

Call for Papers: “Metaphor & Misinformation: Religion in Media-Driven Worlds”

2023 Conference of the International Society for Media, Religion and Culture

Conference location: CERES Bochum (Germany)

Conference dates: 2-5 of August 2023

Deadline for Paper proposals: 14 January 2023

Notification of acceptances: End of February 2023

The history of religion, and current debates regarding spirituality, are full of diverse metaphors that are used to communicate complex ideas. Deities are often described as animals or objects that take on human characteristics. Believers are envisioned as a flock or a ship’s crew. The religious lives of individuals are explained as a journey, an apprenticeship, a struggle, or a path. These metaphors are woven into myths that help make the intangible accessible and create personal worldviews. Yet in an age of fake news and post-truth, the use of images and narratives can complicate already complex discussions of religion in the mediated public sphere.

In light of this, we invite papers that explore the concepts of metaphors and the communication of religious information within media cultures throughout history. We believe these analyses offer an opportunity to explore metaphorical differences and similarities across cultural perspectives. It will also enable a theoretical reflection on the ways in which we use metaphors to conceive of the relationship between media, technology, and religion and the structural implications of the metaphors we use in our scholarly work.

Media, for example, has been described by Birgit Meyer and others as devices that bridge the gap between the immanent and transcendent spheres. Other examples include Christian Nationalism, which often envisions political leaders in “messianic” roles working “miracles” using God Talk. Or corporate marketers who create “brand cults” that rely on mythologies, imagery, and indoctrination strategies similar to new religious movements.

The historical roots and evolution of these metaphors can bring clarity to the social consequences that we face today. Legacy media created and conceptualized different eras as media “worlds.” “Miscommunication” becomes the narrative for explaining fake news, religion-like conspiracy theories, or filter bubbles. Importantly, metaphors form the elementary parts of our linguistic communication, which evoke religious beliefs and ethos for different groups. Religious concepts such as conversion or redemption, which are linked to religious experiences, carry with them mixed messages that can be easily skewed or weaponized when transitioned into secular media discourses.

We are also interested in papers from religious communicators, and encourage collaborations with those in the fields of history, theology, semiotics, linguistics, philosophy, and popular culture to reflect on these themes. For example, how do media outlets and influencers use metaphors to teach or discuss meaning, purpose, or influence? What is the outcome of these framings?

With the relaxing of COVID-19 restrictions, this conference will serve as the biennial meeting of the International Society for Media, Religion, and Culture, with the aim of exploring these issues from a range of disciplinary perspectives. Since its first meeting back in 1996, the conference has become the leading international gathering for the discussion of research in religion, media, and culture.

Confirmed key notes and speakers include: TBD

The conference invites proposals for panels and roundtable sessions as well as individual papers. of up to 350 words. Panel and roundtable proposals should also include paper titles, 150-word abstracts for each paper, and names and titles of up to four participants (in addition a panel moderator or respondent can also be included).

Please note that conference attendees are not allowed to be included in more than two presentations (i.e., present on a panel and offer a paper, take part in a panel and a roundtable, or have their names listed on two papers).

Paper and panel sessions conducted in other languages than English (German-Spanish-French) will be considered, however, abstracts should be provided both in English and the proposed language for such submissions.

Potential panel, workshop, and paper proposals may address, but are not limited to, the following themes:

- Information and misinformation in religious communication
- Religious metaphors in past and present times
- Humor and religion
- Religious freedom and blasphemy
- Sacred texts and metaphors
- Religion and conspiracy theories
- Media and the contested visibility of religion
- Gender and metaphors
- Social media and religious metaphors
- Media and the politicization of metaphors
- Metaphor and religious nationalism
- Metaphor & misinformation: Religion in media-driven worlds in public theology
- Media and varieties of non-religion
- Media, religion and metaphors in a global perspective
- Historical media, material religion and metaphors
- Religions as landscapes, cities, objects
- Truth, filter bubbles and fake news

More information about the conference abstract submission and registration process will be available on the ISMRC webpage: <https://www.ismrc.org>

The conference will take place in Bochum, Germany, in conjunction with the Center for Religious Studies at Ruhr University-Bochum: <https://ceres.rub.de/en/>

For information about the venue, housing and transportation see the conference page: <https://www.ismrc.org/2023-conference>

We warmly welcome you to Germany and ISMRC in 2023!

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