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Chapter 15

Metaverse's First Major Christian Community: Holy Bibles NFT as a Metachurch and Metamissionary in the Metaverse

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ABSTRACT

The Metaverse is a popular topic that has received a lot of attention. The religious communities and churches that have been formed within the Metaverse are also of great importance. In this context, it has been a matter of great curiosity how the relationship between the Metaverse and religion will be shaped. This paper examines *Holy Bibles NFT*, which has been initiated with the claim to be the first and largest Christian community in the Metaverse and establish the largest church with missionary claims. This paper adopts a case study approach to address the commodification of the sacred, its theologically acceptable and unacceptable dimensions, and the resulting uncertainties. The connection established between the game *Assassin's Creed* and *Holy Bibles NFT* provides a new perspective on the issue. While virtual reality holds great potential for the mission movement, some of the theological problems and uncertainties that may arise are the focus of discussion.

Keywords: Religion and new media, digital communication, metaverse, metachurch, metamissionary, Holy Bibles NFT, Assassin's Creed.

Introduction

The idea of Enlightenment put the human mind and science at the center of the universe. However, it left God and religion out of this center. The challenge to the worldview based on religion and metaphysics, which was a barrier to Enlightenment, revealed the understanding of transhumanism in the twenty-first century. In this historical moment, the rational mind and technology, which is its product, put the human being at the center as the God of a meta universe created. However, they create a paradoxical image by including the God and belief that they exclude. While it supposes that it has been separated from metaphysics in this way, it has become more metaphysical. The Metaverse, its most striking example, is mentioned with spiritual terms as the universe where techno-fetishism peaks, and holiness is attributed to its existence. Unlike the understanding of transhumanism shaped by objections to religious traditions, the Church, and a God who created the universe, the churches and religious communities rising inside the Metaverse are seen. *Holy Bibles NFT* is one of the most striking examples of this, claiming to be the first and largest Christian community in the Metaverse.

Upon examining *Holy Bibles NFT*, it is seen to be connected to the game *Assassin's Creed* from some aspects. Digital games represent an important area of exploration for the intersection of religion and contemporary culture. The concepts and elements of fictional or contemporary and ancient religions emerge in video games in various ways. Sacred places are sometimes part of a real-time strategy game, such as *Age of Empires*; sometimes, games narratively borrow themes from religious traditions, such as *Mass Effect 2*. The connection between *Holy Bibles NFT* and the game *Assassin's Creed* presents a much more complex appearance than any of these. While the game *Assassin's Creed* and similar games borrow religious themes and elements, *Holy Bibles NFT* borrows themes and elements from the game. Games make sacred places part of the game; on the contrary, *Holy Bibles NFT* makes the game its part in representing its place as the metachurch. Hence, gamechurch and metachurch should be considered separately.

Video games have once fought for legitimacy as a cultural product, but they are both a business and an art nowadays. These games go beyond being entertainment and turn into religion with the basic elements and designs they contain. On the other hand, *Holy Bibles NFT* goes beyond the traditional understanding of religion and transforms the understanding of religion by transforming religious elements into a design. *Holy Bibles NFT* reverses the relationship between video games and religion. It only finds a common ground with video games with its characteristic of being both a business and an art. As a

company, *Holy Bibles NFT* opens a new way for its mission with the revenue it will generate by offering Bible covers in the NFT format (art) for sale (business).

The study of religion and video games is a sub-field of digital religion, which Heidi Campbell defines as "religion created in new ways through digital media and cultures" (2014, 7). The concept of 'digital religion' has been used and defined to express the evolution of online religious practice; it also indicates how digital media and spaces are shaped by religious practice. 'Digital religion' not only refers to religion as created and expressed online; as a concept, it also enables people to talk about the current state of religion in relation to digital artifacts and the culture they are in (Campbell, 2012: 1). Virtual religious spaces are a common theme typically possessed by all digital religions. "Religion and new media studies are a new scientific sub-field" (Campbell, 2012: 4). *Holy Bibles NFT* bridges digital religion and these two sub-fields through its connection with *Assassin's Creed* and opens a different field of study. The study addresses how the Church and the mission are shaped in the meta-universe from the ecclesiological perspective on an example of *Holy Bibles NFT*. The focus of the discussion is that virtual reality is open to some potential theological problems and uncertainties, in addition to having religious potential.

Materials and Methods

This study focuses on the relationship between digital communication and digital religion, examining how the emergence of churches, religious communities, and missions within the Metaverse will shape the relationship between the Metaverse and religion. The research sample is based on Holy Bibles NFT, which claims to be the first Christian community in the Metaverse with the mission of becoming the world's largest virtual church, expanding the number of Christians worldwide, and providing patronage for small churches. Through a case study approach, this study examines the ecclesiological perspective of the Holy Bibles NFT example, discussing the commodification of the sacred, theologically acceptable and unacceptable issues, and the uncertainties that arise from it.

The present study employed a purposive sampling technique to select a sample from the following websites: https://holybiblesnft.com, https://www.instagram.com, https://opensea.io, and https://www.ubisoft.com. The sampling period ranged from 10.04.2022 to 17.04.2022. This study aims to answer following questions in the context of digital religion and metaverse as new media:

1) Could the emergence of the reconstructed church within the metaverse, which was previously excluded by enlightenment and transhumanism, be considered a paradoxical outcome?

2) In what ways do the existence of VR churches in the Metaverse universe and the commodification of religion through NFT-based scriptures serve the purposes of missionary work and the dissemination of religious beliefs?

3) To what extent does the commodification of religion conform to the classical paradigm, and what uncertainties arise between these two practices?

4) In the context of digital communication studies, where can the relationship between digital religion and digital games be situated given the dialectic reversal in which a VR church representing a digital religious institution uses the visuals of a digital video game and the philosophy/story of the movie adaptation of that game, despite the frequent use of religious themes and content in digital video games?

Holy Bibles NFT as a Church: The Case Study of Metachurch

The church is a concept used to express the community that believes in Jesus from the beginning to the present, dedicates themselves to him and his way, and thinks of Jesus as a hope for all men and women (Küng 2003, 5). According to Hans Küng, "each age has its own image of the Church arising from a particular historical situation […] there is also a constant factor in the various changing historical images of the Church, which is the essence of the Church, and it is something that persists no matter how much the history of humanity, the Church, and theology has changed" (1976, 4). Küng indicates that the essence of the Church is not a matter of metaphysical stability but exists only in ever-changing historical forms. Accordingly, the essence of the Church is always found in its historical form, and the historical form should always be understood in the light of and with reference to the essence (1976, 5-6).

Along with the technological revolution that describes the current historical context, there is "a significant paradigm shift in both the concept and expression of the church as the church enters the 4.0 era" (Jun 2020, 2). By adopting the latest technology at the present time, the church is evolving into a VR (*Virtual Reality*) church, whose core belief and mission statement is the same as other traditional evangelical churches. *Holy Bibles NFT* is a striking example of it. The homepage of *Holy Bibles NFT* in the Metaverse opens with fantastic science fiction images taken from the game *Assassin's Creed* (especially the *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* episode). *Holy Bibles NFT* takes not only the visuals from the game *Assassin's Creed* but also some of the key themes, ideas, and elements of its narrative. While adopting the philosophy of the Assassins, it uses the Templar

names and characters as a reference point with its transhumanist structure. Thus, the connection between *Holy Bibles NFT* and the game/movie *Assassin's Creed* has a paradoxical appearance.

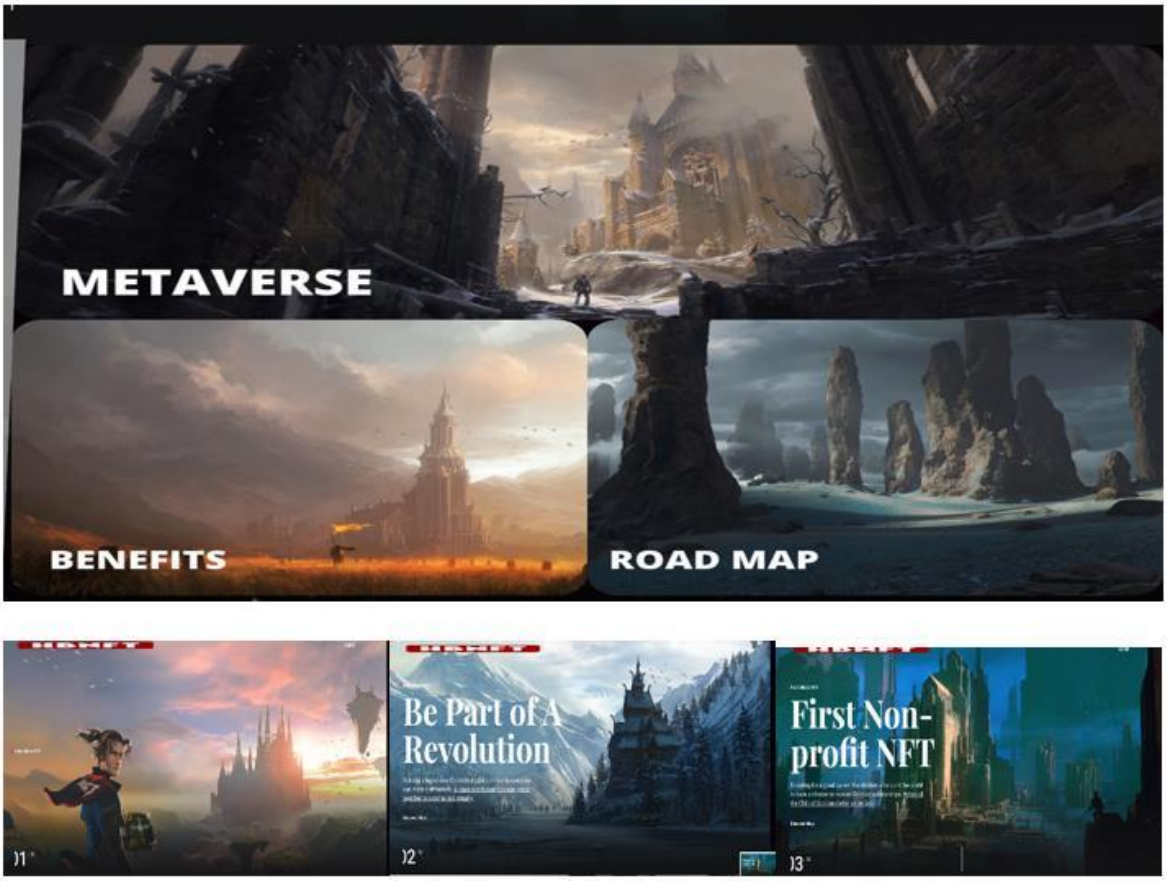


Figure 1. Holy Bibles NFT's Home Page in the Metaverse. Source: https://holybiblesnft.com/



Figure 2. Scenes from the game Assassin's Creed. Source: Ubisoft.

The game's story is based on the struggle between the Knights Templar and the Assassins to obtain a powerful weapon, known as the 'Apple of Eden.' The person playing the game actually directs Desmond Miles, who lives in the 21st century and witnesses the experiences of his ancestors in the past, whose genetic codes he carries, through the machine 'Animus' to which he is connected. The

story begins with Desmond's abduction by the Abstergo Company. Since he completes his mission in *Assassin's Creed*, Desmond is awakened from Animus and realizes that Abstergo is today's organization of the Knights Templar.

The game has also been turned into a screenplay. The character of Desmond Miles in the game is replaced by Callum Lynch in the movie. The statement "where there is no truth, everything is permissible" belonging to Hassan-i-Sabbah, the founder of the Hashashin order, in the movie's opening scene is a reference to the fact that truth can be manipulated. The truth and reality are relative concepts; therefore, the spirit of time comes into play when talking about truths and realities. *Holy Bibles NFT*, which activates the spirit of time in the digital age, adopts exactly this philosophy and creates its own reality in a virtual world through media technologies. The virtual becomes real, whereas the real becomes virtual. *Holy Bibles NFT* is in the Metaverse, where possibilities are endless since it controls time and space in creating a new reality. *Holy Bibles NFT* is a new community of believers in the Metaverse and a church in the virtual world of IP addresses and shared experiences, not in the brick-and-mortar real world.

The main scenario of the movie is actually a little bit inspired by the view of alien gods in Erich von Däniken's books. When there were still primitive creatures on earth before humanity came into existence, an advanced civilization descends to Earth and establishes a base there. This civilization beyond time and space gives free will to animal-like creatures on earth devoid of free will by genetic engineering using a device called the 'Apple of Eden.' The 'Apple of Eden' in the movie is based on these narratives that are similar to the story of the Anunnaki in Sumerian mythology. The man's first sin is to eat the forbidden fruit in heaven, and what gives him free will is that he did this forbidden act. In the plot of the movie, Abstergo, today's organization of the Templars, is in search of the genetic code that gives humans free will. The company aims to control the people they want to exploit by taking away their free will under the pretense of preventing violence. To this end, Abstergo puts the people they trace historically into the Animus device and traces the memories hidden in their genetic code. The Assassins try to protect the apple and faith from the Templars, who want to keep the free will in their hands.

Abstergo tries to take Lynch back to this past moment by connecting him to the Animus in order to find the place of the Apple of Eden. Animus means will and spirit in Latin. Carl Gustav Jung, one of the pioneers of psychoanalysis, added this word to the psychology literature. In the most general terms, he used it in the sense of inner self in order to distinguish it from the persona that the person shows outside. The feminine inner personality in the male unconsciousness was

described as *anima*, and the masculine inner personality in females was described as *animus* (Jung 2006, 72-73). In other words, animus represents the hidden inner self of the human being. As a machine, the Animus projects the hidden inner self of the human being like a projection device. Indeed, the meaning of the 'eagle' symbolism, which is frequently used in the film and game, is insight. The eagle, which is also believed to be a sky god in shamanic belief, is mostly the symbol of the protective spirit and justice in mythologies. In fact, one of the lines from the movie is as follows: "Eagle's spirit will take care of us in the future." It is not surprising that the name of the person who developed the Animus is Sofia. Sofia means wisdom, and the word is always feminine, but it never represents a personality in symbolism. It carries the knowledge of everything and nothing. It corresponds to the second sefirah in Kabbalah; the sphere of understanding has not been produced yet, and therefore wisdom cannot be understood. In Sufism, it corresponds to the concept of 'fenafillah,' and he falls in love with Sofia, who is in search. In fact, Sofia is a friend whom he will never reach and from whom he will turn away even if he reaches her because it is the last door before reaching nothing, and it is always only passed through with great pain to reach the truth. In *Assassin's Creed*, the character Sofia (Marion Cotillard) is the daughter of one of Abstergo's senior members, Alan Rikkin (Jeremy Irons), who plays the techno-God. It is striking that *the Holy Bibles NFT* email address also includes sophia, (sophia@holybiblesnft.com). Singapore, where the game was produced, is also the headquarters of the *Holy Bibles NFT* company.[1]

At the opening of *Holy Bibles NFT*'s homepage, the images taken from the game *Assassin's Creed* are accompanied by the music of the group Hillsong Worship. As seen in the roadmap section redirected from the homepage, the first goal is the project to purchase a metaverse 'land' on which a digital church will be built in April 2022. The second goal here is to "bring together the world's most loyal believers to worship in the 'Holy Land'."

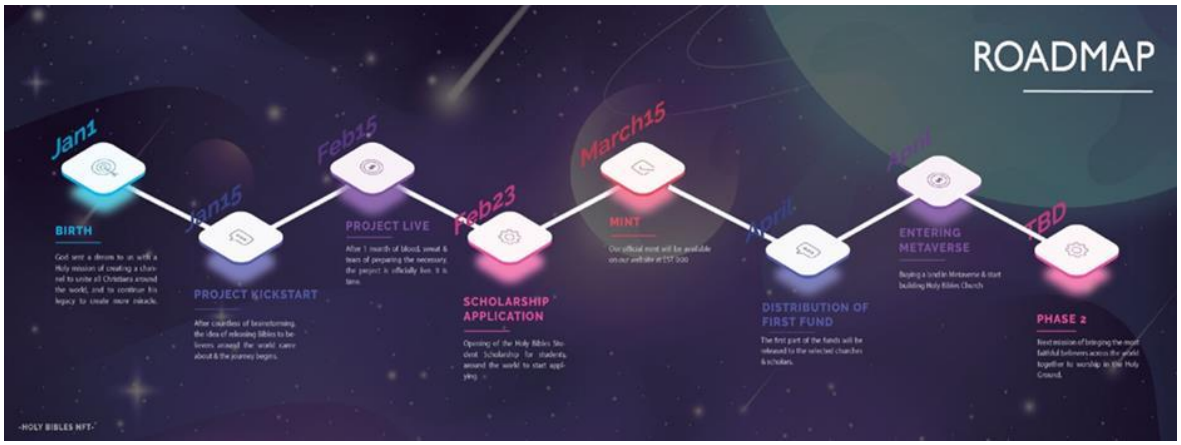


Figure 3. Holy Bibles NFT, Road Map. Source: https://holybiblesnft.com/

Holy Bibles NFT describes itself as "the first Christian community of the Metaverse" and aims to "become the leading church of the world." At this point, an important question of Douglas Estes can be raised: "Is it legitimate to regard the VR Church as an authentic expression of the church of Jesus Christ?" (2009, 33). Estes describes the VR Church as "a community called by God to expand his kingdom and a regular meeting of believers in VR who acknowledge Jesus as the Lord" (2009, 37). Therefore, he claims that those who meet in VR, as well as those who meet in physical reality, are the real people of God. Thus, although churches may have different appearances, as long as one of them considers the other legal, their worship is the same, and they perform their services, it is possible to talk about their unity, not their separation (Küng 1976, 356). The unity of the Church is basically expressed with the unity in Jesus.

The basic information about the nature of the Church is based on the early Christian councils. The Church acknowledges the following article, "We believe in... one holy catholic and apostolic church," which has begun to be defined as "the most universal principle of faith" since the Council of Constantinople in 381, was reaffirmed in Ephesus and Chalcedon and is based on the Council of Nicaea (Küng 1976, 341). The Unity of the Church (oneness) is also the will of Jesus (Sullivan 1988, 5).

With regard to the unity of the Church, Paul considers Jesus as the head of the church or body while talking about him. While considering the Church as the body of Christ, it is essential to base it on an abstraction of the body and consider it as the people of God that Jesus placed in history. Therefore, the body metaphor used for the Church is important in Christian theology and related to Jesus: "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Colossians1:18). With the definition of the 'body of Christ,' both the human and the divine dimension of the church should be considered together.

It is a biblical truth that Jesus renounced his equality with God and became a human being and lived among His people. Accordingly, the Son of God, a spiritual being, became a human being, a physical being. Jesus is a fully divine being and also fully human. In other words, incarnation refers to a dialectical relationship between the man who needs God and the God who needs a man (Schade 2016, 6). Indian Christians have used the concept of avatars for generations to understand the incarnation of Christ. The word 'avatar' is derived from the Sanskrit word अवतार , *avatāra* meaning 'descent' and is used in religious contexts to describe 'divine descent.' The concept refers to another embodiment, the incarnation of a superhuman being or a God (Parrinder 1997, 19-20). In the Christian world, the death and resurrection of Jesus are considered

a paradigm of identity structure. Here, the body constructs identity as the source of pain. Therefore, the aforementioned great narratives provide an ontological certainty. The avatar concept used in digital games is used nowadays in the same way to express virtual representations of people in the Metaverse. A theological glimmer of hope that large religious communities can be created in VR through people's avatars has emerged. According to Estes, avatars not only represent human users but are symbolic proof of their presence in the VR Church (2009, 62–63). However, the body ceases to be a body from the moment it becomes an indicator, which leads to an ontological ambiguity. Moreover, it is necessary to examine whether it is possible for people to establish reliable relationships through their avatars in VR. The fact that people will "establish virtual relationships with no idea of the physical characteristics and identities of others" will bring about confidence issues (Nowak et al. 2008, 83) because an individual can create an avatar of any gender, age, race, type, or shape and meet others superficially through created self-presentations (Blascovich and Bailenson 2011, 5). Bodies that exist by representation and function as objects ultimately make things insecure.

The body and space tend to metamorphose along with the intertwining of their co-existence. While the space acquires anatomical, biological, and organic connotations, the body includes technological ones. While the body and space move toward a different unity along with the technologicalization of human and the humanization of technology, the subject-object situation between them is also dragged into uncertainty. Thus, *homosaphiens* leave their place to another human species. However, the real question is how long this new species, called *homodigitalis*, can remain human. Furthermore, when the physical body of individuals dies, what happens to the avatar that represents them in the Metaverse is a question that has not been answered yet. Accordingly, how eternal life will be depicted for the Church and how rituals will take place in the inevitable case of physical death are other dimensions of the problem.

According to Christians, the holiness of the church is its basic character. The holiness of the church originates from its relationship with God (Romans 1:7, 12:13, 15:25; Corinthians 1, 14:3, 16:1). Whereas some religious groups use video games such as *Left Behind: Eternal Forces* for education, some researchers argue that including religious symbols and characters or sacred places in the virtual environment can cause undesirable results. For example, shortly after the publication of Resistance: Fall of Man, the Church of England claimed that the digital depiction desecrated the actual physical cathedral (Campbell 2014, 5). How God's sanctuary will be developed in a virtual environment is just as important as including sacred places in the game. There are certain criteria for

clothing, behavior, and bodily expressions in all religions when entering a sacred place.

Nevertheless, this necessary care may not be shown in the virtual church environment where people are represented by avatars. While digital technologies can be used to provide benefits in social events, they may also lead to moral indifference along with the endless sense of freedom and irresponsibility that individuals have. In the VR church, there is no religious authority to deal with these people's sins, condemn them and discipline them to turn them back from their sins. It is possible to experience similar problems with the virtual pilgrimage invitation made via Instagram [see Fig 4].



Figure 4. Instagram Post 1. Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/Cbh_VRNJiEy/

According to Christians, the catholicity of the church is its another essential feature. First, 'catholic' means wholly or completely. Second, it is emphasized that catholicity is used in a sense that includes all churches in the world. According to the traditional understanding, the church will continue until the end of the world, will continue to spread all the teachings necessary for salvation, will cleanse all people from all forms of sin by educating them, and will lead them to achieve all kinds of virtues (Dulles 1985, 13-16). Third, the catholicity of the church has been used to mean that the church is a real church, unlike heretic or deviant communities (Rausch 2003, 140). Since it cannot precisely determine the

race, language, gender, nationality, or even belief of people in this virtual universe, it has no opportunity to know whether those who constitute its community are heretic or deviant. It is a special challenge that *Holy Bibles NFT* as a church should overcome. However, *Holy Bibles NFT*'s choice of *Assassin's Creed* is a strategic move. Such games also guide the social behavior of virtual communities by enabling players to interact with others. *HCG* (*Hardcore Christian Gamer*) members are both 'hardcore gamers' and 'hardcore Christians' looking for opportunities to share their beliefs. As *HCG* states in its mission statement, "We took our passion for the game and intertwined it with our passion for God" (Luft, 2014: 154-155).

Apostolic is an adjective used to express that the church was founded by Jesus on his apostles and that Jesus endowed them with special qualities (Rahner and Vorgrimler 1981, 24). The apostolicity of a church, in other words, the fact that it is based on the apostles, means that the apostles, on which the church was first founded, were chosen by Jesus Christ himself and sent for a mission (Matthew, 28:16; Matthew, 28:19; Galatians, 1:1; Ephesians, 2:20). Second, by means of the Holy Spirit in him, he preserves and transmits the healthy words, good heritage, and teaching he heard from the apostles (Acts of the Apostles 2:42; Timoteos 2, 1:13-14). Third, the church was understood as apostolic because of the understanding that it "continues to be educated and governed by the apostles" through the followers of the apostles, who assume the responsibility of governing until the resurrection of Christ (Aydın 2002, 11-13). *Holy Bibles NFT*, which mentions that God has given them the task of mission through a dream, set out with the idea of distributing the Bibles to believers around the world for this purpose.

The church has five accepted dimensions, including unity, organization/institution, sacrament, messenger, and servant. At the Vatican Council II, the unity of the church was particularly emphasized. With this respect, the church was considered a great unity consisting of many interlocking and connected communities (Dulles 1987, 49). The definition of the church as communion is materialized in the Eucharistic rite, which expresses union with Jesus through the Holy Spirit in the presence of God (Vander-Wilt 1962, 12-13). Everything that can be seen is an indication of this unity (Tillich 1968, 156-157). The expression of the church as a sacrament at the Vatican Council II is similar to the statement "a visible sign of invisible grace" (McBrien 2008, 68), which is known to belong to Augustine. The fact that the church is understood as an organization/institution reveals its visible dimension. For the church, carrying out the rites, a sense of community, religious authority for discipline, and authentic meaning of discipleship are important while participants are physically present.

The church is entered by baptism, and this entrance is reinforced and supported by the Eucharistic rite. However, in the VR church, it is not the people who attend sacraments but avatars created by them. This is problematic for traditional liturgical theology, especially Catholic theologians, who believe in transubstantiation, which claims that bread and wine are converted into the body and blood of Christ at the time of consecration. This specific topic raises a problem with religious ontology to understand the meaning of existence between humans and their avatars (Jun 2020, 5). It is not yet known how *Holy Bibles NFT* will overcome such ontological problems. Furthermore, Ken Levine, the lead developer in the *Irrational Games* team, stated that the baptism presentation in the game *Assassin's Creed* was highly controversial, which is an issue *Holy Bibles NFT* should consider due to its connection with the game.

According to Dulles, the members of the church, as an organization/institution, are not an equal society in terms of rights due to their different duties and positions (1987, 29-30). However, as stated by Küng, "the church cannot be exclusive to a caste, an official group, and a privileged group if the church is considered the people of God" (1976, 169). *Holy Bibles NFT* simultaneously contains these two contradictory views. This contradiction becomes concrete in *Holy Bibles NFT*'s call "Become one of the key members of our Church to vote on all future decisions and practices and be a part of us where everyone's decision shapes the future." While the statement 'one of the key members' indicates that some members are privileged, the fact that 'everyone has a say in all decisions and practices' refers to a democratic and equal community. Furthermore, it has been stated that "The Holy Bible covers would be worth collecting in an NFT form, not only as collectibles but also as entry permits into the Metaverse Church." Thus, the entrance to the Church is subject to a condition and permission. Moreover, *Holy Bibles NFT* has indicated that owning the first Bible cover is a privileged place and will ensure that these first owners are 'whitelisted' for upcoming project launches. Therefore, there is more privilege than equality in its community. It should be asked why this list is described as 'white' and not another color. *Holy Bibles NFT*, emphasizing that they are not affiliated to any particular church, has indicated that they aim to "establish a Decentralized Autonomous Organization (DAO) consisting of Christians."

With the dimension of being a messenger, the church has a certain mission and is a means that undertakes that mission. According to this understanding, the main task of the church is to carry the word of God (Dulles 1987, 71). In the mission/vision section on *Holy Bibles NFT*'s page, it is indicated that they have undertaken this primary task: [2]

God has a mission for us to go and make discipline of all nation.
To establish the world's largest virtual church using the power of believers all around the world to make all churches famous using NFT. To grow the number of Christians in the world by at least 5% per year, and there will be no small churches left!
How we see this community in the future: The top and the lead.
To gather the entire world and be the world's leading church. To perform miracles regardless of race, language, or nationality in this digital space. Allow the entire world to enter the arms of the Lord.



Figure 5. Home page of Holy Bibles NFT in the Metaverse.
Source: https://holybiblesnft.com/

Holy Bibles NFT as a missionary: Metamissionary

Theologically, Christians base their missionary activities on Jesus' statement "[...] Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Although Christians base their references on some statements of Jesus in the New Testament regarding the transmission of the mission to other people, it is observed that the first systematic mission activity started with Paul. Paul's letters and travel notes constitute the basis of today's missionary activities.

In Christian eschatology, the salvation of the world and the fulfillment of God's promise depend on the Christianization of the whole world. The responsibility based on the statements "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:16-20) at the end of the Gospel of Matthew is named the 'Great Assignment' by Christians. At the council meetings that the church has held periodically for centuries, it is emphasized that "the mission has not been completed yet" and that more importance should be given to missionary work. In

his article titled *The Unfinished Task,* Avery T. Willis (1998, 668-669) argues that the mission will definitely be completed, and that there is no doubt for Christians in this respect. However, the problem is by whom and how this task will be performed. *Holy Bibles NFT* has undertaken this great assignment itself through the power of technology, recognizing that VR is such a vast field for mission: "God has a mission for us to go and make discipline of all nation." In the post shared on its Instagram account on March 14, 2022, *Holy Bibles NFT* referred to the 'great assignment' by stating that the missionary movement in the Metaverse is their unique mission [see Fig 6].

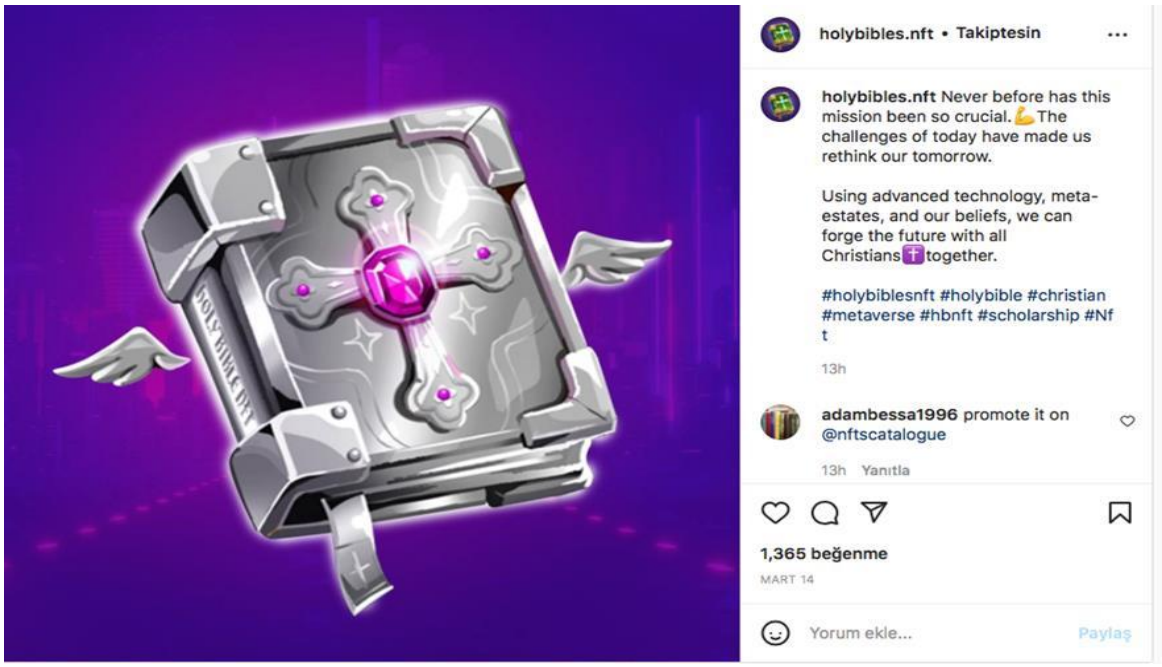


Figure 6. Instagram Post 2.
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CbE4-FOJUZh/

The community, which aims to increase the number of Christians in the world by at least 5% per year, explicitly expresses its effort to Christianize the whole world in order to fulfill the 'great commission' by following Paul's teaching: "Let the whole world enter the arms of the Lord".[3]



FIG 7. End of Holy Bibles NFT Home Page.
Source: https://holybiblesnft.com

The primary goal of Christian missionaries is to carry the Church to the lands where it has not existed before and announce the Christian message to people who have not yet heard or who have heard but do not respond positively to it. In today's world, most of the people who are considered unreached by Christian missionaries live in a limited area called the 10/40 window.

As one of the popular evangelical concepts, the *10/40 window* is a term that was introduced to the agenda of missionary work in the late 20th century by Luis Bush, the director of the *AD 2000 and Beyond Movement*. The concept was first used at the *Lausanne II: International Congress on World Evangelization* held in Manila in 1989. It started to be seen more frequently in the literature with the *Global Consultation on World Evangelism (GCOWE*) held in Singapore in the same year[4]. What is striking here is that Singapore, the headquarters of *Holy Bibles NFT* and the production site of the game *Assassin's Creed*, hosted this meeting.

In the missionary effort in the 21st century, it is stated that working as a professional/long-term missionary attracts the attention of Christians. In this context, in his article titled *Who are the Unreached*?, Damian Efta, who chose the missionary, states his reasons as follows: "The rationale that prompted my wife and me to become missionaries […] is that we have a good chance of preaching the Gospel on television and radio, in books and magazines, in many evangelical churches" (1994, 28). As understood from here, the church and the mission history cannot be separated from the active use of various media. Nowadays, the Internet has brought a new dimension to the Church's mission. *Holy Bibles NFT*, which mentions the rapid decline of Christianity on its Instagram account and puts forward the idea of expanding the words of the Bible to the Metaverse universe in order to prevent this decline, attempts to achieve its Church mission digitally.



Figure 8. Instagram Post 3.
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CbsLOwKp3tS/

It is seen that the general methods applied by missionaries in their activities toward the physical world have not changed much in the digital world. *Holy Bibles NFT* requests to make donations to churches around the world, distribute Christian scholarships to students around the world, and help suffering war refugees.

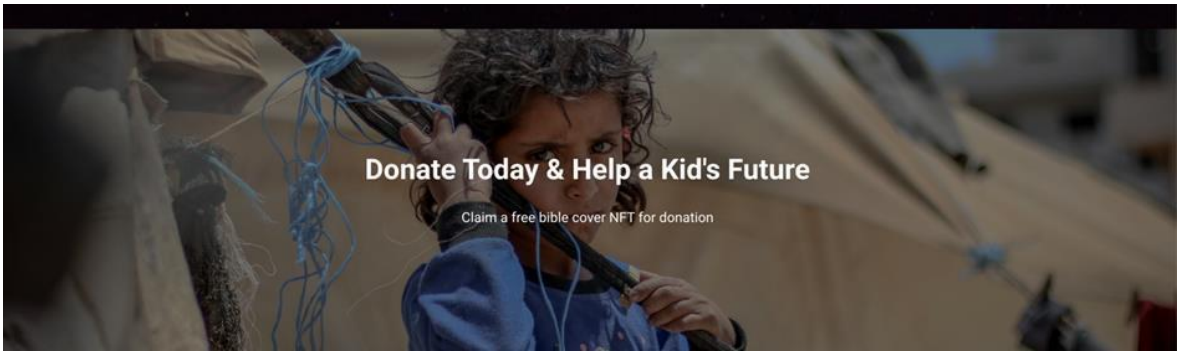


Figure 9. Holy Bibles NFT Home Page. Source: https://holybiblesnft.com/

On their roadmap, it is indicated that God sent them a dream with a holy mission to create more miracles and a channel to unite all Christians around the world on January 01, 2022 (a specially chosen date). To this end, the idea to distribute the Gospels to believers around the world emerged on January 15, 2022, and thus, the journey started. Emphasizing that the Bible is the art of God,

Holy Bibles NFT mentions that together with the Bible covers they put up for sale, the Bible pages should be collected in order to unlock them. *Holy Bibles NFT* indicates that a Bible cover in the NFT format can be purchased by giving at least 6 $ to contribute to the Christian community and only one NFT can be requested for each receipt. On their roadmap, it is stated that the 'Scholarship Application Opening' will be held on February 23, 2022, for students around the world. It has been indicated that the first fund distribution will take place in April 2022 and the first part of the funds will be distributed to selected churches and academicians. *Holy Bibles NFT* also shared the scholarship announcement on its Instagram account with the post, "We are giving out $10m in student scholarships to focus on their studies and commit to God."

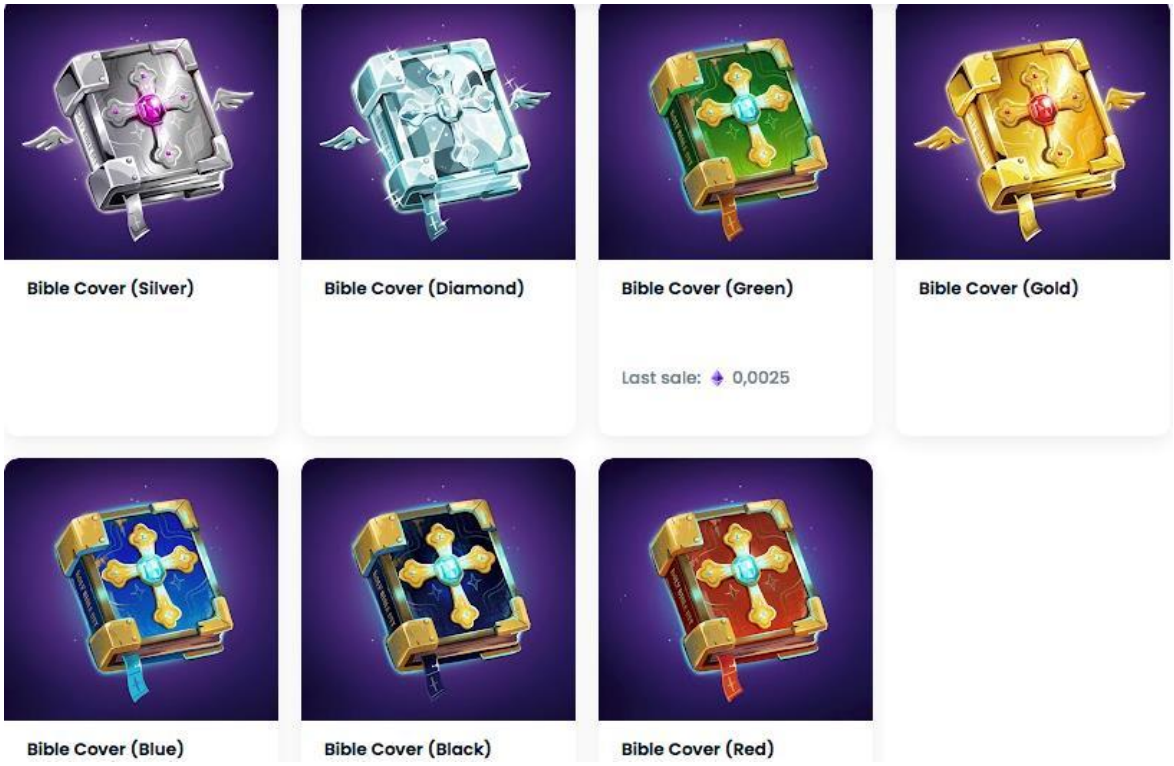


Figure 10. https://opensea.io/collection/holy-bibles-nft

For the Bible, there are many new digital resources with educational purposes for children and adults, such as You Version, Bible.Is, ESV CrossWay. The world of the Bible is changing and moving toward a meta-universe. *Holy Bibles NFT* plans to construct the Bible as a digital product that can be experienced as a physical book rather than just looking at its pages. Furthermore, it shared the news that all kinds of digital versions of the Bible, from different languages and translations, could be found in a single place, in its metachurch. The Bible covers in the NFT format are also presented as works of art and are proprietary when

purchased. *Holy Bibles NFT* announced that the revenue from their sale would be distributed to those in need and used in the missionary movement.

The Metaverse itself, missionaries, opinion leaders, and rituals will reveal a new understanding of religion with the spiritual identities that it attributes to lived experiences because if people are going to experience a second life in this universe, a universe limited to things like games, entertainment, and business life will undoubtedly be deficient. This deficiency is unacceptable for a system that tries to meet all human needs. In fact, as stated in the Instagram post: "Having a heaven in the digital world is a possibility."

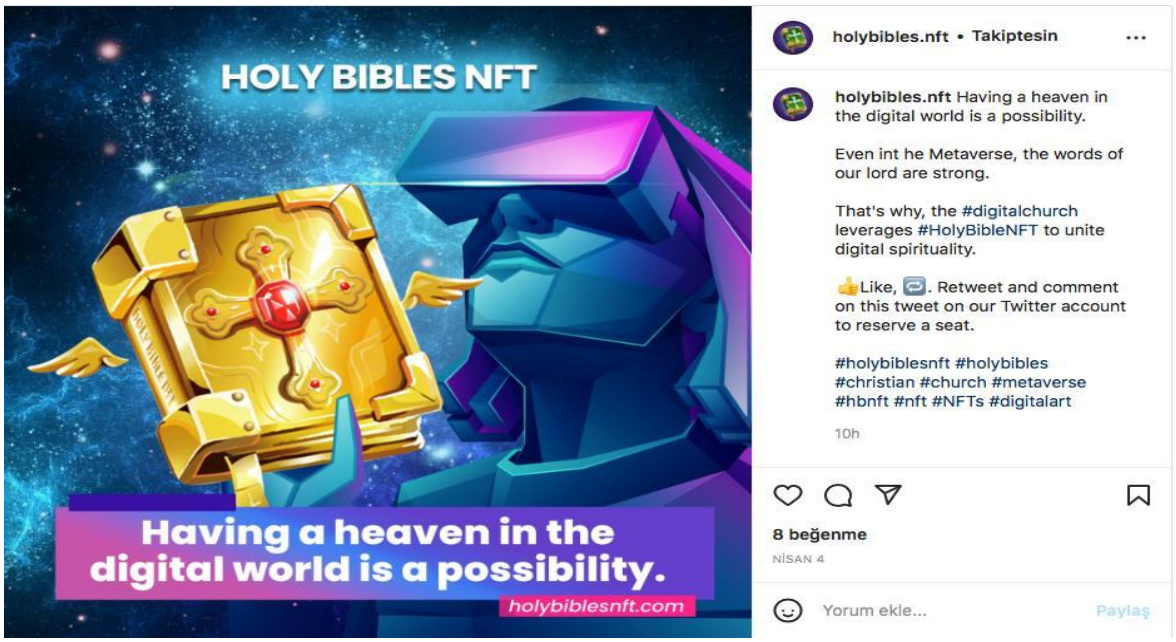


Figure 11. Instagram Post 4. Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/Cb75e_1p7Ze/

Names like Margaret Wertheim (1999) argue that VR is a spiritual space, like a biblical paradise, where people no longer depend on the natural laws of the physical world. The fundamental philosophies that support these philosophers' view on the religious nature of virtual reality are utopianism and transhumanism. It is believed that VR is a gateway that leads the individual to a spiritual utopia through physical transcendence. There is a VR platform called *Second Life*, which offers more than 30 religious domains to develop an ultimate spiritual utopia in VR for all major religions (Khong 2020). While eternal life is offered in VR, there is neither an eternal space for people to live their second life nor a place to escape their physical death (Botz-Bornstein 2015, 53). The digital beings produced by virtual reality are considered the minds and new bodies. In the excess of the virtual world, which has nothing to do with the body, the human species is subject to disintegration and fragmentation. In conclusion, the virtual world that

feels like endless space becomes a dark vortex like hell deep in the abyss rather than the promised heaven for humans.

Instead of Conclusion

For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day.

Exodus 20:11

The 'objective reason' and 'progressive history' understanding of the Enlightenment ideology created a meta-universe shaped by capitalism as the 'promised paradise' it would bring to humanity. With the legacy of this promise from the Enlightenment, the Metaverse almost depicts heaven in the holy books. We do not know for how many days the creators of the Metaverse created it and how many days they will rest. However, the Metaverse's relationship with the sacred seems to progress in two ways. The first one seems to continue to exist as a non-institutional lifestyle with an eclectic structure where it can impose a sacred mission on itself and experience heaven, hell, reward-punishment system, rituals and other spiritual experiences. The second, the Metaverse can be considered to include churches, missionaries, and religious communities. The 'creative-destructive' paradigm of the capitalist spirit transforms every sacred element absorbed by virtual reality into a commodity. *Holy Bibles NFT*, which describes itself as the first and largest Christian community in the Metaverse, is one of its most striking examples as a metachurch and metamissionary.

Meta-civilization also promises the person a heaven that he will experience before he dies. However, "For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you" (Cor. 1, 2:9; CCE §1024-27). In other words, it is not a space that any human can build. *Holy Bibles NFT* is part of a human-built heaven as a utopia, namely the Metaverse, while God promises to deliver to his real heaven. Although VR is a very large field for the mission, *Holy Bibles NFT* must preserve the essence of the Church, based on Küng's concept of ecclesiology, while taking a new format in the form of the metachurch as an authentic part of God's community. This understanding of digital and contemporary religion indicates a positive potential to reunite the Church, which is at odds with Enlightenment thinking.

By means of the economic accompaniment of capitalism developing in relation to technology in this 'new' meta order, not only life practices but also all aspects of art have entered into an effort to commodify. As also indicated by *Holy Bibles NFT*, the Holy Bible is the art of God and is an art that can work miracles. However, the art of God becomes a commodity at the moment when the Bible

cover is put up for sale and it is said that the pages of the Bible must be collected to unlock each different design of the bible cover. Thus, the divine window opening to eternity through art leaves its place to a commodity that can be consumed and easily bought and sold. In this human-made place where the human body, physical world space and time, which are God's art, are disintegrated and fragmented with lightning speed, a virtual infinity universe emerges. Virtuality breaks reality into pieces, and nothingness is left out of parenthes here. There is nothingness all over the virtual space. The experience of nothingness here is not meaning, knowledge, space and time. . In conclusion, the feeling of eternity experienced in VR is just timelessness, non-bodiliness, and spacelessness because, as Bilge Qaghan stated, "God experiences the time, human beings are always created to die" (Kül Tigin, Kuzey 10): (𐰇𐰾𐰃𐰍𐰴:𐰃𐰚𐰚𐰃:𐰆𐰓:𐰃𐰓𐰽𐰆:𐰃𐰇𐰃:𐰋𐰽𐰉:𐰃𐰍𐰓:𐰭𐰃).[5]

Notes

[1] Company name: Holy Bibles NFT
E-mail: sophia@holybiblesnft.com
City: Singapore
(cited from https://holybiblesnft.com/).

[2] https://holybiblesnft.com/portfolio/mission-vision/

[3] https://holybiblesnft.com/portfolio/mission-vision/

[4] "A Brief Historical Overview of the AD2000 & Beyond Movement and Joshua Project 2000". A Paper presented at the North East Asia AD2000/Joshua Project 2000 Consultation in Seoul, May 27-30, 1996.
by Luis Bush, International Director. https://www.ad2000.org/histover.htm (Access date: 18.06. 2022).

[5] https://orhunyazitlari.appspot.com/kultigin.html

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