

# **Religion on the Move:**

## ***Movement, Migration, Missions and new Media across Religious Traditions***

Columbia University Department of Religion  
Graduate Conference  
Friday, April 26, 2013

### **Keynote Speaker:**

Michael D. Jackson  
*Distinguished Visiting Professor of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School*

### **Call for Papers**

The history of religion is a history of movement. But what happens when religion is on the move?

In this conference, we are interested in examining how an interdisciplinary approach to migratory experiences might illuminate the dynamic interplay between the limited possibilities in which people find themselves and the capabilities they nonetheless possess for creating viable, even vibrant, forms of social life. By treating religion as an embodied and spatial phenomenon that intersects with political and economic structures in complex and often unexpected ways, this conference aims not only to contribute to the nascent field of religion and migration but also to broaden its theoretical and methodological repertoire for future studies of religion on the move inclusive of movement, migration, missions and new media.

A spatial analytics of movement as pilgrimage might draw our attention to the intertwining routes believers trace as they undertake the *hajj* to Mecca. Historical attention to the making of regional/national migrations might shed new light on, for example, the unique urban sacred order built by millions of black southerners moving north in the decades of the United States Great Migration, or on the intergenerational histories of peoples displaced because of their religion. An anthropology of the diffusion of missionaries to far-flung lands might include studies of their roles as evangelists moving along trading routes (Buddhists in Southeast Asia), active participants in colonial expansion (Jesuits in the Americas), or ambivalent resisters to imperial power (Protestant sympathizers with Indian independence). And a cultural study of new media forms can help map patterns of religious mobility through the emergence of portable devotional materials carried by journeying practitioners. Whatever our approach, studying religion *on the move* attunes us to how mobility is not only an aspect of religious experience across traditions, times and spaces, but is also constitutive of religious beliefs, practices and communities.

We encourage submissions from those in all fields with interests in the study of religion. Our discussion will address, but is by no means limited to, the following questions:

- How have religious institutions been related to migration through colonial bonds, missionary proselytization, and/or the transnational bridges created by new technologies and media?
- How have the movements of religious traditions been facilitated by economic links such as medieval mercantile and maritime routes or modern globalized flows of capital?
- How has religious movement affected material culture, both in the creation of new media forms by people on the move and in the transformation or hybridization of existing cultural forms in their places of destination?
- How have community practices of transmission been affected by regional and, in the modern period, national migrations, as well as the translation of sacred texts into new languages?
- How has movement reconstituted the boundaries of religious and ethnic identities? How have these boundaries been inscribed on landscapes through the establishment of new neighborhood enclaves and architectural forms?
- Has religion been inflected differently in migrations that are forced (expulsion; evacuation; defection) rather than voluntary?
- Could attention to the embodied nature of migratory experiences shed new light on the study of otherworldly journeys and altered states of consciousness?

Please send a 500-word abstract, along with your name, institution, specialization, and year of study to [columbiareligion@gmail.com](mailto:columbiareligion@gmail.com) by December 28, 2012.

*All proposals will receive a response by early-February 2013.*