

Introduction

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There can be no doubt about the high relevance of the public media for the image we have of religion in general and certain religions in particular. News shows on television constantly supply us with pictures of “Islamist terrorism” and convey the impression that religions are mainly sources of conflict in the world, from Northern Ireland or Sudan to Pakistan and the Middle East. The world-wide catastrophic effects of the Muhammad cartoons or the burning of the Qur’an by an American pastor would not have been possible without the world wide web of the internet. Often, the images of religion conveyed by the media seem biased, one-sided or even distorted.

The media have also changed the character of even very traditional religions such as Christianity or Islam. The American “Electronic Churches” seem to find their Muslim counterparts in the popular TV preachers of Arab countries whose mixture of a pragmatic Islam and modern life style apparently appeals to young people. Even a superficial look into history can teach us, though, that media – in a wide sense of the word – have always played an important role for religions and have been prominent subjects of theological and ethical discourse. Since religious realities such as “God” or “a higher world” are not accessible through our human senses, media – e.g. pictures, scriptures or rituals – are needed to symbolize such realities. Also, especially for revelation religions, media are indispensable for passing on the revelation story to the next generation, thus aiming to ignite the same kind of religious experience in them that the original religious community had. The great historical controversies in the Abrahamic religions on the use of images and on the right hermeneutics of holy scriptures show that in the tension between media use and media criticism these religions have over centuries developed a media competence that may also prove helpful for present-day challenges posed by “media culture”. Yet, to this very day some religions or religious currents tend to restrict the free expression through, and free circulation of, media and thus come into conflict with basic human rights.

Being aware of all these various links between religions and the media, it seems puzzling that they have rarely found due attention in academic discourse. On the part of media science and media education religions are mostly neglected, and on the part of theory and research on intercultural or interreligious dialogue and learning the significance of the media is neglected.

The present volume aims to address this deficit. Most of its contributions were presented as major papers at an international conference – the 10th Nuremberg Forum – in Nuremberg, Germany, in 2010. Others have been added in order to complement certain aspects. The first section of the book contains analyses of significant intersections of media and religions from the perspectives of various disciplines, mainly philosophical, jurisprudential and journalistic. The second part offers perspectives for a theological understanding of media, for media ethics, media education and religious education; it ends with two proposals for standards for addressing religion(s) in journalism and in school textbook production respectively.

In his opening contribution under *Section 1 (Analyses)* UN Special Rapporteur for the Freedom of Religion and Belief, Professor *Heiner Bielefeldt*, inquires into the *relationship between this human right and the right of freedom of expression*. In the conflicts that frequently arise between the two, many people are inclined to think that they are symptomatic of an insurmountable general antagonism and that one has to decide which of the two is more important in a concrete case, or at least that one has to find some sort of a compromise. Bielefeldt objects to such a view and demonstrates that the various human rights norms themselves are complementary in the sense that they mutually presuppose and mutually reinforce each other: “Whoever wants to support freedom of religion and belief, minority rights and anti-discrimination policies must also, to be credible, be committed to freedom of expression and opinion, and in general to a climate of open discussion. The same is true the other way around in that freedom of expression cannot be defended in a credible way without taking seriously the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.”

Law professor *Mathias Rohe*, as an expert in Islamic law, offers a substantial overview and analysis of *media legislation in several Islamic countries*. He has to conclude that even today in many parts of the Islamic world freedom of expression and especially freedom of belief are not in good shape, although there are some Muslim scholars and religious leaders who do speak out for these freedoms. In particular Rohe examines the *The Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam* of 1990, *The Arab Charter on Human Rights* of 2004 and the work of Afghan-Malaysian law scholar *Mohammed Hashim Kamali*, one of the few Islamic writers who has expanded on the right of freedom of expression.

The title of *Daniel Meier’s* contribution, *Looking for the Positive: Islam in the Media*, clearly indicates the problem he deals with. As a journalist and theologian, Meier draws on content analyses as well as empirical studies to show that the representation of Islam in Western media is not only frequently a distorted one, but also that it is highly controversial: “Evaluating the perception of Islam in the media often bears the hallmarks of a proxy fight between, put simplisti-

cally, the critics of Islam and Islam sympathisers.” In this fight, it is not easy for journalists to find a way that conforms with their own professional ethos. Meier sketches the criteria that journalists generally use to select and evaluate news material. He concludes by offering helpful ethical as well as practical perspectives.

Peter Philipp has been a journalist with leading German newspapers and radio stations and a long-time correspondent in the Middle East. Based on his rich experience he offers an illuminating analysis of *Anti-Semitism in the Middle Eastern Media*. He shows that anti-Semitism has never been a traditional part of Islam, but rather was imported by Islamic countries from Western and Eastern Christian countries after the founding of the state of Israel – which was the major starting point for anti-Semitic attitudes among the Arab nations. Philipp inquires into the consequences of the Arab spring in this respect, looks back to the implications of the 9/11 experience, analyses the anti-Semitic tendencies in Arab TV stations, and makes it clear that Iran is, to some extent, a special case among the Islamic states of the Middle East in that it distinguishes quite strictly between Jews – who enjoy a considerable degree of freedom inside Iran – and the state of Israel – that is fervently rejected as the satanic ally of the United States.

As indicated above, religions tend to be presented by the media as sources of conflict rather than of peace and reconciliation. *Markus A. Weingardt*, researcher at the Research Institute of the Protestant Academic Association, Heidelberg, and at the World Ethic Foundation in Tübingen, Germany, shows that this is a distorted view of religions. He draws our attention to the numerous *religious peace initiatives* that are mostly neglected by the media. In his book “Religion Macht Frieden” (Religion Makes Peace) Weingardt has collected a whole range of examples from several religions that he draws on in his contribution. He concludes by advancing concrete suggestions for what academics, politicians, religious communities and the media can do to improve the one-sided representation of religions in the media.

Norman Richardson, Head of Teaching & Learning in Religious Studies at Stranmillis University College in Belfast and Secretary of the Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum, exemplifies the significance of the relationship between media and religion for the Northern Irish context. In his contribution *Media and Religious Conflict in Northern Ireland* he sketches the challenges this conflict brings for intercultural learning. He vividly describes how media and journalists are in a constant danger of being instrumentalized even against their will, which makes journalistic work so difficult in Northern Ireland. Still, in a situation in which school education and religious education in it are mainly denominationally separate, Richardson expresses the hope that the media can help to promote

a religious literacy that includes mutual understanding between Protestants and Catholics.

Section 2 (Theological, Ethical and Educational Perspectives) begins with Jonathan Magonet's hermeneutical and systematic Jewish perspective on *The Ban on Images in a Media Culture Context*. Professor Magonet, who is a rabbi and the former director of the Leo Baeck Colleges of Jewish Studies, London, makes it clear that not only the ban on images in the Hebrew Bible, but even more its prophetic tradition and the Ten Commandments offer orientation points highly relevant to present media ethics. In particular, the Ninth Commandment, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor", that criticizes the "tale-bearing" and "gossip" that are "the bread and butter of the media". It is Magonet's conviction that the Jewish tradition can contribute to entertaining a "healthy skepticism about the ideas and opinions" that are presented daily in the media.

Saeid Edalatnejad, Assistant Professor at the Encyclopaedia Islamica Foundation in Tehran, Iran, introduces an *Islamic perspective on Pictures, Symbols and the Media*. He traces the history of the prohibition of producing and using representational arts containing living creatures in the Shiite tradition. He points out that the original primary reason for this prohibition was to avoid idolatry of other gods – which is no longer a great danger in present society. Consequently, recent Islamic religious ruling has been more liberal, allowing artists and film producers a certain degree of freedom. However, there are still restrictions that hamper the artistic development especially in cinematic art.

From a *Christian, Protestant perspective* Johanna Haberer, Professor of Christian journalism, reflects on *Media Ethics as Part of a Public Theology*. Starting with the hypothesis that Christianity is a "media religion" she argues for the richness of the Christian tradition and its experiences with media in a wide sense of the word. Based on this experience, Christian theology can make substantial contributions to present ethical issues around media culture. One key concept that Haberer uses to disclose characteristics of media as well as religion is that of "attention" or "attentiveness". Christian media ethics helps to focus on the important questions of who gets how much attention in our media culture, how ethical criteria for attention management can be developed and how neglected and socially deprived people can get more attention.

As professor of educational science and media education expert, Horst Nie-syto focuses on *Intercultural Education and the Media*. He shows that for the two presently dominant approaches of intercultural learning, the pedagogy of encounter and the conflict-oriented intercultural education, communication processes through media play an important role. Research findings on media and migration point to the challenges and chances that the media imply for the identity

formation and intercultural communication of young migrants. These findings reveal that in particular music and film in popular culture offer additional modes of expression for those young people who find it difficult to communicate in written language. This is one reason why media education inside and outside schools should be promoted with an emphasis on empowering young people to express themselves, communicate competently and critically evaluate their everyday media worlds.

From a *religious education perspective*, Manfred L. Pirner argues that *Media Culture and Interreligious Learning* are more closely intertwined than is usually presumed. He starts by conceptualizing interreligious learning on the basis of conceiving the main task of education as promoting the ability to *change perspectives*: different religions and world views offer specific perspectives on the world; religious education helps to become aware of one's own perspective as one among others and to reflect on it from an observer's perspective. It is precisely this change of perspectives, Pirner argues, that is also characteristic of media reception and media use. Media education and (inter)religious education thus overlap in their subject as well as in their objectives and should therefore go hand in hand.

In their text *Religion in Journalism*, the journalists and academics Daniel Meier and Peter Philipp advance a proposal for quality and ethical standards for how journalism can and should deal with religious topics. Together with them we hope that this proposal will promote the discussion of this topic among journalists, in newspapers, radio and television.

The second proposal, presented by Johannes Lähnemann, offers standards for *interreligious textbook research and development*. This text has been widely discussed already by a number of outstanding international experts on interreligious dialogue and school textbook research in the context of the Nuremberg Forum. Lähnemann points out the high significance of school textbooks in shaping the students' idea of religion as well as the teachers'. The academically well-argued standards can serve as concrete guidelines for textbook development and publishing and deserve wide dissemination.

Finally, we would like to express our sincere thanks to all the contributors to this volume. Thanks also go to Martin Prowse for his help with the translation of a number of original German texts, to the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg for their financial support of the translation and to the Peter Lang publishers for adopting the book into their programme. We hope that it will stimulate further discussion, research and good practice around this important topic.