## Iliff School of Theology Instructor: Jeffrey H. Mahan Winter 2020 jmahan@iliff.edu

# Theories of Religion and Media: Hybrid

Campus sessions: Wed Feb 5, 1:00 to 5:00PM & Thurs Feb 6, 8:00 to Noon

Audience/ Course description: Intended for PhD, DMin or MTS students, and for other Masters students with some background in media and/or interest in the critical theory that underlies the emerging conversation about media, religion and culture.

The course asks whether the changes in religion’s location, the nature of religious identity and community, and the nature of religious authority that are developing in the digital age something new in the history of religion? Or, has religion always been rooted in its mediations and have religion and media changed and adapted in relationship to each other? We will explore the discourses at the interface of communications, cultural and religious studies on the mediation of religion in contemporary digital culture and in the history of religion and carry out independent research.

## Requirements and assignments:

The seminar depends on the engaged participation of each student. Participants must both participate online and in the two campus sessions. To be fully present you need to have done the assigned reading and come prepared to participate in the class discussion in ways which demonstrate your command of the reading and viewing assignments and your engagement in the discussion.

***Online Participation*:** The course functions as a discussion among us. At the end of each week (except Gathering Days and the down week that follows Gathering Days) I will review your posts for the week and award points at the "closing the week's discussion" tab as follows:

* 3 points indicates your substantive participation in each discussion with evidence that you have done the pre-work reading and viewing.
* 2 points indicates that you have participated in all the discussions with general evidence of preparation but have not as often advanced the conversation and/or have not always posted on time.
* 1 point indicates that you have participated in some or all of the conversation, but without much evidence of preparation, and/or not in time to be part of the group discussion.
* 0 points indicates that you were not active in most of the discussions.

Participation points are awarded at the end of each week, except for Gathering Days and the down week following. (24 pt)

***Introduce an author and essay***: Students will be assigned to prepare a brief introduction to one of the essays read in class which will become the lead posts for the discussion of that essay. The introduction to the author should locate the author methodologically, and in the conversations about religion and media. Go on to provide a brief preliminary overview of the essay (i.e., describe the author’s thesis and key points) and suggest discussion questions to begin the conversation about the class. Typically the introduction and overview will run 3 – 5 pages, followed by 3 to 5 discussion questions that suggest ways to explore the reading and relate it to the ongoing course discussion. Due Friday of the week before the essay is discussed. The instructor will then post your introduction and questions for the class. (15 pts)

***Conference Presentation and Final Paper***: We will attempt to replicate, in a somewhat abbreviated form, the way that reading in a new area can lead scholars to develop their own research, resulting in the development of conference presentations, which in turn lead to revised and expanded papers which might be submitted for publication.

* 1. *Conference proposal*: Each student will develop a proposal of 600 to 850 words for a conference paper. A proposal should signal a significant engagement with theory and critical thought in the field, in relationship to a particular example of the mediation of the religion (a text, practice, media space, audience, etc.), and provide a clear preliminary thesis or critical question you will explore. The proposal and title should signal why others would be interested in your conclusions. Due: Thurs of week two. (no pts, counts as part of Conference presentation grade)
  2. *Conference presentation*: Students will be organized into thematic panels and have 20 minutes each to make an oral presentation of their papers. Computer projection and web access will be available. A good conference presentation is different from reading the final paper aloud. You will need to think through what it is most important to present within the available time so that people understand the depth and implication of your work, and do this in an engaging way. The panel sessions will include time for discussion and your response to questions and comments is part of the assignment. Due: Week five - Gathering Days. (30 pts)
  3. *Paper:* Following the conference you will revise and finalize your paper to submit – in this case to the instructor but think of this as being like a journal submission. Provide an abstract of less than 150 words at the beginning of the paper. The paper should be 5,000 to 6,000words (about 14 – 16 pages double spaced in 12 pt type) Use whatever style book you prefer, but be consistent. Due Thursday of week ten. (30 pts)

## Brief Bibliography:

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deVries, Hent and Samuel Weber, eds. (2001), *Religion and Media*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

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 Meyer, Birgit (2008) “Powerful Pictures. Popular Protestant Aesthetics in Southern Ghana” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76 (1): 82-110.

(2015) Sensational Movies: Video, Vision, and Christianity in Ghana, Berkeley: University of California Press.

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\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (2007) *The Lure of Images: A history of religion and visual media in America*, New York: Routledge.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (2012) *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Cultured and the Social Life of Feeling*, Berkeley: The University of California Press

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Stolow, Jeremy, ed., (2008) *Deus in Machina: Religion and Technology in Cross Cultural Perspective*, New York: Fordham University Press.

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Ward, Pete *Gods Behaving Badly: Media, Religion and Celebrity Culture*. Waco: Baylor University Press.

*Culture and Religion*, vol. 12, no. 2 (June 2011) is devoted to current debates over the definition of mediatization, mediation, and the field of media and religion.

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will engage, construct, and apply theological and interdisciplinary analyses in relation to the contemporary and historic mediations religious traditions, practices, and institutions.
2. Students will identify and critically evaluate the symbolic systems, power structures, ideologies, values, and religious meanings at play in the mediations of events and interactions, institutional structures, ethical judgments, and living communities, and articulate and enact a vision for increased social justice in these contexts.