Five questions for Stewart Hoover[1]
[2]

As he avidly watched television as a youngster, Stewart Hoover's father would walk through the living room and say, "You'll never make a living at that."

Despite the warning, Hoover was interested in media: the industry, the business, practices and showbiz. He worked in radio while in high school and college.

He also came to realize that people studied media – how they functioned, the way the audience used them, and the impacts they had on culture and society.

"I started reading more about it and eventually went to grad school with the intention of making that my career," said Hoover, now a professor in the Department of Media Studies, adjoint in the Department of Religious Studies, and director of the Center for Media, Religion and Culture in the College of Media, Communication and Information at CU Boulder.

In the 1970s, while he was attending graduate school, the phenomenon of televangelism emerged, with big, sophisticated religious broadcasts. The trend away from radio to television received a lot of public attention and televangelists began to have a political impact and broader public profile.

Even though Hoover wrote his dissertation on televangelism and the audience of one such ministry, he was most interested in how media relate to existing cultures and how they change cultural practices, production and art. But his adviser pointed out that not a lot of people were specializing in media and religion, and the topic would be a good career choice. He took the advice.

"I found I was fascinated by all the ways you could look at how media of various kinds and religions of various kinds interact and affect one another and I haven't run out of things to look at yet."

Hoover has been at CU since 1991 and has written or edited 12 books and numerous articles. He has received a variety of awards for his scholarship, service and teaching, and is an internationally recognized expert on media and religion.

1.You published a book, "Religion in the Media Age," in 2006. Now, some 10 years later, if you were to the update the book, what would the revisions or additions be?

My two most recent books – one that came out last year and one the year before – discussed religion and the media and religious authority and how the media have changed who has authority in religion and who is able to dictate and to determine what religious symbols mean and what religious practices are. That has changed a lot in the period since 2006.
[3]

A book released in 2015 that I did with a colleague about masculinity, titled "Does God Make the Man?: Media, Religion, and the Crisis of Masculinity," looked at how people's ideas about who men are and what masculinity is are determined culturally. A lot of people think that traditional ideas about masculinity come from religion, but we found that men, even religious men, didn't really see it that way. What they saw is a broader set of cultural ideas and values about masculinity that are expressed in media more than they are in religion, and that is what determines their ideas and values.

Since 2006, I've looked more at how people's identities and meanings are made out of an interaction between things like religion and the kinds of media they consume. I'm also interested in the fact that people are increasingly using media to do religion. That is the place where a lot of religious practice takes place, and that means traditional religious leaders and authorities don't have the same kind of power they used to have.

It's largely a generational thing, a function of a younger audience. What you see in studies about public attitude and

public involvement in religion is that the percentage of people who select “none” as their religion is the fastest growing category, around 23 percent. It’s not that they are not religious; it’s that they are doing religion outside the traditional institutions and media are providing them with a lot of the resources to do that. They can have an online community or online access to religious information and symbols that they never would have had access to before. The online environment allows somebody who is Christian to explore Buddhism or Hinduism or Islam in ways that they wouldn’t have been able to in the past.

2.When was the Center for Media, Religion and Culture founded and what is its mission?

The seeds of the Center were in the first academic conference on media and religion we held here in Boulder in 1996. It brought together a lot of people interested in this area but who had never had a chance to get together to talk about it: people from media, communication studies, religious studies, anthropology, theology, ethics, ethno-musicology and technology. The panel that got the most press was the one about online religion, so even then, people were looking at how the internet was becoming a place where people could go for religious things.

That conference really started a discourse of a global community of people that began to develop and grow as an association of scholars who look at the intersection of media and religion.

We were fortunate to have quite a bit of success in getting external research funding to do studies in the area of media and religion. Since I’ve been here, we’ve raised about $2 million from private foundations, and so we’ve had a group of colleagues and grad students that regularly have been working together for a number of years.

Student-faculty collaboration is at the heart of what we do. We founded the Center in 2006 as a formal recipient for grant money and to give an identity to the research area. Increasingly we’re a place where scholars – grad students, professors and researchers – from across campus and from all over the world who want to be part of a conversation about media and religion share in our weekly seminar conversations.

In any year, we have two or three foreign scholars with us for a semester or a year. That weekly conversation is the core of the Center, but we also continue to host conferences. We’ve now had six international conferences, and the next one will be in Boulder in 2018. We also produce a group blog, “Third Spaces (https://thirdspacesblog.wordpress.com/[4]),” and produce a public radio program called “Sacred Lines” (http://www.colorado.edu/cmrc/[5]).

3.The Center recently was awarded a three-year, $500,000 grant from the Luce Foundation to “change the nature of religion scholarship in the digital age.” What will you be doing through this grant?

The idea of the grant is to bring together scholars from the fields of media studies and religious studies who are teachers and researchers in those areas to converse with one another to push ahead knowledge and theory building and teaching and methodology. We have eight outside colleagues representing the two fields and four of us from CU who all will be working together. We’ll meet every six months for the next three years while we work on our own research projects and have conversations and interactions about what we’re learning as we’re doing it.

It’s also a project in public scholarship. We want to do this in a very public way so that people can observe and converse with us and be part of the development of our ideas and findings. That public part of it is supported by an online platform that we are designing. The platform will be the home of the projects as well, enabling member work to be accessible to people outside of the Center. We want to learn how to be better public scholars and how to open up academic scholarship to broader communities of people so they can benefit from what we are doing now and not wait 18 months to two years until the study is published in a journal.

We had our first meeting in May and have the platform designed. The working group will begin using the platform this summer, and the public side of it will open after our October meeting. A few of the proposed member projects are: How the invention and introduction of media technology in the United States has used religious terms. This includes everything from the Atlantic cable to the telegraph, to electricity and the phonograph, to the internet, and how, as each of these was developed, people used religious language to describe what the technology would bring. Technology has been described, for instance, as “gift from God,” or seen as something that would benefit the moral and spiritual

purpose of the nation and its people. The project will look at why people had to think in religious and spiritual terms to describe these technologies. How online and offline environmental activism and conservative reactions to environmental activism use religious themes, rituals, symbols and values to promote their positions. A possible exhibition of religious history at the Smithsonian Institution. The historian of American religious history at the Smithsonian will use materials at the institution, including microphones, photographs of revivals, and items related to radio preachers and the history of televangelism, for instance. How media describe international development aid projects in moral terms. A colleague from London is working on how religious languages and religious symbols are used to describe aid and development projects in medicine and health and how the media are involved in interpreting that. It will look at people's symbolic understanding of what we do when we give aid abroad and how that is a kind of quasi-religious activity that is something shared in a religious way through media as a collective ritual space. Media reaction to and framing of ISIS. One of my colleagues is working on the ISIS crisis in the Middle East and how ISIS is a media phenomenon, and how it has gotten attention for using religious language and symbols and the media in very sophisticated ways for the horrible things it does and promotes. Blogging and truth claims. Another colleague will look at how blogging among religious groups, particularly evangelicals, sanctions people for things such as not being truthful online. The work will also look at how those sanctions and ways of articulating values and goals are being developed as these religious groups explore the online space as a context for religious community building. I'm going to be working on the interaction between media and Protestantism, and how that relationship can help to explain things like the election of Donald Trump and ethno-nationalism in Europe.

4. How has digital media changed religion?

Digital media have fewer intermediaries than old media and is much more horizontal so people don't really have to go through anyone else to build a site or community or network or to publish. Again, that means authority is being undermined by digital media. It is also significant because digital media are so elastic and creative and flexible and fluid that people are able to construct any kind of mode of articulation that they want to, including visuals.

If you look, for example, at some Buddhist online sites, you will see graphics that envelop you in the experience of meditative spaces. Some traditional Protestant churches use the online space in a very traditional kind of way that looks more like a newspaper or magazine. So there are a wide range of ways that the digital media can interact with senses, emotions and feelings to exploit those and people's religious impulses. The technical capabilities of digital media also give people a sense that community is always possible and always there.

5.What is the topic of your upcoming book?

We have a book in progress titled "The Third Spaces of Digital Religion," where we examine the ability of digital spaces to allow people to create their own new structures and definitions and boundaries and categories. A formal way to think about it is to consider Second Life, a 3-D virtual world where people can connect and create and chat with others. It is very formal and illustrative of how the digital media is a place where people can make their own spaces and communities. We're looking at how people structure their religious and spiritual experiences online, and how they use those structures to contest traditional religion.

One example I'm working on is "PostSecret," an online environment that has been around for 12 years. People are encouraged to send a physical postcard into a mailing address in Maryland; the postcard needs to share a secret, something they've never told anyone else before, and they must do it anonymously. Thirty postcard secrets are posted every Sunday morning and the community talks about the cards. Typically, the secrets are the kinds of things you would expect: people lamenting about mistakes they've made, regrets or pain they've experienced. It's very therapeutic. But about 20 percent of the postcards talk about religion in one way or another. Most people are critical of traditional religion: how they don't believe in God, or how God failed them, or how they had to fake being a Mormon to satisfy their spouse, for example. It has created a space of discourse where religion is confronted and traditional religion challenged.

The book is about examples like this, where people create a space where they can conceptually get to know each other and develop ideas and identities and feel like they belong, or do other kinds of lifework.

CU Foundation establishes Benson Society to honor top donors[6]
[7]

The University of Colorado Foundation on Monday announced the creation of The Benson Society, which recognizes individuals and private/family foundations that donate $1 million or more to the university. The Foundation's board of directors unanimously approved the concept.

"We are proud to have a society to recognize the donors who make significant investments in the university, which in turn make a substantial difference in our state and society. The return on their investment is tremendous," said Margaret Bathgate, chair of the CU Foundation board of directors. "We are also thrilled that Marcy and Bruce Benson agreed to let us use their name. Their leadership and personal philanthropy at CU make them natural namesakes."

Bruce Benson has served as CU president since March 2008. He is the longest-serving CU president in 65 years. He and his wife, Marcy, have chaired CU's two most recent comprehensive fundraising campaigns, Creating Futures (which exceeded its $1.5 billion goal in 2013) and Beyond Boundaries (which exceeded its $1 billion goal in 2003). Additionally, Bruce served on the steering committee for CU's first comprehensive fundraising campaign, a $272 million effort in the late 1980s chaired by Clancy Herbst.

The university has set fundraising records in each year of Benson's presidency, including $386.3 million in 2016-17. Bruce Benson is an alumnus of CU, having earned his geology degree in 1964.

"We are honored and humbled by this recognition," Bruce Benson said. "CU has played a critical role in our lives, but more important, in the life of Colorado and the nation."

CU estimates that about 350 individuals and private/family foundations qualify for membership.

"We're happy to be able to recognize those whose investments in CU have helped shape the university we are, and who will continue to sustain us for decades to come," said CU Foundation President Jack Finlaw. "This is an enduring legacy of the importance of philanthropy, as well as recognition of those people and foundations that add significant value to CU's students, faculty and staff and to Colorado and beyond."

The Benson Society's signature event will be an annual awards and induction ceremony held each spring.

Dinosaur-killing asteroid could have thrust Earth into two years of darkness[8]

Popular Mini Law School adds live streaming, new curriculum[9]

Vice chancellor search committee named[10]

CU Denver gallery to feature creator of iconic Beatles album cover [11]

Allee, Employee of the Quarter, focuses on helping students succeed[12]

Lee wins crime predicting prize [13]

Hernandez teams with startup to advance new technology [14]

Mark Hernandez, professor in the Department of Civil, Environmental, and Architectural Engineering at the University of Colorado Boulder, has partnered with Aerosol Devices Inc., a Fort Collins startup, to advance a new sampling technology for airborne bacterial cells and fungal spores that could pose a significant health risk in indoor environments. Aerosol Devices has received a $225,000 National Science Foundation (NSF) Small Business Technology Transfer grant for research and development.

The research will include instruments that have an improved ability to monitor bioaerosols that could pose a health threat to water-damaged buildings; health care settings; transportation centers; and other public venues. These “next generation” instruments will provide an “innovative, unobtrusive and practical method for surveying the indoor air we breathe every day, in near real time,” according to a press release.

Johnson named CU Boulder’s director of audio broadcasting[15]

Creosote bush could treat Giardia and 'brain-eating' amoeba infections[16]

Links
[1] https://connections.cu.edu/spotlights/five-questions-stewart-hoover[2] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/hoover_01.jpg[3] https://www.amazon.com/Religion-Media-Age-Culture/dp/0415314232[4] https://thirdspacesblog.wordpress.com/[5] http://www.colorado.edu/cmrc/[6] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/cu-foundation-establishes-benson-society-honor-top-donors[7] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/bensons.jpg[8] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/dinosaur-killing-asteroid-could-have-thrust-earth-two-years-darkness[9] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/popular-mini-law-school-adds-live-streaming-new-curriculum[10] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/vice-chancellor-search-committee-named[11] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/cu-denver-gallery-feature-creator-iconic-beatles-album-cover[12] https://connections.cu.edu/people/allee-employee-quarter-focuses-helping-students-succeed[13] https://connections.cu.edu/people/lee-wins-crime-predicting-prize[14] https://connections.cu.edu/people/hernandez-teams-startup-advance-new-technology[15] https://connections.cu.edu/people/johnson-named-cu-boulder-s-director-audio-broadcasting[16] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/creosote-bush-could-treat-giardia-and-brain-eating-amoeba-infections