

## **Monotheistic Religions in the Media**

While most individuals have general perceptions and stereotypes of the major monotheistic religions, few people consider the ways that these perceptions develop. In large part the news media shapes our perceptions and insights into the nature of culture and religion. Even as our perception of these religions is long-entrenched through insights gleaned from an early age, in a small degree the news media can continue to shape perception through the ways they structure culture and religion. This essay considers three such means of structuring religion through an analysis of articles on Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.

In considering one way the media develops and implements a perspective on religion, an article from the Los Angeles Times is considered. The article 'Islamists in Egypt seek change through politics' presents a number of interesting perspectives on the nature of Islam. The article is interesting in that it considers the nature of radical Islam, yet contrasts it with a reimagined perspective that demonstrates some of the religion's positive elements. In these regards, it considers former rebel Nageh Ibrahim who at one time had expressed a desire to create a large-scale Islamic state through blood-shed, who is now living in a high rise and, "has the soothing voice of a man who could lead a 12-step program on rejecting radicalism" (Fleishman 2010). The article indicates that the group Ibrahim headed at one point committed considerable acts of terror and violence in an effort to achieve these ends for the Islamic state. Within these regards, he is known to have contributed to the assassination of President Anwar Sadat, and the massacre at Luxor temple that contributed to the death of sixty-two people. After being imprisoned for twenty-four years, Ibrahim is demonstrated to have changed his

radical stance. The article uses the story of Ibrahim's life as a sort of metaphor on the nature of the changing nature of Islamic politics. In regards to Egypt, this philosophical slant is akin to a shift from Malcolm X like means of enacting change to Martin Luther King Jr's stance of non-violent exchange. Ibrahim states, "Over the years...it became apparent that violence harmed us and the image of Islam. The state could always hit us back harder than we could hit them" (Fleishman 2010). While the article indicates that radicalism is still occurring, the general consensus in terms of Egyptian politics is that this more political and less violent approach is the means towards significant change. In terms of a broader framing of Islam, the article presents a complex picture of the religion as embodying a variety of polls of political action – both extremism and modernism.

The next article, 'Rapper Finds Order in Orthodox Judaism in Israel,' analyzed is from the New York Times and it considers the nature of rapper that has turned to Judaism. This is an intriguing investigation of Judaism as it challenges traditional assumptions of Jewish individuals as being of a certain ethnic class. In addition, the juxtaposition with rap also constitutes a clashing of socioeconomic classes that are generally separate aspects within American society. The rapper in the article is Shyne, a protégé of famed rap producer Puff Daddy. An interesting sidenote, Shyne served nine years in prison for opening fire at a club. Despite being raised as a troubled street hood in Brooklyn, Shyne states, "My entire life screams that I have a Jewish neshama," he said, using the Hebrew word for soul" (Kraft 2010). This is an interesting presentation of the Jewish religion. While soul and street legitimacy have oftentimes been conclave of African American art and culture, Shyne has made an interesting connection between these aspects and those of the Jewish religion. The article indicates that Shyne discovered Judaism during his time

in prison, although he had been intrigued by Old Testament stories since an early age. While this article may constitute an outlier of sorts, as its depiction of Judaism represents an example that most individuals would consider to be not generally reflective of the religion, it is nonetheless important as it demonstrates that Judaism is not fixed to a specific ethnic group; rather, as Shyne demonstrates, the message of Judaism is powerful enough to appeal to a wide variety of individuals.

The final analyzed is from the New York Post and is titled 'More Koran Chaos'. This article considers the nature of reaction to a Gainesville, Florida church that had designed an event where the Koran would be burned. This event, led by Pastor Terry Jones, gained a considerable amount of public attention for its incendiary and controversial nature. The Dove Outreach Center is the Christian church where Jones was the leader. In large part many individuals will argue that Jones represents an extreme form of Christianity that is not indicative of the faith as a whole. Rather than being about faith and good-will, the Christianity Jones exemplifies through the Dove Outreach Center is more akin to stereotypical notions of Islamic extremism. The article demonstrates the response to Jones' actions, indicating that, "In rioting that lasted hours, protesters smashed shops, burned tires and vandalized a girls school. Two of the dead were Afghan policemen. A doctor told Agence France Press that 10 people had been killed" (Burke 2010). In these regards, the article has presented the Christian religion, not as a sort of peace and love encompassing means of faith, but an angry and vindictive religion of terror.

In conclusion, it's clear that through analyzing these three articles that the news media structures and presents monotheistic religions in unique ways. In terms of Islam,

rather than highlighting the extremist aspects, the article considered peaceful means of political action Islamic reformers are taking in Egypt. The article that analyzed Judaism considered the juxtaposition of a Brooklyn born rapper who found Judaism in prison. Finally, the article on Christianity highlighted not its unifying features, but its implementation as a means of hate and terror. In all it's clear that despite their perceptions, the news media is able o restructure and present religion in a variety of ways counter to traditional perception.

## References

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