

**META SOCIAL TECHNOLOGY AND RELIGION: A MEDIA  
RITUAL THEORY CRITICAL DISCOURSE**

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Abstract

This paper explores the proposition that Meta social media and technology functions as a ritual platform and concludes affirmatively. It identifies and critically evaluates ritual elements on Meta's platform. Employing media ritual theory in the context of religion, it analyzes the *Meta for Faith* homepage. Consequently, the investigation delves into Meta's role in enhancing or diminishing the sacred rituals integral to religion, one of society's oldest cultural institutions. The discussion expands by considering the implications of *Meta for Faith* offerings in religious rituals. Thus, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on the increasing social technology mediatization in the rapidly evolving digital media landscape. It provides a novel perspective on the power dynamics of social media platforms within the framework of media communication ritual theory and religion.

**Keywords:** Facebook, media ritual theory, media and religion, mediation, mediatization, Meta, social media, social technology

**Meta and Religion: A Media Ritual Theory Critical Discourse**

**Introduction and the Context**

In the past decade, more communication and media scholars have been concerned with new forms of emerging media and platforms shaping

social institutions (such as religious institutions) and culture. Among such studies are mediation or mediatization (Silverstone, 2002; Livingstone, 2009; Lunt & Livingstone, 2016; Couldry, 2003; 2008) or deep mediatization (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). Lunt and Livingstone (2016) propose mediatization as a possible new paradigm in studying the complex ways of mediated forms of communication. Magaudda and Solaroli (2020) suggest a shift from political economy to the artistic elements of music, journalism, and photography. Others argue that "social orders are continually changing in important ways to accommodate everchanging media" (Baran & Davis, 2020, p. 371). Ritual theory is an aspect of these proposed paths of new investigation in the burgeoning digital media platforms' shaping of social institutions. Though narrow in its scope, the ritual theory addresses a vital aspect of the hypothesized mediatization process.

Nick Couldry (2003; 2005; 2008), one of the leading scholars in mediatization, arrived at the broader issue of mediation/mediatization when grappling with this narrower aspect of the media's role in shaping established social institutions. Also, Couldry's inspiration—Silverstone (2002)—describes mediation as comparable to ritual analysis. Thus, revisiting the issue of the ritual elements of the mediation, media ritual, a theory in its own right, is worth a scholarly discussion of this kind.

Hence, this essay's objective is to make a relevant contribution to the ongoing conversation about the intricate evolution of social institutions and the mediatization process due to new forms of media. The study examines how social technology platforms are shaping routinized human interactions, partly due to the paradigm-shifting phase of emerging media. Therefore, this study focuses on one of the largest social technology platforms—Meta. The aim is to analyze Meta as a ritual platform for the mediatization of religion in virtual spaces. Similarly, the essay will thoroughly examine the implications of the Meta ritual to an institution whose ordinary language of interaction is lavishly framed in ritual terms, namely religious communities.

Thus, the analysis takes a critical look at the ritual elements of Meta in its partnership with religious communities (Dias, 2021). It critically examines the value Meta delivers regarding religious experiences—broadly speaking—as the experience of rituals and the engagements thereof in social media. In other words, a ritual view of the communication types of the technology deserves fair consideration, and Meta—the most prominent global social media platform that seeks active partnerships with religious communities—is a prime case study for such an investigation. Therefore, this research addresses whether Meta— Facebook, Instagram, and Messenger—is a ritual media platform and what that could imply in its mediation of religion. For clarification, this analysis is not a study of religion in Meta. Instead, it critically examines Meta's mediatization of religion in ritual terms. Thus, the exploration of religious terms of rituals is secondary if necessary.

### **Theoretical Framework and Method**

This critical analysis paper addresses the question of the possibility of the distinct characteristics of Meta social technology as a ritual platform. It draws on Carey's (1989) and incorporates Couldry's (2003; 2008;) and Couldry and Hepp's (2017) ritual theory, a mediatization process.

Carey offers two archetypal ways to look at the capacities of mass communication, broadly speaking—the transmission and ritual models. The former, he argues, is a common approach and deals with terms such as sending, transmitting, delivering information, and imparting data. It is the natural home for media effects theorists. Despite the paucity of Carey's view in this categorization because it excludes the transactional capacities of communication and does not address the mediatization processes of emerging media such as social technologies, his

appreciation of the transmission model deserves a revisiting and a closer examination. Nevertheless, this concern is not in the scope of this essay. On the other hand, drawing on Durkheim's study of rituals (1912, 1995), Carey argues that in the ritual model, "communication is linked to terms such as 'sharing,' 'participation,' 'association,' 'fellowship,' and 'the possession of a common faith'" (p. 18).

Carey is correct in acknowledging the pacesetting work of Durkheim, though he still needs to flesh out the rich anthropological aspects of Durkheim's theory. For Carey, "'commonness,' 'communion,' 'community' are essential elements of the ritual communication theory and connect communication to its ancient and common roots (Carey, 1989, p. 18). He asserts that "A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs" (Carey, 1989, pp. 18–19). Carey (1975) believes that "communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed" (p. 177). He relates ritual theory to religion, asserting that "the archetypal case under a ritual view is a sacred ceremony that draws people together in fellowship and commonality" (Carey, 1989, p. 18). Nevertheless, Carey's view is more functional (functionalism) than grounded in anthropological roots by which the sense of community—as the defining element of his ritual typology—is shaped. Moreover, the theory's limits regarding the media's role in the ritual process are evident since it is silent on the function of rituals in naturalizing a dichotomized structure of reality between being in or out of a space of the interaction. Here, Couldry (2003) fits in this paper's schema and is a deeper theoretical underpinning to this investigation.

Couldry expanded Carey's view in the study of media and the Internet, with a depth fleshed out from sociology and anthropology deepened in the idea of media mediation, if not mediatization (2008). Couldry sees a more decentralized yet pervasive media, as individuals participate in

ritual activities in various media while forming part of the community molded around communication and technological products' engagements. Contrary to the functionalist view of media communication and drawing on the works of Durkheim (1912), Bourdieu (1977; 1991), and Bloch (1989), Couldry deepens Carey's introduction of the idea of ritual in communication studies. Couldry's version of ritual theory could be more appropriately called mediation (2003), mediatization (2008), and later, deep mediatization (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). It takes from Meyrowitz's (1994) technological deterministic medium theory and Postman's (1993) Technopolis. However, it advances media ritual theory scholarship with nuanced and deepened anthropological grounds beyond functionalism.

Couldry was spot-on in acknowledging the vastness of Durkheim's contributions to the study of ritual, for which Durkheim's influence in sociology is self-evident, despite Durkheim's unclear anthropology to which Carey objects. Couldry was also right in re-reflecting the idea of ritual in media and pointing to the deepening that must occur if we reintroduced a richer anthropological framework to Carey's and embraced "social forms" as "media forms" also (Couldry, 2005, p. 11). However, rephrasing the ritual theory to meditation—a term that Livingstone (2009) initially favors, though later changes to mediatization (Livingstone & Lunt, 2014)—risks being generic, an argument many scholars make. Nevertheless, the concept's meaning suffices concerning the ritual elements of this investigation, in part, because of its naturalization of media rituals in a way comparable to everyday life. Therefore, the specific perspective here is recognizing how culture or cultural institutions are redefined or shaped in terms of media's ways of interaction and how users and producers of content are part of that mediatization process. It is to recognize that the *produsage* role (in the language of Axel, 2005; 2007) is symbolic of a higher value than simply sharing or commenting. Thus, the strength of Couldry's is in

providing a more complex framework for understanding the role of media in shaping current cultural forms, not necessarily in terms of a postpositivist media effects framework, but in terms of cultural change and meaning-making around media rituals.

Thus, the use of ritual theory in this analysis is a combination of Carey's for its emphasis on media structures around participatory culture and community, including identifiable features of ritualizing practices within media, and Couldry's for its rootedness in the idea of media as a naturalizing ritual of everyday interactions. It is much more like Couldry's mediatization, approached through a ritual element framework. This paper adds to these adaptations a third element implied in both, which goes back to the traditional, if not archaic, roots as found in Durkheim's (1995) distilled relationship of the sacred and the profane, but more in Bloch (1989)—distinguishing and bonding the sacred and the non-sacred; and the determination of power in the structuring or naturalizing process of the mediated and the non-mediated worlds.

Power, as used in this paper, needs clarification too. In part, it draws from

Couldry's (2005) "space of ritualization" (p. 5), wherein the experience of media power is demonstrated. Bloch's perspective is critical, also, for its insight into the view of ritual not simply as an explanatory form but as "an exercise of a particular kind of power" (p. 45), assuming the role of necessity in the mediated space of interactions. In this view, then, the question will be more like what Baran and Davis (2020) summarize as the problem of what kind of users and community "we are, we become, or we are becoming in our mass-mediated world" (p. 179), and what kind of power is being exercised and by whom in shaping the users and the communities we become in that space?

Key to the appreciation of this paper's interpretative point of view of power in the ritual theory is the idea that in the ritualization process, media are seen or believed to be indispensable, having become the naturalizing ecosystem for the particular ritual category. For example, community members begin to believe that unless they join Facebook, Instagram, or WhatsApp groups, they lose out entirely on the values of *being* in the community. The need to connect becomes the value of *belongingness*, without which social isolation is implied. In the process, rituals assume the role of something beyond the specific action, if not a transcendent value, the other-reality, separating those who are considered initiates and the non-initiates; those who belong to the specific group versus those who are seen as aliens, if not social outcasts.

Power in media ritual theory also deals with structuring the ritual of the mediated community in terms of access. It addresses who has access, who has not, and who sets the boundaries within which access is possible. It is also about agency in formalizing what is considered valued data and what is not. Most importantly, data takes on the value of ultimacy, and access to them becomes the highest pursuit of the initiates. Moreover, the data quality also takes on the value of ultimacy. In short, once necessity, in terms of what is valuable or accessible, weaves through the mediated experience, power is at play.

In summary, in the ritual theory's approach, the central framework of communication capacities is community-centered. Its goal or assumed values are shaped by a sense of building community, being in or out of it, and formalizing acceptable behavior in its terms. Meta frames its platform as social technology whose capacities are for building and expanding communities, not as a web application or a content management system, but as a social technology (Zuckerberg, 2021a). In other words, it is a social technology, a platform with much deeper

value than mere socialization or networking. Thus, it is an excellent platform for ritual analysis research.

The research uses religious rituals and communities as a point of reference because Meta explicitly targets religion to communicate its rituals' affordances. Although the analysis draws on religious metaphors, it does not do so to defend them. Instead, it shows the naturalization of the Meta ritualization in specific religious terms and, by so doing, foregrounds what religious groups and leaders should be aware of and must critically evaluate.

Therefore, in the critical examination of various elements of the Meta ritual experience, this author approaches the analysis by critically looking at the role of Meta's ritual forms as they take on the ritual role of the sacred with the power of blurring (or not blurring) the line of the sacred. Consequently, it examines how Meta's ritual naturalizes sacred ritual, resulting in, what Couldry claims happens in a ritual theory of media, a mediatization process, or what Livingstone and Lunt (2014) describe as a second and real scenario of high modernity, a complex reordering of institutions in media terms. Similarly, while the ritual perspective examines various aspects of the Meta offerings as ritual, it does so in the broader context of its implications to power. In addition, ritual theory, in the context of this inquiry, assumes the framework of the social technology affordances that are humanistic and digital versus the idea of ritualistic elements in the religious sphere. Decisive stand lies in the naturalization of the interactions in the sense that Meta blurs the line between what, in the language of Couldry (2005), is "'in' or not 'in' the media" (p. 8). The normalization of the interaction and the blurring of the sacred versus the technological are decisive points for Meta's ritual posture.

Hence, this study sits within a broad context of the ritual theory discussion. Therefore, how does Meta serve as a ritual platform? What evidence supports its characterization as such, and how does this challenge or enrich traditional conceptions of religious rituals? Answers



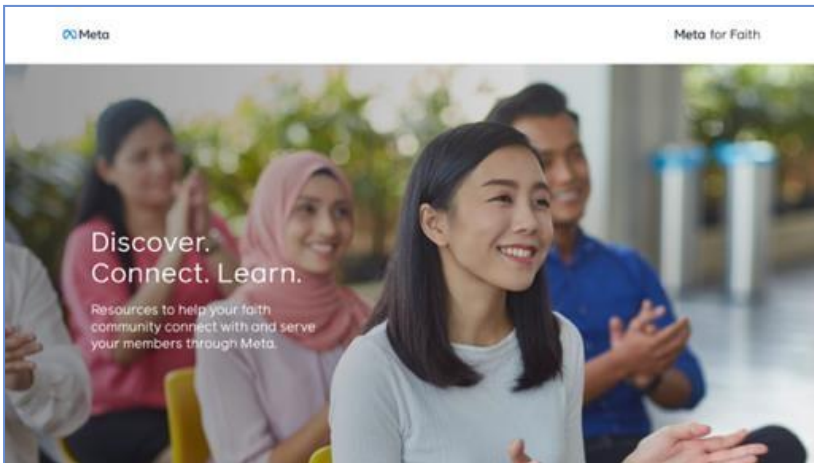
to these questions stem from analyzing *Meta for Faith* homepage design and images, its *Faith Resource Hub*, and its power dynamics.

## Analyzing Meta’s Homepage Design and Images

Meta's form of invitation to its rituals is the claim to make it easier for faith communities to do what they do best—worship, pray, fellowship, engage, participate, and belong (Zuckerberg, 2021; Culliford, 2021). The following data from Meta’s homepage provide evidence.<sup>1</sup> The screenshots of the landing page of the *Meta for Faith* community (see *Images 1-9* below) show the well-thought-out user journey map of the partnership and demonstrate the ritual patterns of the platform.

### Image 1

*Meta for Faith homepage main header*



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<sup>1</sup> The data in the form of images are screenshots of the user frontend view of the *Meta for Faith* site, captured on January 2, 2021. As a result, this illustration should be confined to that specific time frame and cannot be used to apply to any future layout changes that Meta may have made. Accessed: <https://faith.facebook.com/>.

Image 1 and the subsequent images presented are not merely an ornamental element. Instead, it plays a crucial role in shaping the user experience and journey map within Meta's ritual metaphor designed explicitly for religious communities. Image 1 serves as an exemplar of visual cues embedded in Meta's design and branding strategy. These cues strategically utilize visual metaphors that evoke associations with religious experiences and rituals. "Connect with and serve your members through Meta" is a text invocation to religious leaders that reinforces the image metaphor. Meta presents itself as the bridge of that resource between the leadership and the membership to the courted community.

Meta's bridge-building metaphor is subtle because its soft-selling language positions itself as a value beyond a tool but as a needed space of connection. Without this space, a *ritualization space* in the language of Couldry, the "connecting" and "serving" would not occur.

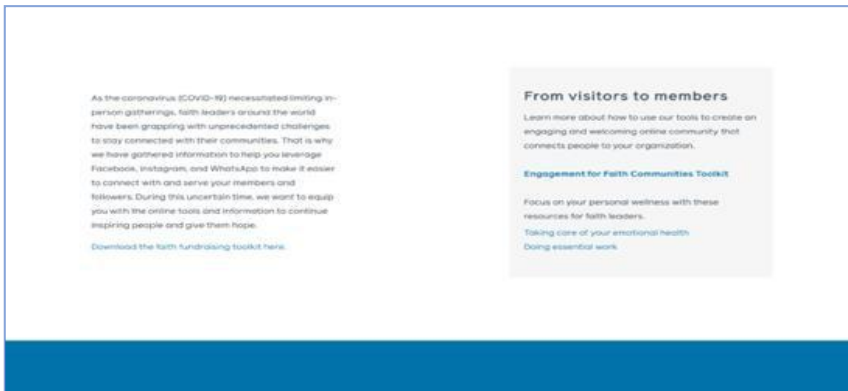
Furthermore, the image demonstrates an inclusive, if not inter-religious, typology that appeals to diverse religious traditions. For example, the portrayal of a woman wearing a hijab is juxtaposed with gestures traditionally associated with Christian evangelical faith practices, highlighting the interconnectedness of these religious expressions. However, by framing and composing the image around a communal ritual that meshes various ritual gestures, the distinctive features of the sampled religious gestures are distorted, emphasizing the shared humanistic experience across various faiths.

Furthermore, the youthful appearance of the individuals in the photos conveys a new and fresh way of worship. It showcases how the younger generation worships in a form that bridges religious variations, with a central focus on one direction. The medium shot, composed to draw proximity to the lead figure in the foreground while creating warm connectivity with the figures in the out-of-focus background, reinforces the community connection ritual. Thus, there is the naturalization process in which distinct traditions and the line between them are

blurred, and the new-found value beyond boundaries is presented as desirable.

## Image 2

Meta for Faith's homepage, 2<sup>nd</sup> row



Upon analyzing Image 2, one can identify Meta's user journey story as an invitation or invocation for members to join the "Engagement for Faith Communities Toolkit." There is also the "Faith Fundraising Toolkit" and other resources for the mental health of faith leaders. These toolkits are symbolically integrated into Meta's invitation ritual, emphasizing their significance in facilitating engagement within faith communities. In other words, the messaging suggests that connecting in Meta's ritual is a primer to the higher values of fulfilling social needs for engagement online, financial sustainability, and overall mental health.

### Image 3

*Meta for Faith's homepage, 3<sup>rd</sup> row*

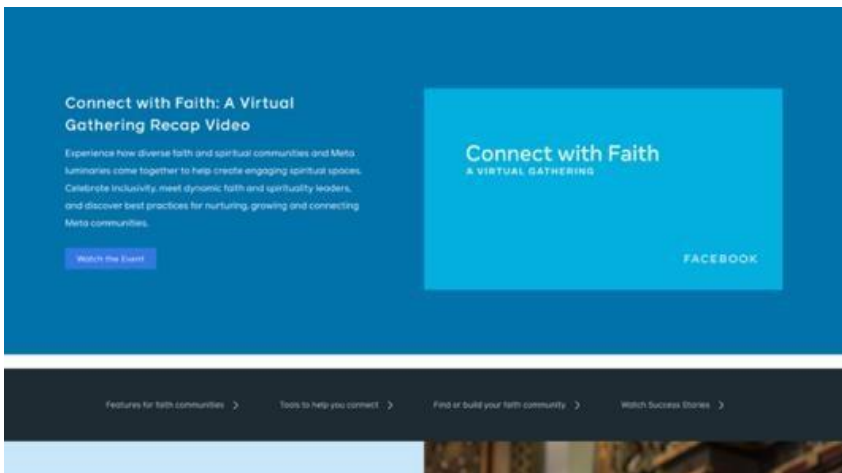
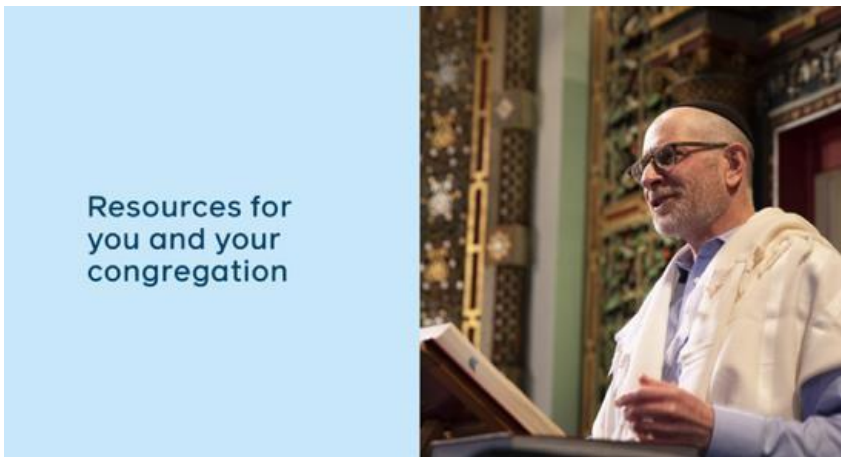


Image 3 represents an additional invitation to connect with Meta for faith-based values. It highlights the virtual ritual value of communion/gathering, underscoring the significance of remote engagement within faith communities. What is offered in the Meta

interaction becomes a new experience in which technology is invisible. Instead, human values of connecting with faith in the virtual world are offered. This invisibility of technology is the ultimate goal of naturalization, which Meta seeks as social technology mediates religion online.

#### **Image 4**

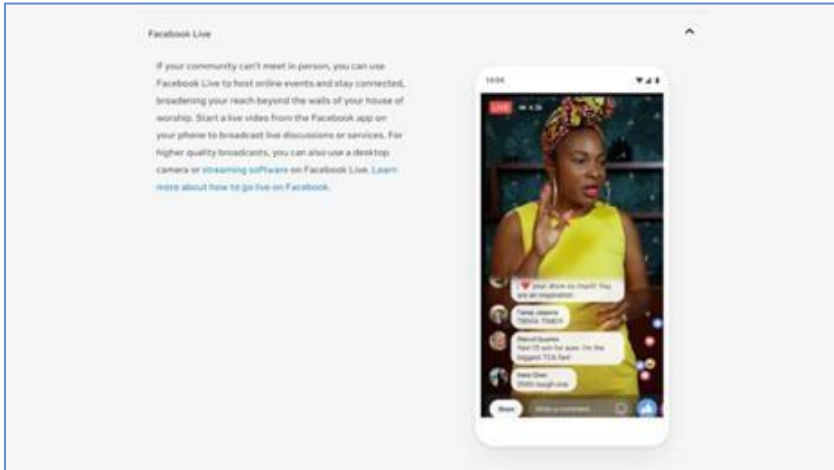
*Meta for Faith's homepage, 4<sup>th</sup> row*



An analysis of Image 4 indicates that it targets Jewish faith leaders and traditions. Just like in Images 1 and 2, the apparent target audience of the messaging is faith leaders. The absence of congregation or community members further emphasizes this motif in Meta's promotional imagery. In addition, the shoot-from-below composition of the image gives power to religious leaders, but this power is subtly presented as granted through the resources in the Meta's abundant storehouse for congregation members.

## Image 5a

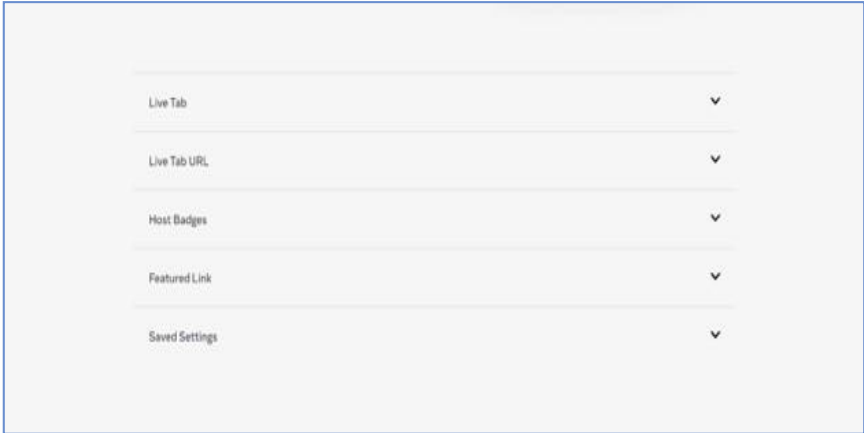
*Meta for Faith homepage photo, 5 row*



A thorough examination of Image 5a reveals Meta's promotion of live liturgical services and discussions, positioning the Facebook app as a viable substitute for face-to-face fellowships. This alternative is rooted in the circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The chat features highlight the interactive communication that unfolds as members engage in the virtual religious experience. Emojis are used as reactions, underlining this novel interaction ritual and demonstrating audience participation in worship. Furthermore, the 9:16 aspect ratio of the online video interaction implies its compatibility with mobile devices, Instagram feeds, and WhatsApp. It feels normal in the world of smartphones and the look is realistic.

## Image 5b

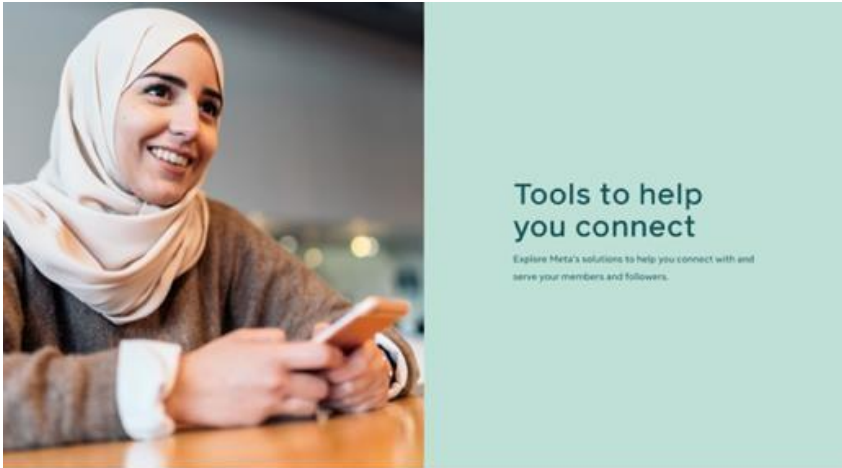
*Meta for Faith homepage photo, 5 row, the second image*



Also, an analysis of Image 5b showcases the five distinct User Interface (UI) elements employed by Meta. The UI elements are ritual components in Meta's live worship space. These elements include the live tab, live tab URL, host badges, featured link, and saved settings. Notably, the image depicts the visual form of this ritual, one that features a trendy reel design, complete with real-time chat features. Those elements form the pathways through which Meta offers to deliver other services in support of religious practices.

## Image 6

*Meta for Faith site's homepage, 6 row*



A detailed analysis of Image 6 reveals a distinct focus on Islamic traditions, particularly the visual depiction of community connection and service rituals. There is a subtle suggestion that smartphone devices facilitate these rituals of community and service. In addition, the presentation of a woman in conjunction with the concept of serving one's community may be interpreted as an effort to popularize the relatively infrequent instances in Islamic tradition where women take on the role of Imams. The close-up shot is an intentional design to show intimacy, while drawing out the delight symbolized in the facial expressions of a woman who has come to enjoy the experience of practicing her faith on Meta space.

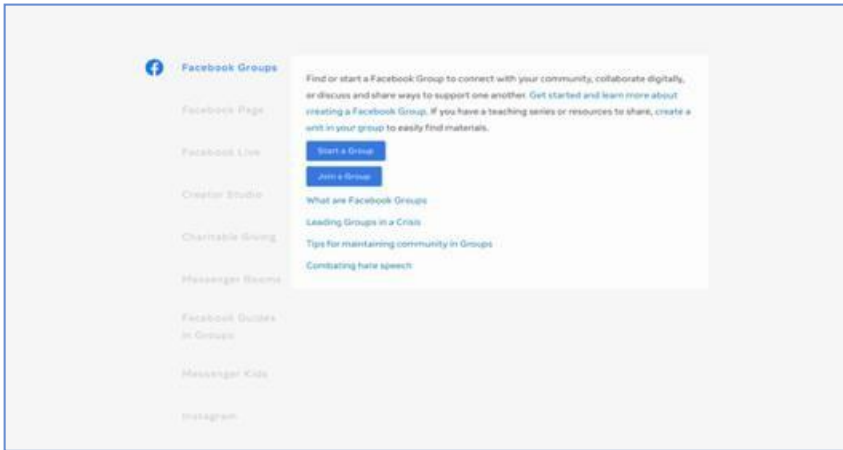
However, the woman's seating position introduces a subtly different seating gesture, which is not popular in Islamic worship. Ultimately, it becomes clear that elements not typically associated with a specific



religious community are incorporated and normalized within Meta's ritual framework. This normalization process presents this new fellowship method as a practical alternative to traditional practices.

## Image 7

*Meta for Faith's homepage, 7<sup>th</sup> row*



Upon analyzing Image 7, it becomes apparent that Meta promotes Facebook groups. Specifically, it highlights how faith communities can become Facebook groups; the group functions as an alternative to faith communities' ways of meeting. The banner utilizes a minimalist, clean design whose tabs emphasize the ritual pathways toward becoming a group member. The image features various tabs on the left-hand side and blue highlights within the content area. These are a strategic and userfriendly UX journey map for potential *Meta for Faith* group leaders or members.

## Image 8

*Meta for Faith's homepage, 8<sup>th</sup> row*



Image 8 centers on religions originating from Eastern or Asian cultures alongside other spiritual beliefs. The image underscores the integration of various media types and highlights the necessity to broaden these communities through online networks. The image exemplifies the concept of ease and convenience through a woman casually drinking tea (or potentially coffee) in the foreground. At the same time, a man appears relaxed in the out-of-focus background. This scene illustrates the comfort and accessibility of engaging in such gatherings from home with the convenience of a computer.

## Image 9

*Meta for Faith's homepage, 9<sup>th</sup> row*

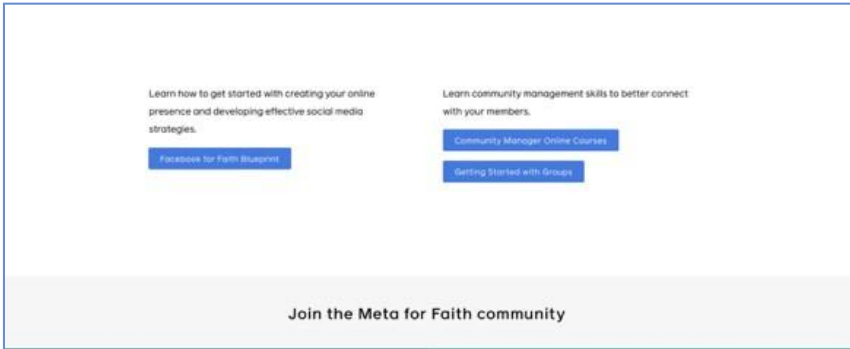


Image 9 invites users to join the Meta for Faith alternative to their gathering places while highlighting three additional ritual paths. These paths include the Facebook for Faith Blueprint, the Community Manager Online Course, and Getting Started with Groups. The value promoted as in the previous one (Image 8) is the alternate world of meeting, where physical barriers would be no more, and technology becomes the indispensable place (space) for faith activities.

In conclusion, analyzing the images on *Meta for Faith*'s landing page reveals a well-executed user journey map incorporating ritual patterns and visual metaphors. These images strategically utilize religious symbolism and inclusive typologies to appeal to diverse faith traditions. The ritualization process within Meta's platform blurs the boundaries between different (and distinct) religious practices and emphasizes a shared humanistic experience. The invitation to connect with Meta is presented as a means to facilitate worship, fellowship, and engagement for faith communities, offering resources such as toolkits, mental health

support, and virtual gathering spaces. The images showcase the seamless integration of technology into religious experiences, presenting online rituals as a desirable and accessible alternative to traditional practices. Meta positions itself as a bridge between faith leaders and their communities, providing a space for connection and service. Overall, these images highlight the platform's expressed commitment to faith communities and fostering faith communities' connections in digital spaces. All these relate to the following consideration: Meta provides its new product line—*Faith Resource Hub*—as an invitation to religious communities to tap of its abundant resources.

### **Meta Faith Resource Hub and an Invitation of Convenience**

How can Meta *Faith Resource Hub* be examined as a ritual invitation? It is the task of this aspect of the current inquiry. Meta's *Faith Resource Hub* is a well-thought-out marketing strategy targeting religious communities. It is an invitation comparable to a sacred site, with its familiar language resembling invocations heard in the reverberating bells of cathedrals or the adhan resonating through the streets of Mecca. Since religious rituals already have a sense of community, it is an effortless union with the allure of new technology, which has taken on the cloak of the religious language and communicates to its subscribers and members in like terms. The power dynamics are subtle, and the sale is easy. Before long, entire communities find themselves integrated into the Meta platform.

Visualize over two and a half billion Christians, close to one billion eight hundred thousand Islamic participants, and nearly three billion individuals practicing Eastern religions and various spiritual movements, following Meta's logic and user interface in their ritual interactions. It requires little research and critical analysis to recognize the connection between the rituals of this form of media and the natural affinity with sacred rituals. Faith communities readily connect with their kind, once

labeled as "the opium of the people" (Marx, 1844, n.p.), because they share unique bonds. Meta understands this, and the easiest way to exert power and control is by delivering engagements reminiscent of religious rituals centered around community rituals, regardless of their true nature. Meta offers this, and its invitation becomes a ritual of mediatized power. One might even aptly describe Meta as the opium of religion in emerging media.

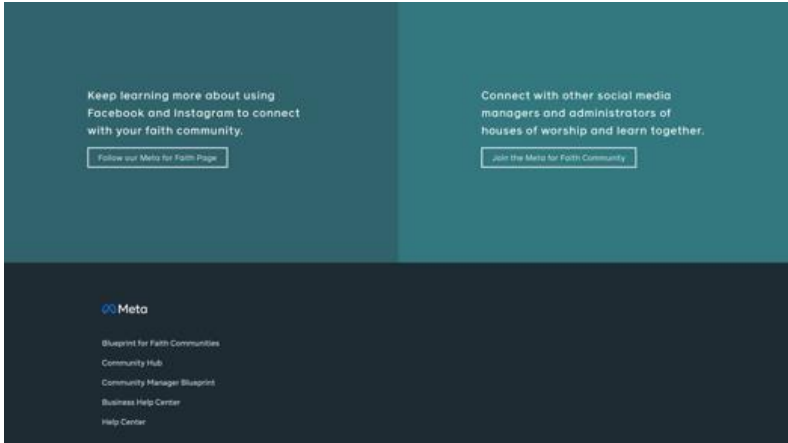
A compelling argument made by Meta in favor of religious communities is the concept of the *Faith Resource Hub*. One of its features, Meta Blueprint for Faith Communities, is illustrated through a collection of screenshots (Images 10-11). These screenshots depict the user frontend view of Meta for Faith site, captured on January 2, 2021.<sup>1</sup> A closer site analysis reveals meticulously planned ritual strategies for integrating religion. Images 10-11 showcase the homepage of Meta's Blueprint for Faith Communities, while Image 12 emphasizes an educational component consisting of lessons intended for the Meta Faith Community. One can interpret the images as a complete ritual of mediatization.

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that this illustration is limited to the time of capture and does not apply to any potential layout changes Meta may have made subsequently. The accessed source for the screenshots is <https://faith.facebook.com/>.

## Image 10

*Meta's Blueprint for Faith Communities' site header*



## Image 11

*Meta's Blueprint for Faith Communities site homepage*



## Image 12



*The lower part of Meta's Blueprint for Faith Communities site homepage*

Notably, Image 12 prominently features a lesson titled "Partnership with your followers and local community leaders," which can be considered a catechesis of Meta's religious mission. The design, religious symbolism of images and icons, and app user experience all provide evidence of religious-minded individuals embracing this initiative. The site evokes a sense of being in a sacred space, resembling the design and layout of pages typically associated with religious groups. This positive aspect of Meta's design allows it to continuously reinvent itself, addressing the perceived needs of diverse religious communities.

However, some individuals may raise valid objections, particularly those concerned with doctrinal formulations. Meta offers its brand of religion, promoting inclusivity and a non-doctrinal approach to religious experiences. Spiritual groups may find this appealing, while more traditional groups might object. Nevertheless, there is more to be said about this initiative that goes beyond the doctrinal argument hypothesis and directly engages with Meta's ritual typology. The Meta for Faith

Resource Hub is a strategic pitch to secure the buy-in of faith leaders and communities. Many comply, and many more may do so because it seems to resonate with their accustomed ways of interaction.

Nevertheless, there is a deeper layer to this initiative. While it may appear commendable and comparable to the religious rituals of everyday worship, it serves as the easiest way to rally faith communities around a company that has faced ethical issues and has been repeatedly called to account for its handling of user data. This paradoxical situation aligns with religion's history of self-inflicted ethical wounds, where reparative rituals serve as paths to redemption. In the proposed hub, redemption becomes a rhythm of Meta's rituals.

Considering that Meta's primary business revolves around selling ads, it is reasonable to question whether its partnership with faith communities aims to harvest more data to refine targeted advertisements. Access to congregations' mailing lists, digital footprints, encompassing their private lives, emotions, feelings, and relationships, holds power in a more intrusive, if not pervasive, manner. In a mediatized culture where technological rituals occur alongside immersive data, the entity that possesses access to and control over data wields the most power. Thus, Meta's journey toward dominant power and ultimate virtual absolutist epiphany in the virtual space is well underway.

### **Further Discussion and Conclusion**

The meticulous crafting of Meta's landing page design and imagery reveals a calculated strategy to capitalize on faith communities. The integration of ritual patterns and visual metaphors tailored for these communities blurs the lines between distinct religious practices, potentially diluting the authenticity if not unique identities of these traditions. By presenting technology as a harmonious fusion of religious



experiences, Meta promotes itself as an appealing and easily accessible alternative to traditional practices.

This research paper has examined the distinct characteristics of Meta as a ritual platform, drawing on Carey's and Couldry's ritual theory. By combining elements of Carey's and Couldry's theories, this paper has explored the ritual aspects of Meta's social technology. It has highlighted how Meta's platform functions as a ritual space, blurring the line between the sacred and the technological. Meta's ritual forms facilitate community building and reframe religious rituals in specific terms, potentially reshaping the religious landscape.

While Meta's invocation of rituals may simplify routine rituals for faith communities and democratize access to sacred rituals, it is essential to examine these claims critically. The accessibility and ease of engaging with Meta's rituals depend highly on digital infrastructure and literacy, which may be lacking in remote parts of the world. Furthermore, Meta's unique rituals and community-building efforts may blur the line between *religion online* and *online religion*, creating its community brand with pseudo-religious language.

Analyzing Meta's homepage design and images has provided evidence of its characterization as a ritual platform. The visual cues and metaphors used in Meta's design evoke associations with religious experiences and rituals, appealing to diverse religious traditions. However, the composition of these images may distort the distinctive features of religious gestures, emphasizing a shared humanistic experience across faiths.

In light of these findings, there are recommendations for religious leaders and communities. Firstly, religious leaders should critically examine the implications of adopting Meta as a ritual platform for their

members. They should assess the accessibility and inclusivity of Meta's rituals for their communities, considering the digital divide and the potential loss of distinct religious practices. Secondly, religious communities should be mindful of the blurring of the sacred and the technological in Meta's rituals. They should reflect on the implications of participating in a platform that may reshape the religious landscape and consider how Meta's services align with their religious values. Proper discerning leadership in this matter is necessary.

It is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this research. The analysis is based on the available information and data up to September 2021, and Meta's platform and features may have evolved since then. Additionally, the research focuses on Meta's rituals in the context of religious communities and does not provide an analysis of all aspects of Meta's platform. Further research is needed to explore the long-term implications of Meta's ritualization and its impact on religious practices, community dynamics, and power structures. There are themes that emerged from this analysis that would be discussed in another paper. They include Meta's invocation as an online religion, examining the role of Meta as a facilitator of shared rituals and a platform for sacred interactions. Also, not covered in this piece are Meta's influence on traditional conceptions of religious rituals, the power dynamics inherent in Meta's ritualization, including access, agency, and the determination of valuable data. In addition is the role of advertising as a ritual and the centrality of data as the ultimate value in Meta's ritual typology.

In conclusion, this research paper highlights the ritual aspects of Meta's social technology platform. It considers Meta rituals' potential implications for religious communities. By critically examining Meta's ritual affordances, scholars gain insights into how Meta's rituals blur the line between the sacred and the technological. Hence, this paper raises an awareness that might inspire religious leaders and communities to engage in a thoughtful and reflective dialogue about a blanket adoption

of Meta as a ritual platform, considering accessibility, inclusivity, and the potential reshaping of religious practices. It would be timely for future inquiries to probe deeper into the dynamic metamorphosis of social technology platforms such as Meta, keeping an unwavering focus on their far-reaching impacts on multifaceted societal elements, with religion at the forefront. Therefore, this paper stands as a call to action for scholars and religious leaders, challenging them to grapple with the complexities of reflexive intertwining of traditional rituals with cutting-edge technologies. Optimistic engagement of media technology in religion—which this author advocates—does not need to be a wholesale immersion that blurs distinct lines.

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