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Religion, Media and the Public Sphere

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Conference Announcement

From 6 to 8 December 2001 the ISIM, together with the Research Centre Religion and Society, will hold an international conference on ‘Religion, Media and the Public Sphere’ at the University of Amsterdam. Since the 1990s, three themes have featured prominently in debates in the social sciences and cultural studies: the crisis of the post-colonial nation-state, the increasing global accessibility and proliferation of electronic media, and the rise of religious movements.

Taking as a point of departure that the nation-state no longer features as the privileged space for the imagination of identity, scholars have paid much attention to the crucial role that electronic media play in the imagination and constitution of new links between people and the emergence of new arenas of public debate.

Religion, Media and the Public Sphere

If the nexus of media and the nation-state stood central in recent debates, the role of religion in the transformation of the public sphere has received much less attention. The decline of religion in the public sphere has been taken for granted as an intrinsic feature of modernity. The limitations of this stance came to the fore, of course, with the global rise of religious movements such as political Islam, Hindu nationalism and Pentecostalism. Driven by their will to make sense of the marked articulation of religious movements in, and their contribution to, the transformation of state-society relationships in post-

colonial contexts, anthropologists and other social scientists recently have ventured into an empirical study of these dynamics. The central issue to be addressed during this conference pertains to transformations in the public sphere, and the ways in which these relate to the proliferation of media and the liberalization of media policies, the upsurge of religion, and the crisis of the post-colonial state. Important in this context is the question of the usefulness and limits of the notion of the public sphere: How can this notion be made productive for a better understanding of the dynamics of the complex

relationships between media, religion and the state? Topics to be discussed include the role of media and religion in transforming the public sphere, the changes which religious organizations and individual experiences undergo through processes of mass mediation, and the ways in which different forms of mass mediation impact debates about the public-private relation.

For additional information, please contact the ISIM secretariat or see the ISIM website:
<http://isim.nl/isim/activities/seminarsconf.html>