

The sacred and the profane in the media / Special issue

Media and Religion – the interplay of profane and sacred

The modernity product, from which mass media feeds, was built on axiom of the political institutions' laicization, education and culture. Print media, television, radio, and recently online media define themselves as institutions serving various public categories by offering them information and entertainment (essential in profane existence) and no access to the spiritual transfiguration (sacredness).

In a secular era, religion could only use the press as a medium to transmit its messages; while the press used religion and its institutions as subjects for news or reports, or as themes for entertainment products. In many instances, mass media framed in profane code religious events, and paid attention more to values like dramatic nature, human interest, and conflict than to values related to sacredness and its implications. The stereotype of media profanity dominated thinking about journalistic discourse, even when not connected to religion. The press was constantly accused of "dumbing down" – the "sacred" values of politics, of civil society, of culture, of social politics and so on.

However, the research from the past 20 years showed the multiple interferences between media and religion. These interferences were different than the ones between a support and content: mass media is now understood as a cultural product that can involve itself in ritual, mythological and religious dimensions. This awareness of the symbolic dimension of media was not accompanied by a thoroughgoing study of the relation between the founding categories of the two

cultural systems: does a media event, attracting a powerful ritualization of media coverage, also involve a media content sacralization? Does the call for religious archetypes covered by dramatic events also involve a sacred perspective on those events and on their major actors? Does the mythologizing of the journalistic discourse bring along a sacred sense/meaning?

The Bucharest workshop aims was to become platform for debating the relations between sacred and profane, as they are (inter)mediated by the contemporary press. The participants were invited to address issues such as religious phenomena coverage; using religious archetypes in media, advertising and public relations; online religion and media; media rituals and media events; rituals of media consumption, media revelations and religious/sacred secrets; media anthropology – from the perspective of the sacred and profane categories.

The workshop was organized by the Media and Religion TWG of ECREA (European Communication Research and Education Association), in cooperation with the Doctoral School in Media Studies of Bucharest University and the AFCOM (Association of Educators in Journalism and Communication) and will be held in Bucharest (Romania) on October 11 and 12, 2013. It was honored by Stefan Bratosin (France), Nicolae Dascalu (Romania), Johanna Sumiala (Finland) and Eric Rothenbuhler (USA) as key-note speakers.

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