Religion is prominent in public debates, in the media, and in the cultural imaginary of people’s daily life, no matter whether they see themselves as believers or not. In turn, religions also “make use” of media and mediation, creating symbolic representations and special experiences, be it through architecture and music, images and narratives, or through clothes and body practices. The course will focus on how the relationship between religion and media can be studied and how this can help to better understand the role of religion in the public sphere. Our understanding of media will reach beyond TV and internet – scripture and dance, money and microphones are means of mediating religion as well. We will ask, what is a medium, how are religions depicted in the media, how do religions act on and react to new media, and how can religion be understood as mediation while often claiming to provide “immediate” experiences? Besides signing up for an “expert group” on one of the weekly readings, you will engage in studying and presenting a self-chosen case.

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Distinguish and reproduce approaches to the study of religion and media
- Conceptualise key terms (medium/mediation, religion, public sphere)
- Describe the interaction between religion and media in historical perspective
- Understand the role of mass media in the contemporary religious field
- Distinguish the diverse media performances in religion as a lived cultural practice
- Reflect how religious media usage impacts on larger culture
- Present a self-chosen historical or contemporary example of religion in the public sphere; formulate a research question; outline an approach to study the case.

Indicative Reading:

Hoover, Stewart M., Religion in the Media Age (London: Routledge, 2006).
Meyer, Birgit/Annelies Moors, Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere (Indiana University Press, 2005).
Knott, K., Poole, E. & Taira, T., Media Portrayals of Religion and the Secular: Representation and Change (Farnham: Ashgate, 2006).

Assessment: One 3,000 word essay.

Name of lecturer
Professor Alexandra Grieser