

Communication and Religion: A Common Argumentative Attraction

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Abstract: This article aims to analyze the specific relationship between religion and communication, and to reveal the argumentative elements that consolidate the common attraction between the two. Religion and communication represent, on the other hand, a type of power that consolidates, in a certain way, this attraction.

Keywords: argumentation, communication, power, religion.

1. Introduction

The strong correlation between religion and the media or communication in general today is more than remarkable. This phenomenon has become an object of study from different cognitive fields and certainly, both from the domain of communication and from that of culture and religion, these studies made a great effort to understand this strong relationship between the two, since the most symbolic image of "this alliance" between communication and religion is manifested in the phenomenon of religious media.

Different studies reveal the concern for this correlation between communication and religion. There are several very significant titles on this subject. Among them, we highlight the work edited by Peter G. Horsfield, Mary E. Hess and Adán M. Medrano entitled *Belief in media: cultural perspectives on media and Christianity*. This title analyses the solid fusion between religion and communication and suggests the collapse of the boundaries between the two. The word "belief in" is used in this context (the title of the book) loaded with purely religious connotations. The media thus become a "God" to be believed in and churches or mosques to be prayed in. In the virtual world, websites such as "God online" and "Churches online" emerge. For Muslims in the virtual world, there are sites such as Imams online where visitors' questions are answered with fatwas, not to mention the many sites devoted to almost every aspect of Islamic life. It is true, therefore, that religion in the age of communication and with the new technologies has taken on a new visibility (Michael Hoelzl, Graham Ward: 2008), consolidating this fusion between communication and religion that was achieved after religion occupied a large space in the virtual world and adopted its tools to become more visible and present today.

In the Islamic world, a large number of titles are emerging that deal with the subject of religion and communication. Taha

Ahmed az-zaidi cites in his bibliographical book "Dalilu Al Ialam Al Islami" (Taha Ahmed az-zaidi. 2008:7), (Bibliography of Islamic information) more than three hundred books on Islamic communication and information. The author states in his introduction that his bibliographical survey "is a response to those who say that there is no Islamic information and communication", and adds: "despite the fact that this concept (Islamic information and communication) was not established in the Islamic world until forty years ago, there are more than three hundred Arabic-language studies on the subject" (Ibid. P: 8).

2. What then Motivates this Common Attraction Between Religion and Communication?

What seems very clear is that religion and communication have always been related, as confirmed by studies developed in different cognitive fields in the Western World, namely sociology and communication, while in the Islamic World, which has known the arrival of communication as a professional practice and as an independent cognitive field later, through the Western World, there is talk of an "Islamic communication theory" developed since the time of the prophet Mohammad, i.e. since the beginning of Islam (A. al Jateeb, Mohamed.1984). The differences between the academic and critical discourses on religion and communication in the Western and Muslim world are due to different approaches. While Westerners start from the communication perspective to analyse the relationship between communication and religion, most studies in the Muslim World, and more specifically those carried out in the last two decades, start from a purely religious perspective, since most researchers are professors of Theology or Islamic Sciences.

What then motivates this common attraction between religion and communication?

The answer to this question leads to the adoption of two positions: the first investigates the magnetic component through which religion is attracted to communication and merges with it to strengthen its existence and promote its visibility in the public space. The second one highlights the characteristics of communication and information that make religion a subject of great interest to them, by virtue of which the media address it and adopt it to strengthen their role within the communication

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universe and, in this way, achieve predominance in their field.

3. The Point of Attraction of Religion to Communication and Information

At this point we will focus our approach on the Islamic religion, since it is the object of our study. We will try to clarify what is considered to be the rationale that makes religion so attracted to communication and information that it adopts them as the basis for its visibility in public spaces. This approach is often absent from the attention of researchers in the field of communication and its relation to religion and especially from modern studies that start from communication, such as sociology or similar disciplines, and never from religion itself. This approach was undertaken by Muslim theologians and not by researchers in communication or sociology, and although this approach may appear to be purely theological, it is very important because of its commitment to highlighting the characteristics of the strong impact that the cohesion between religion and communication has had and eloquently explains the causes of religion's attraction to communication.

The first of these characteristics is the establishment of religion on the principle of preaching. Several studies interested in this matter have considered preaching as a communicative phenomenon, and this is how it is defined, for example, by a Catholic website when it states that "preaching is the communication of a message" (Sugel Michelén. 2010), while in the Qur'an in the Surah of An-Nahl in verse 125 it is recommended:

"And hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of Allah, and be not divided among yourselves".

This means that preaching was one of the elements on which religion was based to become public. Another characteristic of religion is that it is based more on the group than on the individual. In the texts of Islamic law such as the Qur'an and the Sayings of the Prophet, 'Al Jama'a' (the community/group) is listed as a determining pillar in Muslim society. Several verses of the Qur'an quote directly or implicitly "Al Jama'aa" as in the sura of "Al Imran" (the house of Imran) in verse 103:

"Therefore, openly proclaim what you have been commanded".

Also quoted in the sayings of the Prophet Mohammed is his recommendation to Muslims to join the community and the group/Al Jama'ah (Musnad Ahmed)" (243.5/232).

It is clear from these testimonies the importance of the community or al Jamaah in the Islamic religion, which also implies the importance of communication as a tool to establish links between the individuals of this community and even with other communities, for, as the Belgian philosopher Michel Meyer states, communication begins when one of us establishes a discourse or a message towards another (Michel Meyer 1993: 92).

The fact that religion is based on preaching and is exercised in the community or Al Jamaah and not individually, makes these pillars magnetic points of attraction of religion towards communication. They are elements that guarantee the communicative objectives of religion. Many theologians and historians of Islam consider that the first appearance of Islam

was based on a communication operation. (A. al Jateeb 1984: 23 in Arabic). For in Islam the Prophet decided to go out with his religious preaching from the private to the public after receiving the Qur'anic text which recommends this step: "So proclaim openly all that you have been commanded (to say)" Surat al Hichr, verse 94.

Analysts point out that Islam when it decided to establish its visibility in that Meccan society or even in other geographical horizons had to adopt a communicative process. Religion not only wants through communication to establish its visibility in the public space but also, and even more so with the new technologies, to make this visibility seem modern (When Religion Meets New Media. 2011).

4. The Interest of Communication in Religion

No one can deny the space acquired by religion in the field of communication. In the press, in the audiovisual media and with the new technologies, religion appears as a content or ideology, and even with the shift towards thematic media, religious press, religious television and religious radio have emerged. With the new technologies there is already talk of "digital religion", which today includes a myriad of examples such as: "evangelical breast community blogs", "Jewish dating service website" and "Jewish dating service website". Jewish online dating service website", "Jewish online dating service website", "virtual pilgrimage website". a website of a virtual pilgrimage of the Muslim Hajj ritual, websites offering bids on virtual Hindu temples, a YouTube series by a former Catholic nun, the invention of Kosher phones, the "Al-Quraysh" game, or an Anglican Church in Second Life. Religion seems to be a fruitful factor for those who use it in their conflicts to achieve certain goals. Religion was used as a touchstone in international conflicts or conflicts between civilisations as Samuel Huntington's theory on "The Clash of Civilisations" (Samuel P. Huntington.2005). Didn't George Walker Bush make religion an ideological framework to influence the American public opinion and gain their support for his colonial plans in Afghanistan and Iraq, when he declared after the attacks of September 11, 2001 during the national day of mourning, using the term crusade: "this crusade, this war against terrorism will take some time"? Middle East expert Robert Fisk, an analyst for the British newspaper "The Independent" wrote in 2003 an article entitled "Ditching the Crusade" in which he said: "George Bush seems to really believe that he is leading a Crusade".

Didn't extremist groups use religion to justify terrorist attacks? Didn't some political forces adopt religious issues, such as the hijab for example, to provide their election campaigns with a force of attraction and to collect votes? Didn't Barack Obama's political opponents use his Muslim background to discredit him as US president?

Didn't Muslim societies themselves take refuge in religion to acquire power or to discredit him? Religion has played a significant role in the media coverage of Barack Obama's election (How the News Media Covered Religion in the General Election: Obama Gets Most Coverage, Much of It on False Rumor He Is a Muslim.11/ 2008). Religious personalities are

gaining more and more space in the media: the world's major networks have devoted a great deal of space to the Pope's travels, the burial ceremonies of John Paul II and the appointment of Pope Benedict XVI.

Spiritual leaders, such as the Tibetan Dalai Lama, Pope Benedict XVI, Hassan Nasra Allah, spiritual leader of Hizbullah in Lebanon, or Al Qaeda's leader Ben Laden, have become media personalities with a strong presence in the world's media. In the US and Europe, a vast literature on political Islam, Islamism, Islamic fundamentalism, etc. has flourished. Religious news has multiplied in the international and local media and, as quoted by the Mexican newspaper "La Jornada", "in 2007 alone, 73 programmes with religious content were identified in Mexico in the radio quadrant, with an average of 196 hours per week" (José Antonio Román. 2008).

In short, our century, according to George Corm, is a "century of religion" (Corm. 2007: 15). Corm, in his explanation of this striking presence of religion in the 21st century, points among other things to the media as one of the factors that have contributed to the entrenchment of this presence, when he says: "Whether in Paris, Moscow, New York, Beirut, Baghdad, Istanbul, New Delhi, Jakarta, Madrid, London, Rabat.... The headlines of our press, the weekly magazines or the television and radio screens tell us about religion" (Ibid: 17). Religious figures are gaining more and more space in these media, and the world's major channels have devoted a great deal of space to the Pope's travels, to the burial ceremonies of John Paul II, and to the appointment of Pope Benedict XVI. With all this, "it now seems that religious identity wants to dominate everything" (ibid. 20).

This use of religion makes the media feel attracted to it, because it is a "noisy" element that captures attention and moves the masses, things that communication, or more specifically the media, seeks in order to acquire more power as a mass tool. It is necessary to invoke in this respect the fact that the media are not independent channels, but are directed by a certain power, be it political, economic or ideological. These powers undoubtedly pursue some end that passes through the use of religion either as a media ideology or as media content.

5. Conclusion

The attraction between communication and religion is an element that consolidates the media's presence in the world's political, social and religious scene for a number of reasons:

- a) The growing role of the media in international society, and the convictions of social, political and religious actors in the role of the media in the transformation and movement of the masses, as well as in the dissemination of ideology or values among public opinion.
- b) The growing presence of religion and its role in modern societies, which is manifested in various aspects of religiosity: religious institutions, religious debates, religious political parties, the return of religion to the public sphere, and the role of the media in the

transformation and movement of the masses, as well as in the dissemination of ideology or values in public opinion.

- c) The context of 11 September 2001 and the global as well as local strategies that were adopted by the state to combat radical ideologies made Islamic and religious media a communicative necessity to carry out objectives of domination and control.
- d) The advent of new technology and the impact of the information and communication age offered religious forces oppressed by the official power a perfect medium for the dissemination of their ideology, discourses, and values outside any kind of control by this power, which until then had limited their access to public media such as television, radio, press, etc. The new technologies have brought them freedom of expression and freedom of expression. New technologies have given them freedom and means.

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