

Faith and Media

Analysis of Faith and Media:
Representation and Communication

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PREFACE

Communicating about Faith Balancing between Identity and Perception?

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While in the past, ideologies and religions had a real impact on mass media, in the current era religious groups and institutions are competing with other political and commercial organisations to take part in the mediated public debate. To be heard in mass media, churches need to know the language, scope and priorities of media professionals to be able to influence the agenda setting and framing of their messages.

The main aim of this book is to offer an insight into the changing relationship between religion and media. It is the result of a two-day international conference concerning representation of and communication about faith in media organised by the University Centre Saint-Ignatius Antwerp in collaboration with the Department of Communication Studies of the University of Antwerp and the Research Unit Pastoral Theology of the K.U.Leuven.

Different authors focus on the gap between the language of faith and the language of the mass media. Central themes are the evolution of the critical function of faith and ideologies in mass media and the comparative analysis of faith in European broadcasting, printed media and other (new) media formats.

In the first chapter Peter Horsfield stresses the critical view of religious organisations on mass media, blaming them a lack of understanding of religious perspectives, but also reproaching an inaccurate reframing or even distortion of religious truths, failing to represent positive actions while emphasising conflicts and controversies. Yet, this view often fails to reflect equally critically on the ideologies and institutional interests of religious institutions and their vested worldviews that are challenged by this reframing and repositioning of religious discourse. To explore this, the author considers a number of characteristics of the interests and language of institutional religion and the interests and

language of the media. Furthermore, some historical episodes involving similar remediations of Christianity are considered.

Next, Franz-Josef Eilers focuses on communication about faith, and even more citing Avery Dulles (1972) stating that church *is* communication. The author gives a historical overview of milestones in the evolution of church and communication, indicating the loss of the church's monopoly in communication becoming in many ways a defensive communicator instead of an aggressive one.

The invention of new means of modern communication, like film and broadcasting, slowly brought a change in attitude which finally was not only condemning anymore but became more positive and discriminating. This evolution is reflected in the author's analysis of different communication decrees, pastoral instructions and other policy acts of the Vatican. The author considers that beyond its own members, the church also has an obligation to human society as such in contributing towards a responsible use and appreciation of the new communication culture. This could also stimulate the church to contribute to communication education, media research and communication ethics.

Ernest Henau takes a closer look at the ambivalent relation between church and media. He starts with the history of the Popes' attitudes towards media during the previous centuries, stressing the changing attitude of the church during the last century expressing the high expectations on the possible use of electronic media, adopting a critical but positive attitude. In a second part of his contribution, the author outlines the policies in different European countries concerning religious presence in broadcast programming. He observes that religious programmes are not only marginalised because they are religious or ideological by nature, but also because they do not fit into a policy that is mainly governed by the law of supply and demand.

Marit Trioen and Martina Temmerman investigate the way (Catholic) religion and (religious) youth are represented in the different Flemish newspapers. Rather than assembling a corpus of all articles on faith and religion within a certain period of time in the Flemish press, they have opted for a thematic delineation. Their research focuses on the press coverage of the World Youth Day 2005, making a thorough description of the representation of the event, the presence of the Pope and of the young participants based on linguistic analysis (drawing on naming analysis and transitivity). Although the coverage is very matter-of-fact, some noteworthy patterns of inconsistency are discovered.

In analysing the variety of relations between faith and printed media Joan Hemels makes in his contribution the difference between (daily) newspapers and magazines, and between journalism for commercial use

and non-profit journalism. First he outlines the historical development of churches, religions and journalism in the Netherlands. Based on his analysis of newspapers and magazines, the author pays attention to the relevance of a public debate on different religious convictions within and outside the churches. Furthermore the responsibility of journalists for the attitude of their readers with regard to faith is stressed and the need for training of journalists is underlined to develop an open mind, based on knowledge of religion, ethical questions and the role of churches in everyday life. Also the role of the internet is addressed in order to promote the open debate between different groups in Dutch multicultural and multireligious society.

Jacques Guyot addresses the debate around the prohibition of religious signs in French schools that raised a controversy aimed at the Republican doctrine of *laïcité*. The vote of the 2004 act reactivated historical clashes between the defenders of a clear-cut separation of church and state who think that expressing one's faith should be a private matter and those who wish to bring changes in order to consider religious idiosyncrasies in the public sphere. Audio-visual media echoed and crystallised this debate. Public service broadcasting television is particularly interesting as it reveals a very contradictory situation. On the one hand religious diversity is respected in public broadcasting by granting religions time to broadcast programmes dedicated to services of worship, analyses of sacred texts or history of religions. On the other hand, TV news on religious issues is more prejudiced: an unconditionally positive attitude towards Catholicism versus recurrent stigmatisation of the French Muslim community. Also a survey of European public television shows that although most channels broadcast religious programmes, most countries still tend to promote former native denominations and tend to ignore other confessions.

Jim McDonnell charts the evolution of religious broadcasting (public and private) since 1990 in Great Britain and considers how religious broadcasting meets the demands of a more pluralistic and religiously diverse public. In 1990 the British government introduced a new Broadcasting Act having profound and lasting effects on the nature and practice of British religious broadcasting. Religious broadcasting so long protected and accepted as an integral part of the public service mandate found itself increasingly pushed to the margins. In 2003 a new Communications Act marked yet another change as it prepared broadcasting for the digital future leading to new opportunities but also challenges for religious broadcasters.

The last part of the publication is devoted to case studies and possible communication strategies, with special attention to faith and media

in Western policies and in the Middle East and the representation of minority religions in the general media.

Daniela Frank sketches different case studies concerning the relationship between faith and audiovisual media. Against the background of different cultural and (inter)religious contexts in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Central Europe, different issues are treated: which religious messages are communicated by which spokespersons, what language is used to reach specific target groups and finally what is the role of religious messages in audiovisual media? The different cases selected from different continents, stimulate reflections on the possibilities and limitations of the Church to be present in television, and also on how faith can be communicated to an audience that is increasingly diverse and fragmented.

Next, the Western media discourse about Muslim culture, Muslim women and Islam is analysed by Fadi Kabatilo. Using the Foucauldian discourse theory besides the metaphors theory, the discourse about Muslim women's dress is analysed in articles of *Time Magazine*. The analysis explains how the interaction with Muslim women's dress creates new metaphors and meanings for the veil. Links are made with other discourses, such as discourses on Western identity, Arab identity, education, integration in a multicultural society, but also, amongst others, the war against Iraq. The author argues that the discourse on Muslim women's dress is shaped by other political and ideological discourses.

It is even utilised to serve their interests and to justify the imposing of Western values on Muslim societies putting the discourse on women's rights on the second place.

In the last chapter Khaled Hroub reports about his investigation of material broadcasted on a sample of Arab TV channels. The hundreds of Arab TV channels can be categorised into four groups: news, variety, entertainment and religious channels. That being said, all four channel groups strongly feature religious programmes and material. The exploitation of the new communication means by faith in the Middle East is merely a translation of the globalisation of religious phenomena in recent years. Arabic-speaking channels based in any part of the world have therefore acquired the possibility to reach Arabic speaking communities anywhere on the globe. The researcher conducted content analysis of broadcasted material examining amongst others prevailing views and perceptions over a wide array of issues. One of the author's conclusions is that the liberation of faith from the exploitation of politics in the Middle East (and in turn the circumvention of its increasing radicalisation) is equally important as and completely interwoven with

the process of freeing the politics of the Middle East from exploitation by Western policies and hegemony.

The diversity of the above-mentioned research proves the innovativeness of this book assembling articles of authors who analyse from within, but also from without, a catholic church environment but also other faiths and denominations with regard to their social communication in general and media strategies in particular. In a highly secularised and multicultural society new strategies have to be developed for faiths and denominations to fight for media attention and learn how professional communication mechanisms work. But it is not only the relationship between religious institutions and the mass media that is at stake, also the way in which the media are covering religious topics is under scrutiny. Therefore journalists too have to find new ways to address these questions within a secularised and plural society.