conference themes, or other forms of interaction between technology and religion, and the main contribution/argument of the proposed paper

- 5-10 keys words

Information about the acceptance of a paper will be given by end of May 2023 together with guidelines for the paper and its presentation and the Registration fee payment mode. [A nominal registration fee of Rs.500 (15 USD for international participants) is payable]. Complete papers must be received by 25 August 2023. Papers (along with session schedule), will be made available for pre-reading to registered participants. Some of the papers presented at the Conference will be chosen for further expansion and inclusion in a special issue of a relevant journal of high international standing, or in an Edited Volume. (Presentation of paper in the Conference does not automatically guarantee publication).

Most of the outstation speakers will be provided accommodation from 20th November to the evening of 24th November 2023 in the IITM Guest House at a nominal cost of Rs 500 to 1000 per night depending on the size and occupancy (single/double) of the room. Participants who are unable to travel can participate online. Travel or other forms of financial assistance, if any, will be announced if adequate funds are raised.

TIMELINE
Deadline for submission of Abstracts – May 23 2023
Intimation about selected Abstracts - May 30
Deadline for submission of first Drafts - Aug 25
Conference: Nov 21 - 23, 2023
Intimation about Papers selected for Publication – Dec 3 2023
Resubmission of the selected Papers [for Peer Review] - Jan 10 2024