
Editorial

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This issue is a companion piece to that on Islam and the media, which we published last year (WPCC Volume 3, Issue 2). That we should devote two issues to the subject of religion reflects the heightened salience of the topic even in secular societies such as Britain. Within the field of cultural studies it has been pointed out, until quite recently, scant attention was paid to the question of religion, attention being focused on issues such as race, class, gender and sexuality. However, that has changed and there is now an emerging literature on the relationship between the media and religion. Enquiries may relate to the use made of the media by various groups, or the converse, that is the restrictions groups may place on member's use of the media; or to changes in religious practice due to developments in technology; or the spread of religious imagery across media forms (Stolow 2005, 122-124). It is hoped the articles here contribute to these debates. The range of issues covered is diverse: from Christian Evangelism at the BBC; to journalism and theology; to the changing interplay between religion, secularism and nationalism in modern Ireland; to popular religious film in Nigeria; and finally to the so-called 'new' religions in Japan.

Our first article deals with religious broadcasting in the early BBC. As in other areas, religious broadcasting has evolved down the years as new techniques were developed and perfected. Clerical broadcasters for example had to learn to set aside the tone of voice they habitually used in the pulpit, which was appropriate in church and chapel but which came over as a 'parsonical drone' to listeners in the more intimate surroundings of the home, causing them to switch off (Scannell and Cardiff 1991, 162). Other changes were to do with content and treatment and were connected to developments in society. The Christian zeal of the BBC's first Director General Sir John Reith is well known, and Michael Bailey gives an account of the attempts by Reith to use the BBC as a vehicle for a Christian Evangelism, which, as BBC historian Asa Briggs notes, was against the secularist tide of society, but which Reith saw as his duty to resist (Briggs 1995, 249).

Diego Contreras tackles the question of how contemporary journalism deals with complex issues. His case study is of the hostile international press coverage of a

theological document, *Dominus Iesus*, which was published in 2000 by the Catholic Church. This document was authored by the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, and in many ways pre-figured the much larger row following his (by now as Pope Benedict XVI) 2006 speech at the University of Regensburg. *Dominus Iesus* was a highly complex theological discussion of some basic tenets of Roman Catholicism and deals with a Catholic response to one of the features of modern culture and society, namely relativism. Journalism regularly tackles complex, difficult, technical topics and Contreras argues that part of the response to *Dominus Iesus* was predetermined not only by prior attitudes to religion in general and Catholicism in particular but also by journalistic conventions and news values which highlight, for example, conflict.

Timothy White then examines the nexus of relationships between religion, the state and national identity in Ireland from the nineteenth century to the present. As Irish nationalism developed, he argues, for various reasons there was an ever closer alignment between Irish nationalism and Roman Catholicism. When the modern Irish state was founded, this alignment continued. This gave the Church enormous influence over policy making in very many areas. However, in tandem with increasing prosperity, the last twenty years or so have seen Ireland become a more secular society and the power of the Church, at least in political life, has diminished.

If in some parts of the world religious belief or, more properly, adherence to a particular organised form of worship may be under pressure, in others, notably in the developing South, the established religions are expanding. Dominica Dipio's article gives us a picture of one area of battle, between traditional African belief and Christianity, as exemplified in Nigerian home videos. These films are Manichean morality tales, she argues, opposing good versus evil, with good always triumphant. Many espouse a Pentecostal version of Christianity which, she argues, has similarities with African tradition and is finding fertile ground in the continent, and Nigeria in particular. These films can be seen as part of a vibrant popular culture through which Africans try to reconcile old and new belief systems.

Erica Baffelli examines the emergence of *Kofuku no Kagaku*, or the Science of Happiness, an example of one of the so-called 'new' religions which have sprung up in modern Japan. In fact there are four classifications of new religions, depending on the period of their emergence from late in the nineteenth century until today: new religions (*shinshūkyō*), new-new religions (*shinshinshūkyō*), new spiritual movements (*shinreisei undō*), or spiritual world (*seishin sekaï*). *Kofuku no Kagaku* is one of the latest of these, being founded in 1986. Since the 1970s, Japan has experienced a re-awakening of interest in religious belief – something of a religious boom (*shūkyō būmu*) in fact, combining traditional Buddhist doctrine with outside influences – from the predictions of Nostradamus to the New Age

writings of Hollywood film star, Shirley MacLaine. One of the features of these new religions is their close association with the development of what has become known as the Information Society. Media strategy has been crucial to the emergence of these new religions, but since the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo metropolitan subway by members of the *Aum Shinrikyō* group in 1995 the media examines the media performance of the *Kofuku no Kagaku* and their charismatic leader in the light of this turning point in the relationship between the media and religions in Japan.

Finally, I should like to pay tribute to my friend and colleague Tarik Sabry, who was the driving force behind this particular academic venture. He has edited WPCC since its inception in 2004, but has now moved on to launch a new journal – *The Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*. He remains on our editorial board so his intellect and energy are thankfully not lost to us. We all wish Tarik the very best in his new venture.

References

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