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How Do the Media Affect the Image of God and the Ideas about Religion?

Abstract

The study will focus on the relationship between the representations of God's image in the Bible and on film. How is transcendence presented and what is Christology like in film production in the time that is either negligent of the religious and the transcendental or tries to reduce it to a matter of human intellect? How does Christ differ in the films by Pasolini, Zeffirelli and Gibson? Can Jesus Christ the Saviour be replaced by a popular action movie hero? The paper will deal with religion from another perspective, namely, it will try to see whether religion has truly disappeared from the public life as it is sometimes assumed. How were the ideas about God used or misused by some politicians and leaders, such as Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, and George W. Bush? What to do if the media enable us to perceive how religion is made political and how politics is made religionist?

Key words

media, film, religion, politics, image of God, audiovisual translation

Introduction

A characteristic of the culture of Antiquity was the centrality of the religious sphere, whereas the culture of the Modern age is characterized by focusing on a human being. The intellectual as well as cultural horizon has changed from theological to immanently anthropological. Consequently, a considerable part of modern culture consciously distances itself from religious contents. In a book review published in *The Globe and Mail*, writer Kenneth Bagnell observed that "if you are working in network television and you admit to faith, you should carry a note from a psychiatrist – preferably three – attesting to your normalcy" (Higgins 2000, 8).

Due to the secularisation of the last three centuries, it seems that the religious dimension itself does not have an obvious public effect; on the other hand, it is still persistently apparent – not least due to the media – behind everything that cannot be rationally and scientifically proved, and whenever the meaning of human life or the issue of power is concerned. In the background, there is an invisible harmony between religion, media and culture – not in the sense of melodious harmony and accordance, but in the sense of the Greek verb *harmodzo*, meaning *I connect,* and the derived noun *connectedness*.

How is the power of the media expressed, and how does it affect the image of God and religious ideas? We shall look at the issue from two aspects that appear different, but are in fact rather related: from the perspective of the history

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of Jesus Christ on film, on the one hand, and from the perspective of uses and abuses of God talk by some prominent contemporary politicians and leaders, on the other hand.

The image of God in general

Man cannot live without notions and images. Individual and common human experience shows that people have a notion or an image of any idea, however abstract it may be. Images are based on personal experience and are frequently related to certain knowledge. The expression 'the image of God' does not refer to pictures, images or icons of God, but to our human, mental notion of God, either conscious or subconscious. Our image of God is influenced by the pictures that we see, and even more strongly by various positive and negative experiences with people and events, as well as by religious teachings. Images prevent dry notions from prevailing. They enable us to feel and grasp the mystery hidden in every sentence, even in the most abstract one.

"The connection between the notion and the image is essential to human existence. When the connection is lost, the intensity of thinking, living and acting decreases as well." (Platovnjak 2008, 8)

Let us look at some of the most common images of God in contemporary man. The impersonal image prevails: God as "energy". For someone who imagines God as energy, God is present everywhere and acts in everything, but it is impossible to establish a personal relationship with a God that does not have a face. When we say God is "a mystery", mental images can vary. One may imagine God as a person, different from any human being, but still a person with whom one can establish a trustful, respectful, personal relationship. One may also imagine God as "something" strange, unreachable, unknown, even "something" to fear, and one tends to reject God rather than attempt to establish any kind of relationship.

There are various images representing God "the Father", although we all use the same word. All of us – mainly subconsciously – project onto this image our own experience with our father or another person that influenced our childhood. Some see God as "the judge" who awards the good and punishes the evil, so they tremble and respect Him because they are afraid of punishment. Others see Him as the last resort, someone to turn to when we feel absolutely powerless and have no one else to count on. Each of us has a different notion of "God Almighty", depending on our experience of "almightiness".[1]

The image of Jesus Christ the God in the Bible

Religious teachings depict a certain – rather accomplished – image of God; the media popularise the "chosen" image. The historical personality of Jesus of Nazareth is presented by ancient writers, especially the authors of the biblical New Testament, which is a special medium for faith. Jesus Christ is the basic message of all the four Gospels. This is the news on the incarnation of God, on His sufferings, death and resurrection. This central message is common to all Gospels, and it also represented a criterion for determining the canonicity, which eliminated several so-called apocryphal texts created in the first centuries. Exegetic analysis shows that very early there existed the core of Jesus' sayings and events that were written down, which were later adopted by all the evangelists. An important part of these written records was probably

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the event related to multiplying bread and Jesus' explanation of the secret of bread, which the four evangelists accurately report on.

The four evangelists were conveying the message to different target audiences, which resulted in the collection of four Gospels, i.e. the complete New Testament. The message of the incarnation of God was shocking to the people of the first century A.D.; the apostles, Jesus' disciples, attempted to formulate the message in the context of the mentality prevailing at the time. Consequently, the Gospels according to Mark and Luke address a pagan setting, while those according to Matthew and John speak to an established Jewish environment.

The Gospel according to Mark addresses the people, Christians of Rome, and emphasizes the divinity and the extraordinary power of Jesus. It portrays Him in the way He is perceived by the people following the path of faith. It focuses on the formation of the disciples who develop while discovering the secret of Jesus and the image of God in bread. In fact, bread represents Jesus and His words. If bread is Jesus, then the logic of the Gospel according to Mark requires that sooner or later also his disciples become bread; not only will they distribute bread, but will have to let themselves be distributed like bread.

Luke addresses pagans with a wider spiritual and cultural horizon, and he, therefore, uses a more narrative manner; he uses wisdom of the folk in parables and stories and shows Jesus in His social endeavours. "This model centres in the image of the righteous God of justice and freedom who calls the faithful to action on behalf of the poor and powerless" (Eaton Blair 2001, 18).

The Gospel according to Matthew speaks to Jews and aims to present Jesus as the One materialising the expectations of the people and the longing of the Old Testament: that they should be the real God's people and that God should be with them. "It is the most down to earth and closest to the problems of the historical period in which Jesus lived" (Stack 1970, 37). Matthew guides the readers towards searching for something higher, and through the novelty of blessings to overcome the narrow pharisaic mentality. His other focus is to exceed fixed ideas and images of God by constantly questioning the origins and the essentials.

John the Evangelist speaks to the community of Christians in which there is no doubt about the recognition of Jesus as the Son of God, but the understanding of His human dimension disappears, endangering the human and social aspect of the teachings of the Gospel.

"The central image in this approach is the God of goodness and faithfulness who loves us. This God judges but redeems; God no longer condemns but forgives" (Eaton Blair 2001, 19).

The image of Christ on film

For many people, the Gospels are first a film and only afterwards a book. When viewers of the film proceed to read the book, the narrative of the film

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The rather tabloid-like full title of the research project is: *God in Sørlandet – more friend and less almighty?* There are many examples in their studies that God is depicted primarily as a loving and caring God, and that there are few examples where Christianity is presented in a dualistic way, that is with a strong emphasis on the alternatives of either salvation or perdition what was often seen in the golden age of the revivalist movements, say from 1870 to the 1960. A good-hearted, kind and helpful God seems to be nowadays the favourite God of the region's in Norway predominant liberal newspapers, according to discourse analyses carried out in the *God in Sørlandet* project. Cf. P. Repstad, "A Softer God and a More Positive Anthropology: Changes in a Religiously Strict Region in Norway", *Religion, An International Journal* 39, Issue 2, (2009), 126–132.

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naturally becomes a filter. It is important to understand the conditions enabling the interpretation of the biblical text in an audiovisual form. This is even more important because for many people films are almost the only way of becoming acquainted with the Scripture.

Pre-understanding of the Bible, in a way transformed by the media, film and television, is rather demanding at present, as biblical symbolism is not something familiar. It is, therefore, extremely important how the "seventh art" translates and interprets the Bible, and more specifically, in our case, the life of Jesus. Some call it the "Christological cinema" (Viganò 2005, 19). In our research, we are not directly interested in films that only vaguely touch the life of Jesus, e.g. *The Sweet Life* (Federico Fellini, 1959), *The Last Temptation of Christ* (Martin Scorsese, 1988), but we focus on stories about Jesus on film, and there are almost one hundred and forty of them.

In fact, it is Hollywood that has constantly used the personality of Christ in cinematic spectacles for a whole century, counting on the profit that such biographic films undoubtedly bring. Gigantism and influential use of technology paved the path for the figure of Jesus that was initially freed from all bad and unpleasant traits and wrapped in impeccable morals, as in *The Greatest Story of All Time* by George Stevens from 1965.

On the other hand, in the history of film, Christianity has often been presented in an ugly and rough form, and new interpretations of Christ have appeared: political, as in *King of the Kings* by Nicholas Ray in 1961, musical, as in *Jesus Christ Superstar* by Andrew Lloyd Webber in 1973, and non-conformist, even hippie-like, as in the work of Norman Jewison.

In the Italian environment, the life of Christ was interpreted by various directors whose depiction of the image of God followed their own poetical and ideological orientations. Undoubtedly, the two who captured most attention were F. Zeffirelli – in spite of the dramaturgical limitations – and P. Pasolini (Beylot 1996, 111–120), who distantiated himself from Hollywood biographical movies and showed poor Christ with baroque vitality. Pasolini's film from 1964 faithfully follows the Scriptures and portrays Christ as a revolutionist in slow, but firm and realistic rhythms, which are not mystical. Moreover, Jesus is a man with a distinct, yet delicately expressed physical aspect, with a strong emphasis on mysticality and vitality, presented through timeless humanism. In Zeffirelli's image of Christ from 1977, the emphasis lies on the beauty that developed primarily in the art of the Renaissance. From His baptism on, Zeffirelli's Christ is a perfect icon, almost as if He had just stepped down from one of the 17th century paintings of Guercino or Reni. The director used a clear anti-reformist type of Jesus' face, which still remains, more or less unchanged, in our general awareness.

The modern translation of the message of the Gospels into the story of the contemporary society often proves to be the best method of introduction to the image of Christ. Works with a trace of scandal also arouse a lot of reactions, e.g. *Jesus of Montreal* by Denys Arcand from 1989, opening the door for a heterodox approach and allegory, playing with danger between contemporary everyday reality and the narrative of the Gospels. The *Garden of Eden* by Alessandro D'Alatri from 1998 reconstructs the unknown years of Jesus – from the age of twelve to thirty – of which no accounts exist in the Bible. These mysterious years offer countless possible interpretations, ranging from historical anchorage to imaginary inventions (Baugh 2001, 719–760).

A true media example of Jesus is Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* from 2004, where we follow the suffering Christ during the last twelve hours of

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His life (Viganò 2004). In an exceptionally dramatic manner, Gibson portrays the incarnated Son of God – the image of the suffering God – who is capable of withstanding physical and spiritual torture like no ordinary man could. Intensive and bloody violence in the film is not merely based on the Gospels, but also to a large extent on the visions of the mystic A. Emmerich (Boulet 2004, 173–180). The film clearly rejects the gnostic view of incarnation and presents an image of God who became human. The suffering in the film, therefore, brings the image of perfect and infinite God's love, and at the same time symbolises the human sins that have to be borne by the Son of God, the Saviour (Garcia 2004, 137–150; Chattaway 2004, 121–133).

Although it seemed that this extremely resounding film, in which Gibson responded to romantic iconography by choosing and showing Christ's mutilated body following the example of Northern iconography of the Crucifixion by Mathias Grünewald, will not be immediately followed by new films about Jesus, it can be established that to the making of movies about Jesus, there is no end. In the first three months of year 2006 alone: for example, *Son of Man*, which casts a black man as Christ and sets his life in modern South Africa, got positive reviews at Sundance. Next film in 2007 was *Lost Tomb of Jesus* by Simcha Jacobovichi, which makes a case that the 2000-year-old Tomb of the Ten Ossuaries belonged to the family of Jesus of Nazareth. *Jesus, the Spirit of God* in 2007, an Iranian movie that follows the traditional tale of Jesus as it is accepted by Muslims. Nader Talebzadeh, the director, sees his movie as an Islamic answer to Western productions like Mel Gibson's 2004 blockbuster *The Passion of the Christ*. *Aquarian Gospel* by William Sees Keenan in 2009 portrays Jesus as a holy man and teacher inspired by a myriad of eastern religions in India. The *Aquarian Gospel* takes its name from a century-old book that examined Christianity's eastern roots and is in its 53rd reprint.

Audiovisual translation of the image of God

The text of the Bible is a medium through which readers explore the image of God; a film based on the biblical tradition is a medium of the medium. The fact that film is extremely powerful in modern society is proved by the growing desire for film. Films are attractive because of their technical possibilities to transport the viewer miraculously into an imaginary world. Documentaries show the viewers the reality of time and place. Under mutual influence, technologies and film have cooperated in accomplishing, developing, importing emotions, sounds, music, natural colours, even three-dimensional view – everything that can lead the viewers into a live scene. It needs to be pointed out that, besides technological accomplishment, psychological laws play a very powerful role in films. Viewers are introduced into transferring their ego with its psychical characteristics into the personality of the actor, thus making their own dreams, wishes or fears come true in a peculiar way. The more a film stimulates such processes, the more successful and convincing it is. Simultaneously, it makes the viewers feel important in that they begin to foresee the outcome of the story, which also brings special pleasure.

When viewers approach the language of the film, they will find that it works as a ramified system following the complicated network of social knowledge. The film embodies individual configurations of social knowledge and creates a range of rhetorical and narrative relations among them. Finally, through

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examples and composed text, the film projects such social knowledge back on the society. On the one hand, the film triggers the problem of confrontation between various kinds of social knowledge, opinions and beliefs, and on the other hand it raises the question of realisation of the text on which it is based (Ruggero 1999, 7–9). Due to all of the above, the text must somehow die in order to bring new freshness and certain deeper aspects.

Naturally, the question arises whether films are indeed audiovisual translations of biblical texts.

"We, readers of the beginning of the third millennium, (…) are undoubtedly different and have a notion of the world and things which is different from the notion that people had some centuries or millenniums ago. This also applies to translators who are familiar with the original (…) language, but remain people anchored in their own time and space and cannot do anything but use their best effort and attempt to make a presentation which will be permeated with the original and which will leave a trace in their writing." (Bourlot 2002, 14)

Consequently, an audiovisual translation of the text expands the possibilities of existence of the text, or, "if the task of translating a certain text corresponds to strengthening its message, it is crucial that we should try to understand how the text can be reformulated so that it proves to be faithful in two directions: to its source as well as to its receiver" (Bussetti 1998, 195). The number of problems increases because of the fact that the link between the biblical text and the new audiovisual interpretations is intersemiotic and that a transformation is involved, causing language signs to be interpreted through a system of non-language signs.

We can see that there are three types of challenges related to the possibility of translating biblical texts into audiovisual texts. The first problem, which is especially important, has a semantic nature, and refers to semantic expansion of elements and to the fact that they are impossible to understand only in one way. The second problem is semiotic and refers to the communicative target of the text itself. This means that every text contains a certain kind of attitude which must be maintained in order to remain faithful to the text. The third problem is pragmatic, as each text is created for the public according to exact forms of use, which makes it indispensable that after having seen the deviation from the biblical text, we shall focus on the method of use offered by the film (Viganò 2005, 16).

In the radical meaning of the term, to translate means to rewrite. On the semantic level, to translate means to transfer one constellation of meaning into another within the same code, bearing in mind that any faithful translation is partially also unfaithful. Besides, there is the burden of history, changing the manner of use and bringing new characteristics into focus.

On the semiotic level, we can see that

"… each act of communication, each text, regardless of its nature, or each chosen means of communication, will always reflect an image of its author, will always contain the profile of the receiver, and will always include the suggestion of an attitude. In other words, the text is created in such a way that it offers its receiver the instruction for use… cognitive, emotional, motivational and priority processes … and in each case, there exists a communicational goal with a special purpose." (Bourlot 1998, 20)

Any text is born for a certain audience and for certain manners of use. Manners of use of a text vary, not only from place to place, but also with time. This is particularly true in the case of our audiovisual translation that would be inconceivable for the original text of the Bible. On this level, in order to evaluate the film translation of the biblical story, we need to consider the par-

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allel text, i.e. the elements indicating the manner of use of the film. These elements comprise a wide range of messages: from promotional spots to director's statements, from reviews to DVD covers, i.e. everything that is available to the viewers and represents an instruction for the use of the work itself.

When presenting the life of Jesus, we can distinguish among three models: reinterpretative, degenerative and transfigurative.

"The first model can be defined as a reinterpretative and actualisational one: a biblical text or symbol is taken, re-read and transposed into the frame of new and different historical and cultural coordinates. The second model should also be defined: here, biblical information is processed in a manipulative way, so the model can be defined as degenerative (…) The Bible becomes merely a pretence to speak about something else. The third model is transfigurative, and here art succeeds in making the hidden echo of the holy text visible and retelling it in all its credibility." (Bourlot and Viganò 1997, 50)

Battle between the media and religion?

On a global scale, Europe appears to be the exceptional case (Davie 2002). This exceptional status is often theorised in terms of the secularisation narrative, the validity of which divides the scholarly community. Still defended by some (Bruce 2002 and Lehnmann 2002), it is disputed by the others (Pollack 2003), while others have suggested more differentiated scenarios that take account of different societal levels, countries, cultural contexts, historical processes, age groups, and other factors. Some even posit the return or re-emergence of religion (Polak 2006, 22–47), while others find that secularisation and sacralisation go hand in hand (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 77–128). Single, unidirectional models may turn out not to be applicable (Greelly 2003, xi). Apart from secularisation, there are rivaling sociological narratives of the place of religion in the present age such as the rise of fundamentalisms, religious competition and consumption, globalization, religious reorganisation, and religious individualization (Spickard 2006, 13–29). Evidently these general narratives cannot all claim validity for the particular case in Europe. Consider the Netherlands, where religious tensions continue to surface, and France, where the law of 2004 dictated that Muslim women are not allowed to wear the chador and Christians are not allowed to wear prominent crosses.

Today, most radical religious views which achieve a hearing in the media sphere come from non-institutional sources. The authoritarian pattern of discourse by the priest (the pastor, the rabbi, the imam) who questions political leaders from his pulpit is very rare. Instead interventions in the media in the name of democratic values (pluralism, freedom of speech) are far more legitimate.

Confronted with radical rhetoric, religious hierarchies oscillate between reproach, obliging silence and embarrassment. The case of *Radio Maryja*, which contributed to the rise to power of the Law and Justice Party in Poland, is interesting, because it is a rare configuration where a private religious actor can be considered to have played a major role in crystallising the nature of the political game. Despite the nationalist and anti-Semitic discourse of *Radio Maryja*, the Catholic Church in Poland remained too divided to express explicit disapproval of this powerful and awkward ally (Ramet 2006, 133–134) before the visit of Pope Benedict XVI in May 2006. Elections in 2007 showed political support for most extremist Catholic fringes. In the same year, similarly aggressive interventions by the Spanish clergy against the Prime Minister Zapatero, ended in failure.

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The role of the mass media has been central, both as producers of an image of otherness attributed to some religious groups (often the Muslims) (Lorcerie 2005) and as arenas where different versions of freedom confront each other around religious issues. The Danish cartoons crisis provides a paradigm case of the alternation of cooperation or conflict in relations between religion and media. At first sight, everything seems to make for opposition between the media as symbols of modernity, structured by the imperatives of creating the event and the quest for novelty, and religion, defined by tradition and relying on repetition and continuity. However, these are two vectors of community-building whose interactions reveal the changes in the nature of social bonds (Bréchon and Willaime 2000).

From its mission and its nature, every church has to engage in communication in order to maintain or to spread its faith. It broadcasts its words across society through its discourse, its rituals and symbols, thereby eliciting the involvement of its believers. Religion is both the means and the end of its message: the medium truly is the message. By comparison, the activities of the mass media have been defined as rituals of secular modern religions in the nation-building processes (Anderson 1983), as the reading of newspapers and, later, the watching of the same TV programmes (Dayan and Katz 1992) act as ceremonials where the community of doing can have the capacity to create (or not) a community of being. Not long ago the terms *ritual* and *media* would have been regarded as labels for separate cultural domains: the one sacred, the other secular. Today, both notions, *ritual* and *media*, are understood quite differently. Either strategy, segregating or equating, oversimplifies the complex ways in which media and ritual are related (Grimes 2002).

On the other hand, as cyber-religion is expanding daily, the internet may be a source of information, a new way to obtain sacred texts conveniently and quickly, but can be far more than that. Websites offer the possibility of making a spiritual break in a busy agenda and thus are in full harmony with the new individualised and *ad hoc* demand which prevails in the religious marketplace. For example: yet in 2000 the French portal *Notre Dame du Web* proposed a retreat on line, with advice how to pray by mail and to explore one's faith by readings.

Religious spams inviting users of the internet to pray are more and more numerous, even if it represents less than one per cent of the total of unsolicited messages (Majendie 2005). Sociological analyses of the internet, then, confirm that virtual communication can efficiently underlie existing social patterns, but not replace them, nor create social cohesion from scratch nor develop a Habermasian public space (Oates et al. 2006). New technologies cannot affect decisively the societal trend of religion.

Regulation systems of religion in the media are different in each European country, depending on the historical matrix of the articulation between church and state (Madeley and Enyedi 2003), but converge on some principles which both facilitate and limit religious freedom. The principles are: freedom of expression, respect for religion and equality between faiths, promotion of autoregulation for the secular media with the participation of religious groups, the possibility of having religious media provided that the law is respected, the consideration of all religions in programming, no religious advertising and no commercial advertisements during religious broadcasts (Doe 2004, 314–315).

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Churches have faced an alternative when dealing with the media: either to accept the opportunity structures offered by a pluralist society, with the obligation to make religious meanings and symbols available for anybody within the limits fixed by law; or to demand the accurate interpretation and a respectful treatment of sacred traditions and beliefs. The first choice (the "let it be" option) has the advantage of maximising the chance of reaching a large audience, thereby taking advantage of the ancestral and diffuse presence of religion in all parts of social life, at the risk of trivialising and distorting the religious message. The second choice (the "be careful what you are saying" option) is likely to ensure the preservation of the dogmatic harmony and cohesion of a core group of believers, notwithstanding possible conflicts with more liberal ones contesting the right of institutions to control the sacred. The danger is that of limiting the social scope of the discourse to those who are already convinced and of accelerating the withdrawal of religion from the common culture of a given society.

Media, religion and politics

A phenomenon similar to the translation of the words of God into film, can actually be seen in the "translation" of religion into politics, and consequently in special "audiovisualisation" of religion in today's less religious society. When we use the term *less religious society*, new questions arise: do we refer only to Europe or to the whole world? Will America be religious and Europe secular (Berger et al. 2008)? Increasingly, the religious practices people engage in and the ways they talk about what is meaningful or sacred in their lives take place in the context of a media culture that is both avowedly secular and relentlessly commercial.

When President G. W. Bush announced, shortly after the September 11, 2001 terrorism attacks against the United States, that he wanted to lead a *crusade* against terrorism, this word *crusade* spawned alarm, anger, and resentment throughout the Muslim world. Lieutenant General W. G. Boykin used God talk to explain the mission, motivation, and confidence of success with which he approached his military charge. Boykin spoke of his mission in terms of a clash between the Judeo-Christian values of a Christian nation and the work of Satan. Dressed in full military uniform the general declared: "We in the army of God, in the house of God, kingdom of God have been raised for such a time as this" (Cooper 2003, 126). Exuding confidence regarding the ultimate success of his work, Boykin reflected on an earlier victory in Somalia, explaining: "I knew my God was bigger than his, I knew that my God was a real God and his was an idol."[2]

Osama bin Laden and other terrorists also justify their actions with divine motivations. In June 2002, he divided the world into believers and unbelievers. Even later, he often spoke with God's name on his lips, summoning faithful Muslims who believe in God to join him in his plans with all determination.[3]

Early in the presidential campaign of 2000, then vice president of the United States Al Gore indicated that answering the question: "What would Jesus do?"

2
This comment, made during a Celebrate America Event in Good Shepherd Church, Sandy, Oregon, 21 June 2003, was broadcast on NBC News.

3
Osama bin Laden's statements dividing the world into believers and infidels were repeated in recorded comments that were broadcast on Al-Jazeera television on 7 October 2001.

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would be an integral component in his process of political decision-making. Bush, at that time the governor of Texas, cited Christ as the most important and influential philosopher in his life. Later, simply put, through a variety of expressions, more than once Bush has declared: "God is on our side" (Gaddy 2005, 43–48). When he became the president, he was convinced that God "called" him to run for president: "God wants me to do this, and I must do it", he had told a minister named J. Robison (Mansfield 2003, 108–109).

A proliferation of God talk generally and among politicians especially is altering views of democracy, jeopardizing appreciation for religious pluralism, and even threatening the stability of the historic constitutional guarantee of religious liberty. With traditional boundaries between religion and government blurred if not successfully erased in the psyche of a large segment of the American public, it is little wonder that God talk is now, thanks to the media, so much a part of government as well as religion. Reciprocally, the politisation of religion and the religification of politics encourage more God talk (Gaddy 2005, 50).

Conclusion

Since its beginnings, cinema has dealt with the image of God in the person of Jesus Christ, which is reflected by the fact that there are almost one hundred and forty films presenting Bible texts in one way or another. If it is true that the seventh art is a mirror of the time, we may state that contemporary man has intensively dealt with the image of God and has met Him in every movie where He is presented in a special visual manner. By all means, each of these presentations depends on the attitude and feeling of individual directors and actors, who reflect the time and partially the culture in which the film was created. Similarly, the cinema has always presented the Gospels to the audience in images that in a way already existed in the general awareness of the people, but adding its new creative inspiration. An example is the director F. Zecca, who in 2007 launched the film *La vie et la passion de Jésus Christ*, inspired by "pictures taken from classical Renaissance iconography, let us say Leonardo da Vinci" (Laura 1997, 27). This method ensures that the viewers will be satisfied and makes it possible for them to become emotionally involved with the story.

When we look generally at the relation between mass media and religion we find out that religion frequently appears either in a stereotypical and old-fashioned way reflecting the perceptions of a general audience less and less familiar with religious tradition, or as a particularism rendered banal like others. New structures of opportunity can be found in specialised channels and new technologies; in both cases, religion can successfully maintain existing faith communities or facilitate contemporary individualised and free spiritual practice. The media have also been the site of conflicts around religious issues, between competing interpretations of freedom of speech and respect for religious sensitivities. National configurations differ from each other, but a common set of regulatory principles exists and it may be possible to discern a dominant trend toward the acceptance of relativism and the rule of law by religious and political actors.

Religion has both private and public faces, and media, while often consumed privately, is a very dominant feature of its public sphere. When religious rhetoric is made into a form of propaganda[4] that establishes a specific position on a political issue as the equivalent of a moral-spiritual conviction, simple dif-

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ferences of political opinion can be labeled as evidence of questionable faith
and also of the abuse of the image of God. Once engaged in healthy political
debate for the purpose of clarifying varying points of view to achieve mutual
understanding and to move toward consensus or compromise, now people are
defending a religious or moral dogma about which, at least, those on one side
of the debate believe there is no room for give-and-take without a betrayal of
conscience. The more the religion is established and associated with power,
the more it is in danger of decline.

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4

God talk could be employed as a studied stra-
tegy for advencing public policy. For exam-
ple: during a senatorial debate on President
George W. Bush's proposal for massive tax
cuts as a way of adressing a faltering econo-
my, Senator Mary L. Landrieu declared: "God
wants you to vote for this amendment! "

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Erika Prijatelj

Kako mediji utječu na predodžbu Boga i ideje o religiji?

Sažetak

Ova će se studija usredotočiti na odnos između načina predočavanja Boga u Bibliji i na filmu. Kako se prikazuje transcendencija i kako kristologija izgleda u filmskoj produkciji u vremenu koje se ili nemarno odnosi prema religioznom i transcendentalnom ili ga pokušava sažeti u doseg ljudskog intelekta? Kako se Krist razlikuje u filmovima koje su režirali Pasolini, Zeffirelli i Gibson? Može li se Isus Krist Spasitelj zamijeniti popularnim filmskim akcijskim junakom? Istraživanje će religiju istražiti i iz jedne druge perspektive, naime je li ona doista nestala iz javnoga života kao što se ponekad pretpostavlja. Kako ideje o Bogu upotrebljavaju ili zloupotrebljavaju neki političari ili vođe, kao što su Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, George W. Bush? Što učiniti kad nam mediji omoguće da uočimo politizaciju religije i religizaciju politike?

Ključne riječi

mediji, film, religija, politika, predodžba Boga, audiovizualni prijevod

Erika Prijatelj

Was für Auswirkungen haben die Medien auf das Gottesbild und die Religionsbegriffe?

Zusammenfassung

Die Studie macht das Verhältnis zwischen den Darstellungen des Gottes in der Bibel und jenen im Film zum Fokus. Auf welche Art und Weise wurde die Transzendenz präsentiert und wie die Christologie in der Filmproduktion erscheint, zu Zeiten, die sich als nachlässig gegenüber dem Religiösen sowie Transzendentalen zeigen, beziehungsweise beides auf eine Sache des menschlichen Intellekts zu reduzieren gedenken? Wie verschieden ist Christus in den Filmen Pasolinis, Zeffirellis und Gibsons? Kann Jesus Christus, der Heiland, durch einen populären Aktionsfilmhelden ersetzt werden? Die Arbeit setzt sich mit der Religion aus einem anderen Blickwinkel auseinander, nämlich versuche ich festzustellen, ob die Religion tatsächlich aus dem öffentlichen Leben verschwunden ist wie mitunter angenommen. In welcher Manier wurden die Ideen von Gott von bestimmten Politikern und Führern gebraucht bzw. missbraucht, wie zum Beispiel Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein und George W. Bush? Was gilt es zu tun, wenn uns die Medien ermöglichen, wahrzunehmen, wie die Religion politisiert und die Politik religionisiert wird?

Schlüsselwörter

Medien, Film, Religion, Politik, Gottesbild, audiovisuelle Übersetzung

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E. Prijatelj, How Do the Media Affect the
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Erika Prijatelj

Comment les médias influencent-ils la représentation de Dieu et les idées sur la religion ?

Résumé

Cette étude se concentrera sur le rapport entre la représentation de Dieu dans la Bible et celle dans le cinéma. Comment la transcendance est-elle représentée et à quoi la christologie ressemble-t-elle dans la production cinématographique d'une époque qui, soit néglige le religieux et le transcendental, soit tente de le réduire à un cadre intellectuel ? Comment le Christ diffère-t-il dans les films de Pasolini, de Zeffirelli ou de Gibson ? Jésus Christ le Sauveur peut-il être remplacé par le héros d'un film d'action ? Cette étude examinera également la religion d'un autre point de vue, celui de la question de savoir si elle a véritablement disparu de la vie publique comme il est parfois supposé. Comment les idées sur Dieu sont-elles utilisées ou malmenées par certains hommes politiques et dirigeants, à l'instar d'Oussama ben Laden, Saddam Hussein ou George W. Bush ? Que faire lorsque les médias nous permettent de nous rendre compte de la politisation de la religion et la « religionalisation » de la politique ?

Mots-clés

médias, cinéma, politique, représentation de Dieu, traduction audiovisuelle