



TRENDS IN WRITTEN RELIGIOUS MASS-MEDIA

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Abstract *Religious journalism is ritualist, presenting aspects of spirituality and faith in the form of a discourse about the inner world of each individual, addressed to the self. Today, by means of the written religious press, it is little probably to convert persons. The only visible effect is to establish connections between the members of the community and to be successful in the coherent mobilization of those respective groups. In the Romanian written press there is a wide discrepancy when it comes to approaching religious information, between the point of view of the church, which is based on the theological doctrine, and the viewpoint of journalism, which approaches the topic without going deep into the theological, ritualistic layer, but merely following the narrative thread.*

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1. Introduction

Religious journalism, in the great mass-media ensemble, has no privileged status and is treated most of time with inconsideration. The religious subjects do not constitute sensational news; the occasions when they make it to the paper are rare and even rarer are the moments when they hold the front page of newspapers. Nowadays, religion comes on the front page in strict connection to the terrorist attacks that confuse and startle the entire planet through the perplexity of the suicidal gestures and through religious fanaticism.

Religion, from the point of view of the journalism in search of sensational, is ritualistic, monotonous and without special events. "Religious journalism speaks of spirituality and faith and it is perceived as discussing about the inner world of each individual and this is not an issue pertaining to the group, but rather to the self" (Hoover S., 2008, p.36).

Religious journalism has no ample departments and no numerous staff, as the news, sports or even weather forecast have. The person employed to write religious articles may always be fired, if the economic reasons so dictate. Generally, in moments of economic growth, the media trusts can afford to financially support journalists specialists in theology, who can properly draft religious information, while in moments of crisis the press trusts let go of the services of

specialists, preferring to reproduce the religious information shown on the news flow. This unfortunate habit of the media trusts has a disastrous consequence on the quality of the information contained in the religious message sent to the readers. Following this defective media practice, the religious news have doubtful accuracy and they reach the public in a distorted and incorrect way, which deeply displeases the great dissatisfied public, which strongly opposes this approach.

In an opinion poll performed by Stewart M. Hoover (Hoover S., 2008, p.36), it was established that the public considers that religious information is more important than sport-related information and the number of readers and listeners is approximately equal, while their degree of satisfaction is completely different. The sports news are almost always on the front page of newspapers, while religious news almost never, except for the scandals involving as protagonists religious personalities or for information on the attacks of the extremist terrorist groups (Apostol M. S., 2012, p.39).

The status of religious journalism is nothing to be envied - in general, the religious subjects are not considered as being serious topics of debate, which to deserve the attention of the press and to benefit of preferential treatment, as the political, economic or sportive subjects. Of the same discriminatory treatment suffer the readers of these subjects, who are

labeled as bigots, anchored in the past and not very educated and, in conclusion, not interesting for the media trusts.

2. The religious structure of the Romanian readers

The influence of the religious mass-media over the population indicates the improbability that the persons will give up their own faith in the name of another, but research has proven that there is a tendency of individuals to embrace new religious elements belonging to other cultures and to bring them in their own faith and own system of values (Apostol M. S., 2012, p.75). At the same time, the quality of the religious journalistic material can also be discussed and it can only be analyzed in religious terms. It is impossible to compare the quality of the religious material of different religious confessions, it is strange to discuss in these terms. But rather in terms of clarity and ability to transmit the religious message. In fact, it was noticed that people have the tendency to choose that media which best supports their ideas and faiths and which does not conflict their own convictions. As a consequence, there is little probability that the media will be able to convert anyone. The only visible effect is to establish connections between the members of the community and to be successful in the coherent mobilization of those respective groups (Buddenbaum J. M., in Stout D. A., 2006, p.206).

The fall of communism made most of the political constraints on religion to disappear and gradually religion to not be marginalized. Thus, all cult forms existing in Romania were able to state their own beliefs, to recover their confiscated assets, to build churches and to acquire radio and television stations. In order to understand the complexity of the religious market in Romania we must first speak of the market structure, the number of existing cults, the nationality of the believers and their spreading throughout the territory. This statistical data is absolutely necessary when we speak of the presence on the mass-media market of certain stations and certain consumption tendencies (Apostol, M. S., 2012 p.7).

Out of the total of 19.98 million inhabitants, according to the Statistical Yearbook of Romania 2014, 86.8% declared they belong to the Romanian Orthodox Church and to the Serbian Orthodox Bishopric in Timisoara. The Roman-Catholic church represents 4.7%, the Greek-Catholic church less than 1%, the Christian Russian Orthodox Old Rite Church under 1%. In Romania there are also present: the Reformed Protestant Church, the Christian Evangelical Church, the Romanian Evangelical Church, the Evangelical Church of Augustan Confession, the Lutheran

Evangelical Church – Presbyterian Synod, the Unitarian Church in Romania, the Baptist Church, the Pentecostal Church, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, the Armenian Church, the Jewish Community, and the Muslim Community.

Following the opinion polls, it was established that the great majority of respondents - 85% - declared that they believe in the existence of God. Still, only 1% of the population of Romania declared going to church every day, 3% several times a week, 19% once a week, 17% several times a month, 5% once a month and 34% declared that they go only for holidays: Christmas or Easter, 9% go less than once a year, 11% do not ever go and, still, 83% of the Romanians consider the church as the institution they trust most (G.R., D.R.I.)

3. The religious written press of the Romanian Orthodox Church

The Romanian Orthodox Church (in original, BOR) has a series of publications addressing the different categories of believers, for those with specialty theological studies, for the students within the faculties with theological profile, for priests and laymen, magazines, bulletins and a newspaper: Lumina newspaper, BOR – the official bulletin of the Romanian Patriarchy, Ortodoxia – magazine of the Romanian Patriarchy, Studii Teologice – magazine of the Faculty of Theology within the Romanian Patriarchy. The wish of BOR is to communicate the message of the church to all, but also that all can find themselves in the theological discourse.

Lumina newspaper, "launched as publicist novelty in Iasi, by the Mitropoly of Moldova and Bucovina, on the date of 7 February 2005, is the first Christian newspaper in Romania and, until the present, the only Christian Orthodox newspaper in the world. Lumina newspaper experienced in Bucharest an ascendant evolution, from the editorial and printing point of view, as well as with respect to increasing the area of distribution to the readers. Since 16 October 2005, Lumina de Duminiță is published, the "week-end" edition of the newspaper. Weekly publication of Christian spirituality and attitude, it is dedicated to the readers who, on Sunday, concern themselves with subjects of Christian spirituality, other than during the week. The first regional edition started its activity on 2 February 2009, in Iasi. In the following year were launched: the Transylvania Edition (Sibiu, 9 April 2010), Oltenia Edition (Craiova, 14 August 2010) and the Banat Edition (1 October 2010). In the spring of year 2013, a sub-redaction of Lumina newspaper was organized in Cluj-Napoca and since 10 May 2013 the

Transylvania Edition is printed in a new format” (Dascălu N., 2011).

Studii Teologice – magazine of the Faculty of Theology within the Romanian Patriarchy “is a theological magazine with a long tradition in Romania, bring published without interruption since 1929 and until the present. It is the magazine of all Faculties of Theology in Romania, having 4 fascicles every year, of 300 pages each. Thus, you can access approximately 1200 pages of theological materials of high academic standing. The magazine enjoys a large circulation, of approximately 10,000 for each published fascicle” (Apostol M. S., 2012, p.67).

BOR – the official bulletin of the Romanian Patriarchy, “*Revista Biserica Ortodoxă Română* (BOR) was issued at the end of the 19th century, having as main goal to inform the clergy and the believers regarding the activity of the Holy Synod of the national Orthodox Church. Also, its role was to popularize theological culture by means of treaties and articles related to the History of the Church, Morals, Exegesis, Liturgical, Apologetic or about Romanian spirituality. At the same time, according to the Regulation approved by the Holy Synod, the periodical magazine presented the debts and needs of the clergy, published sermons and translations, and communicated news regarding the other sister Orthodox Churches, as well as of heterodox ones.

The Romanian Orthodox Church, as we have shown, is trying to cover different manners and types of communication with the Christian-Orthodox believers, in order for them to find a word of support, at any level.

4. Discourse on religious topics in the mass-media

Religious information is recounted in the Romanian written press following the sensationalist model usually practices when reporting undiscovered news. That is why there is a wide discrepancy when it comes to approaching religious information, between the point of view of the church, which is based on the theological doctrine, and the viewpoint of journalism, which approaches the topic without going deep into the theological, ritualistic layer, but merely following the narrative thread. From here comes the discrepancy between the two discourses, one looking at the practice of the ritual from inside, while another looks at the ritual from outside, the two feelings being different. Journalists present religious reality predominantly illustrating those frames that are spectacular, bizarre and unexpected. The media narrates with predilection amazing events, at the edge of impossible, when framing reality; it chooses to tell about strange, sensational cases, which disturb the viewer. They

present information that includes the sensational: miraculous healings, visions, divine appearances, angels, demons, saints, facts and events at the limit of the real, which are told in the space of faith. Anchoring these stories in the religious dimension makes them gain a nuance of absolute truths, difficult to contest, being an integral part of the dogma. The stories in the holy books become religion only when someone believes in them and classifies them as such. Such an example when the facts told in the press lead to the officialization of religious phenomena is the following: “In 1917, next to Fatima, Portugal, several children said that Virgin Mary appeared to them in a vision and told them that on 13 October in that year a miracle will happen. On that day, the Sun appeared unusual in the sky, like an enormous disk. The reporters present at the event wrote about this phenomenon. The church added this miracle of the Sun on the list of official miracles in year 1930” (Albulescu G. T., 2014).

“In 1531, in the fields next to Mexico City, a peasant called Juan Diego saw an appearance of Virgin Mary, who asked that a church be built in her honour. The Virgin asked the man to gather flowers from a hill and to put them in his cloak. Afterwards, the cloak had printed the image of Virgin Mary. Even though scientific analyses of the so-called miracle of the Virgin of Guadalupe were performed, nobody reached a definitive conclusion (Albulescu G. T., 2014)”.

In the religious press in Romania contradictory subjects or subjects considered marginal are also approached, as follows “after the press wrote, during the last days, about the car consecration service in the newest edition of the Moliftelnic 2013 prayer book, Constantin Stoica, BOR spokesperson, indicated that “now was it discovered by the journalists; it has always existed”.[...] The BOR representative mentioned that this prayer had always existed in the Moliftelnic, only that priests adapted the fragments where there was talk of the new boat or ship, using the term “vehicle”, after translating prayers from Greek (Toea D., 2013).”

The sensational does not avoid the religious sphere, such as there are reports of “A priest died, electrocuted on the shore of a lake in Bistrita, even on the Pentecost day. The priest of Hășmaș locality died while fishing, most probably touching the electricity lines with his fishing rod, according to Realitatea TV (Ziare.com 2011).”

As can be seen, the journalist selects from the multitude of banal facts one information that he later transforms, seasoning it with all journalistic ingredients anchored in the show. This is inevitable because, through its nature, the media discourse must say something significant. And this must be achieved even when the base of the information is banal, the journalist having to justify himself before the reader

and explain why he chose that news and why he, the viewer, must watch that information. The information selected by the journalist remains frozen in time, this event captured in the media becomes a fact known to all, out of the multitude of other events daily happening anonymously (Apostol M. S., 2012, p.52).

The examples presented have the role to illustrate the multitude of subjects that make the object of the journalistic act, swinging between banal news, lifted to the rank of sensational and the novelty subjects, such as, for instance, stories of the miracles performed by Father Arsenie Boca, which target the support for his future canonization.

Conclusion

In Romania, the religious written press has a long tradition. At present, it is used as: means of promotion; of development of the religious cultural patrimony, as information means for the representatives of the community it represents.

Most of the articles are written by theologians and less by specialized journalists, fact which brings forth the doubtful quality of the construction of the message. Increasingly often, the sensational is targeted in selecting the news and the journalistic manner of writing does not distinguish from the other categories of press. The religious written press addresses a segment of conservative readers, consequently oriented towards this form of information.

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