

Early Modern Christian Materiality (Wrocław, 19–21 May 26)

Wrocław, May 19–21, 2026

Deadline: Feb 15, 2026

Aleksandra Lipińska, Kunsthistorisches Institut der Universität zu Köln

15th Annual REFORC Conference on Early Modern Christianity: "Early Modern Christian Materiality", Wrocław, May 19-21, 2026.

At the time of the Reformation, new ways of perceiving bodiliness and materiality began to reshape Western thought, particularly in relation to the understanding of the Incarnation and the Eucharist. In a sharp critique of medieval Aristotelianism, especially the doctrine of transubstantiation grounded in Aristotelian hylomorphic theory, the Reformers developed new understandings of Christ's presence, the Holy Spirit, human being, and the material world. While these reinterpretations varied among the different reformers, they commonly marked a departure from medieval theological frameworks and opened the door to (re)configurations in how materiality was understood, experienced, and practiced. The reconfigured understanding of the sacraments had a substantial influence on liturgy and, consequently, also on ecclesiastical art, architecture, and music. Likewise, the role of materiality in everyday domestic piety was reassessed, reflecting broader theological reconsiderations of how the sacred could be mediated through physical forms.

The organizers of the conference invite papers and panel proposals on the topic of Early Modern Christian materiality which may include, but are not limited to following questions:

- How was matter understood in Christian thought during the early modern period, particularly in relation to the Incarnation and the Eucharist?
- How did attitudes toward materiality change or diverge across Christian denominations?
- To what extent was the material world perceived as a book of wisdom?
- What role did materiality play in theological cognition – in sermons, literature, visual arts – and across confessions?
- What were the theological foundations and practical expressions of materiality in liturgical life across denominations?
- How did theological, social, and cultural factors shape liturgical material practices?
- How did materiality shape everyday religious practice and confessional identity – in church, domestic, and public spaces?
- In what ways did materiality serve as an argument in interconfessional polemics?
- How were objects understood as agents, bearers of theological meaning, or potential threats (e.g., in iconoclasm)?
- What was the impact of theological debates on the material aspects of ecclesiastical architecture and furnishings?

- How did theology influence the perception and design of sacred space?
- How was the materiality of a church community (its human and spiritual body) negotiated in relation to the materiality of the church building itself?
- How did changes in the natural and built environment reflect or influence religious and liturgical thinking?
- Are there ecological dimensions to early modern theology and practice?
- How can materiality serve as a heuristic tool to foreground marginalized voices and topics, such as gendered practices, vernacular religion, or attitudes toward the environment?

Short Paper Presentations:

The conference welcomes proposals for individual short papers as well as thematic sessions of two or three short papers. Presentations should be 20 minutes in length and followed by 10 minutes for discussion.

In addition to the more specific topic mentioned above, the conference is open to proposals focusing on any other topics or disciplines related to Early Modern Christianity, ca. 1400-1700, such as philosophy, law, history, theology, etc., independent of the theme of the plenary papers.

Panels and General Attendance:

In case of a thematic session (panel) all panelists must register separately, indicating the panel in the registration form.

It is also possible to attend the conference without giving a paper. In that case, you can register for the conference via the registration form, indicating that you do not want to submit a short paper proposal.

Submission:

Short paper proposals can be submitted until February 15, 2026, while registering via the registration form:

<https://reforc.com/registration-form-fifteenth-annual-reforc-conference-on-early-modern-christianity/>

Language:

Preferred language for short papers is English, but papers in French and German are also welcome. Presenters who prefer to give their paper in French or German must provide the audience with an English summary of about 150-200 words.

Conference Proceedings:

The conference volume will be published by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht in the series Refo500 Academic Studies (R5AS) and will contain plenary papers and a selection of short papers. Another publication venue is the Journal of Early Modern Christianity (JEMC).

Manuscripts for the conference volume can be submitted after the conference to the editors:

Aleksandra Lipińska, Katharina Opalka, Agnieszka Seidel-Grzesińska, and Marcin Wisłocki. Presenters will receive an email invitation and the R5AS stylesheet after the conference. All other manuscripts can be submitted to editor-in-chief of the JEMC, Wim François. Editors will decide on publication.

Scientific Committee

Aleksandra Lipińska (Cologne), Katharina Opalka (Bonn), Agnieszka Seidel-Grzesińska (Wrocław),
Marcin Wiślocki (Wrocław).

Reference:

CFP: Early Modern Christian Materiality (Wrocław, 19-21 May 26). In: ArtHist.net, Jul 3, 2025 (accessed
Jun 28, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/49633>>.