

God online: Religion resources

by [James D. Davis](#) in the [November 13, 2007](#) issue

As the Internet world expands, the number of religious resources multiplies accordingly. But how to find those that are especially helpful or creative? Here are a few leads:

Image

www.imagejournal.org

A project of the Seattle-based Center for Religious Humanism, *Image* magazine looks at spiritual values in visual art, drama, photography, music, poetry and other arts. Like other journals, it offers a sampling of its articles online. Unlike many other journals, *Image* also advertises opportunities in the real world, including workshops, lectures and concerts. The site menu offers slick mouseover pulldowns that lead the reader to events in Seattle (home of the Image staff), as well as in other regions.

Past issues—going back to 1989—include works by writers such as motivational speaker Dan Wakefield and scholar Martin Marty. There's also some evocative art, but it's small and user-unfriendly on the screen. Unfortunately, there's no "print-friendly" mode; when you print the articles, they come out in a tiny text. The entire site is a little hard to read, for that matter.

Like all good Netizens, *Image* has links to related sites.

Children of Abraham

www.children-of-abraham.org

Seeing something for oneself can lead to acceptance—this is the hope and motive behind Children of Abraham, an example of how the Internet can leap boundaries between religious communities. Starting as a teen project, this effort to photograph Jewish and Muslim people has thrived since its birth in 2003 and has involved more than 160 students from 43 countries.

Children of Abraham lists articles from international media: European Jewish Press tells of a new Jewish-Muslim radio station in the United Kingdom; Al-Arabiya reports on an "electronic dialogue" among Christians, Jews and a Muslim sisterhood in

Damascus.

The site's centerpiece is a 16-page gallery of thumbnail photos showing people from a variety of faiths. In one, a shawled Muslim kisses the Qur'an; in another, an unshawled Jewish woman kisses her prayer book. The viewer may see Jewish teens in the Alps laying their ski poles in the shape of a Star of David, or Muslim children singing in a choir on Muhammad's birthday.

Text sometimes obscures photos. There are no "Next" or "Previous" buttons to move from one photo to an adjacent one; you have to return to the group of thumbnail photos each time. But the power of the photos outweighs the awkward layout.

Famous Last Words

<http://users.belgacom.net/gc674645/grave/lastword.htm>

Oh to be as brave as Thomas Hobbes: "It's my turn to take a leap into the darkness." Or as dry as Beethoven in his last hour: "Friends, applaud, the comedy is over."

This collection of final sayings has enough faith and fear for just about anyone. One cringes at the last words of Civil War general John Sedgewick: "They couldn't hit an elephant at this dist . . ." Or smirks at Pancho Villa: "Don't let it end like this. Tell them I said something."

The layout is simple: a single long file, along with photos of a few faces and gravesites. The list doesn't seem to have any particular order, whether by name, category or date of death.

Christian underpinnings are revealed in the long stories of martyrdoms, and there's a hyperlink to a heavy-handed evangelistic pitch. But the site creators don't take themselves too seriously. They include Marx's deathbed rant: "Go on, get out! Last words are for fools who haven't said enough."

I've Screwed Up

www.ivescrewedup.com

"I have stolen about \$15,000." "I am struggling with self-harming, bulimia and anorexia but no one has even noticed." I've Screwed Up is a project of Flamingo Road Church near Fort Lauderdale. The site is an online confessional where penitents can confide hidden rages, fears and grief without having to identify

themselves except for giving their age and city of residence.

The site opens with an animated splash and a logo that is ornate and tawdry. Yet I've Screwed Up has hit a vein: it's had more than 160,000 visits since it began last Easter.

Pastor Troy Gramling of Flamingo Road Church says the confessors are penitent: "I saw little [on the site] about defending what they've done. I saw a lot of asking for forgiveness and wanting to break free."

How to do that? Well, there's a link to the church's Web site, and the church offers counseling. What's less clear is how counseling happens for someone who cannot travel to Fort Lauderdale.

Religion Online

www.religion-online.org)

It's not pretty, but it's a gold mine of knowledge. Religion Online boasts more than 6,000 articles on culture, theology, social issues and other matters—all for free. Founded for religious students in Bangalore who had trouble buying books, the site now boasts 1.5 million hits a year worldwide.

There are articles on Kierkegaard, postmodern religion, process theology, megachurches, the environment and psychology of religion. The reader can ponder faith in *The Lord of the Rings*, how architecture affects religious experience or whether Bono's celebrity activism really makes a difference.

The layout is unsophisticated, with long columns of hyperlinked topics. The viewer clicks on a topic and sees article titles listed alphabetically, as well as by author and category. For those who are still lost, there is a search function. Finally, there's a list of 200 books with the entire text free for the downloading.

Sites like this often languish after a strong start; they're seldom updated and they grow stale. This hasn't happened with Religion Online.