Reel Religion: The Portrayal of Clergy in a Century of Cinema

A proposal by:

Marianne Ryan, Associate University Librarian for Public Services at Northwestern University Library

and

Mark Stover, Dean of the Library at California State University, Northridge

Annual Conference on Information and Religion

Kent State University

Abstract:

A hundred years ago, film was a new technology. From its early development, cinema has been used to portray clergy and to present perspectives on religion and religious organizations. Initially fairly simplistic, depictions of priests, ministers, rabbis, and nuns have become more sophisticated over time, keeping pace with changing social mores and evolving technologies.

In this session, presenters will explore the portrayal of clergy in film. They will examine early and more recent examples of cinematic clergy and suggest what these figures communicated to their audiences. They will also explore how clergy used information (and information technology) in their roles in ways which may have influenced viewers’ perceptions of religion and religious groups.

Keywords:

Clergy; Cinema; Information Technology