

# Ways of Knowing 2017

6th Annual Conference on Religion at Harvard Divinity School



October 26-28, 2017  
Harvard University  
Cambridge, MA



## CALL FOR PAPERS

THE SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND CULTURE PROGRAM AT HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL announces the 6th annual “Ways of Knowing: Graduate Conference on Religion at Harvard Divinity School.” Inaugurated in 2012, this multi-day event is made up of thematic panels that cross religious traditions, academic disciplines, and intellectual and theological commitments. In addition, the conference features special panels on professionalization, addressing both academic and non-academic careers, and a keynote address. The conference aims at promoting lively interdisciplinary discussion of prevailing assumptions (both within and outside the academy) about the differentiation, organization, authorization, and reproduction of various modes of knowing and doing religion.

Last year, more than 100 students and early career scholars representing over 60 graduate programs worldwide gathered to present their research. Following the success of our previous conferences, we invite graduate students and early career scholars to submit paper proposals from of a variety of theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary perspectives.

### General Call for Papers

We seek papers that explore religious practices and modes of knowing, especially in relation to this year’s central theme, “Religion and Migration”. We welcome the use of all sorts of theoretical tools, including discourse analysis, gender theory, queer theory, race theory, disability theory, postcolonial theory, performance theory, and ritual theory. Papers may focus on any period, region, tradition, group, or person. They may address a set of practices, texts, doctrines, or beliefs. Projects that are primarily sociological, anthropological, theological, ethical, textual, historical, or philosophical are welcome, as are projects that draw on multiple disciplines.

### Central Theme: Religion and Migration

The central theme for this year’s conference is “Religion and Migration.” We take a capacious approach to understanding how human communities and religions have long engaged the question of movement across time and space. We especially encourage papers that engage the complex relationship between religion, mobility, and diaspora in a global age. Papers might focus on the religious lives of migrants; religious narratives about journey, travel, and passage; histories and legacies of mass migration by particular religious communities; or changes in religious landscapes as a result of emigration and immigration. Proposals might also interrogate the role of nation in constricting or enabling religious movement, religious texts that deal with themes of departure and arrival, religious responses to emerging migrant flows, and methodological approaches to the study of migration and religion. We welcome a broad range of papers that address the theme of religion and migration from a range of methodological approaches and in the context of various religious traditions, historical periods, and geographical regions.

Possible approaches include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. an exploration of a specific way of knowing, being, and engaging the world in relation to religion
2. historical, sociological, and/or anthropological analyses of the cultural processes that support a specific religious discourse or practice, its authoritative structures, and/or its strategies of inclusion and exclusion
3. analyses of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, sexuality, and/or gender with respect to religious texts, practices, or performances
4. comparative examinations of religious texts and/or their interpretations, with attention to the historical, sociopolitical, cultural, and/or intellectual contexts that mediate and delimit different interpretative strategies and practices
5. analyses of the interplay between religion and scientific, moral, and/or legal discourses, practices, and authorities
6. a theological construction or analysis of a particular normative framework, which critically and/or comparatively engages one or more religious traditions
7. critical analyses of the scholarly production and dissemination of knowledge on religion.

### **Special Call for Papers**

In addition to the General Call for Papers, the conference will also feature four special modules devoted to each of the following themes:

- » **OBJECTS AND ORIENTATIONS: MATERIALITY AND SPATIALITY IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION**
- Encounters with objects can shape bodies, orient in space, and tie experiences to memory—often across great distance, in absence as well as presence. With the new materialist turn, scholars have begun to develop what vital materialist Jane Bennett refers to as an “attentiveness to things.” However, attending to the material dimensions of religious belief and practice raises questions about how, where, and to whom matter matters. Indeed, the study of religion has long been characterized by a marked disavowal of the material that is itself rooted in the colonial context of the discipline’s emergence. How can we take into account these histories when engaging material-oriented methods in the study of religion? How does an attention to matter disturb, trouble, or dismantle the distance between “scholar” and “subject”? How might we build upon but also push beyond work that treats matter as passive and immutable rather than active and dynamic? Is “agency” a property or a product? Are doing things and thinking things the same? Does matter mean only one thing, or are the entanglements of bodies, experiences, ideas, and objects historically and/or spatially contingent? Finally, is it time to critically evaluate the terms and categories embedded within materiality/new materialist studies, and what might the study of religion have to contribute to this conversation? In light of these and related questions, we therefore invite papers that ask questions of space and place at the intersections of the study of religion with new materialist work. We are interested in papers that not only explore the possible contributions of new materialist work to the study of religion, but that also address how an attention to religion might add to or complicate emerging theories of materiality. We are particularly interested in approaches to these questions that address issues of spatiality and the intersection of absence and presence. How are humans involved in both the production of and production in space? How do human and non-human actants engage with physically absent properties? Creative interpretations of “space” are encouraged. For example, while we welcome papers focused on archaeology, we also recognize that new materialist scholarship is focused primarily on concrete or “real-world” interactions between actants, the study of which is often limited in historical inquiries. Hence, we ask: What is the relationship between language and object? What is the ontological and/or agential status of linguistically constructed objects? How might we consider the relationship between representations (literary and otherwise) and physical objects? That is, what types of “spaces”—literary, imagined, cognitive—have been given comparatively less attention within the new materialist theories?

Other possible themes include but are not limited to: materiality and ritual; identity, embodiment and spatiality; pilgrimage; architecture and space; possible intersections of cognitive science and materiality; relations of power encoded in space; histories of matter and materiality; posthumanist theory. Papers are welcome from any time period or geographical location. Our focus is primarily new materialist theory, but we welcome and strongly encourage papers that explore the intersections of new materialisms with feminist, queer, postcolonial, critical race theories, and/or theories of affect.

» **BODILY WAYS OF SHARING KNOWLEDGE**

Shared bodily practice may lead to shared knowledge. This basic assumption lies at the heart of any plural expression of religiousness: Communities of faith often engage in practical activities with others; they kneel, chant or go on pilgrimages together and through these collective embodied practices establish a shared view of what their faith is about. This module examines the interconnection between shared bodily practice and religious practice.

Religious engagement in groups necessarily entails a shift from a solitary to a shared intentional action. Within anthropology, for instance, this shift is an elementary and intensely debated methodological aspect for what is frequently pooled together as “participant observation”. On the other hand, the contemporary philosophical debate on the issue has a lot to say about the possibility, conditions and conditions of possibility of shared intentional agency and shared knowledge. However, it lacks empirical grounding.

This module scrutinizes what is usually taken for granted: the phenomenological presuppositions of social scientific, historical and philosophical theories, methods and methodologies concerning shared knowledge. This module thus seeks to locate the manifold ways of treating the question of how collective intentionality comes into being in a shared practice of faith. We depart from the often assumed but hardly proven premise that shared practice is the key to a deeper understanding of a specific social action and invite proposals from a wide range of disciplines to explore how this understanding of a social fact comes into being when we engage in social and embodied activity with others.

We call for papers that speak to the following questions: How precisely does collective intentionality arise in a religious ritual? What role does the body play in making faith a plural experience? How can we be certain that our religious intentions reflect the intentions of our religious community? Can faith and belief be shared the way knowledge is? Asked on a conceptual level: How do we link and distinguish shared faith, belief and knowledge? We seek inputs across a broad range of fields and methodologies, including history, philosophy, anthropology, theology, critical theories, and more, across different religious and epistemic traditions, on the question of shared human agency and embodiment in religion.

» **AMERICAN RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

Within the last several years, a number of significant political events and social movements have fundamentally altered the ways in which religious liberty is being understood, articulated, and experienced in the United States. Yet while scholars of religion and other commentators have routinely identified a number of key political moments—from the election of Republican candidate Donald Trump in 2016, to the Supreme Court’s landmark 2014 decision in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* and the fractured religious responses to national issues such as immigration rights and clean water access—as foundational to understanding the role of religion in contemporary American civic life, there remains a dearth of scholarly attention to how such phenomena have already begun to influence the lived experiences and belief systems of individuals living in the United States or popular understandings of the nature and scope of religious freedom. As such, this module seeks to probe more in depth into the complex ways that religious self-identity, religious experience, and the idea of ‘religious liberty’ are all being reciprocally re-imagined and renegotiated in response to recent legal, social, and political changes in the United States.

In order to examine how religious individuals and communities—including those who support and those who oppose these recent shifts—have understood, experienced, and responded to them, this module is seeking scholarship from a broad range of academic disciplines. Historical, anthropological, sociological, theological, and critical theoretical approaches are all welcome, among others. Questions for consideration might include: how has the candidacy of Donald Trump influenced the theologies, modes of political engagement, and attitudes toward religious difference of various faith communities in the United States? In what ways has the policy agenda and political rhetoric of the early Trump administration affected individuals' lived experiences or their interpretations of what 'religious liberty' means in practice? What networks of solidarity and response have developed in response to various political concerns, and how are they helping to structure new forms of religious engagement and inter-faith relations? In what ways has the Hobby Lobby decision been interpreted by various faith communities, particularly given rising concerns that these types of religious liberty claims may be invoked to restrict the rights and freedoms of others? Finally, how have other issues implicating religion in American public life—such as the recent rise of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic hate speech, the water rights protests at the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, various religious responses to recent trends in LGBT rights, or the emergence of the Alt-Right community—similarly informed the ways in which individuals understand the role of religion in American politics or what religious liberty means in this current historical moment?

By placing various disciplinary approaches and faith perspectives in conversation with one another, this module is intended to help scholars whose work touches on questions of contemporary American religious life an opportunity for deeper reflection and critical engagement with how discourses of American religious liberty have been shifting in recent years, as well as what this means for people of various faith backgrounds living in the United States today.

» SCIENCE/RELIGION FICTION AND THE MAKING OF NEW FUTURES

What is the future history of religion, and how do religious traditions make discursive claims to futurity? We currently inhabit a political, religious, and epistemic terrain wherein crisis is found everywhere: the global rise of ethnic nationalisms, economic emergencies and the failure(s) of neoliberalism, climate change and threats to biodiversity, neocolonialism, crises of faith in both religion and science, and so on. Perhaps the biggest crisis of all is the inability of our dominant epistemic, religious, and political traditions to imagine new non-apocalyptic futures at all, as the tools of future making have increasingly been called into question. And yet, these crises are not novel for many whose claims to futurity were always already contested in the dominant Western-European secular tradition, and for whom the apocalypse could be said to have already happened.

In this atmosphere, science fiction has already emerged as a privileged mode of critical theory, wherein authors, artists, and theorists are unsettling the future and present epistemic and political order by proposing and thinking through new futures rooted in alternative presents. At the same time, these contestations and new modes of futurity, particularly those coming from the Global South, indigenous, and marginalized communities in the Global North, are troubling what the science in science fiction even means, and introducing other religious and cultural ways of knowing as tools of imagining the world otherwise. What is the role religion in this space that has opened new opportunities for future making that exist outside western-scientific progress?

We propose a multi-disciplinary discussion of religion fiction and futurism and the role this plays in thinking through contemporary framings of crisis and the political implications of an epistemic ordering of things that places limits on whose futures are deemed worthy of a capital F "Future."

In this module, we invite papers that address religious futurism in a broad range of genres: religion fiction, art, and films, futuristic theology, religious political activism that makes moral claims to the future, exegesis on the role of religion in a time of crisis, and so on. We seek perspectives from numerous disciplines including science fiction studies, literary studies, religious studies, philosophy, anthropology, history, queer theory, critical race theory, and postcolonial theory. Possible themes include but are not limited to: future religions/religious futurism, eschatology, cultural studies of space travel, religious themes in science fictional futurism, techno-mythology, religion and deep time, religion and empire, religion and technology, religion as literature, etc... We are particularly interested in strengthening a conversation that troubles the distinctions between science and religion futurisms from postcolonial, critical race, and queer perspectives.

### **Submission Instructions**

**INDIVIDUAL PAPERS:** Please submit a 300-word abstract explaining the topic, main argument, and methodology of the project. You will be asked to specify whether you are submitting your proposal to the General Call or to one of the Special Call modules. Individual papers will be organized into panels and should not exceed 20 minutes in delivery.

**PRE-ORGANIZED PANELS:** Proposals for panels on a particular topic may also be submitted to either the general or special calls. These should include three to five papers, including a respondent paper. Please submit: 1) a 300-word summary of the focus and purpose of the panel, specifying how each paper contributes to the overarching theme; 2) a 300-word abstract for each paper explaining the topic, main argument, and methodology of the project; 3) the name and contact information of the panel organizer/chair.

**Proposals are due by Wednesday, May 31 through the WOK 2017 Submission Portal:  
<https://goo.gl/forms/GfbstgRvbWc1WHtt1>**

All inquiries can be directed to Kera Street and Eli Nelson,  
Conference Coordinators, at [wokconference.harvardsrc@gmail.com](mailto:wokconference.harvardsrc@gmail.com).