Book Reviews

Sumiala-Seppänen, Knut Lundby and Raimo Salokangas (eds.) (2006) *Implications of the Sacred in (Post) Modern Media*, Göteborg: NORDICOM. ISBN 91-89471-34-2

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In recent years, the topic of media and religion has become increasingly studied. This may perhaps relate to the number of news stories that have had some connection with religion, whether or not the supposed connection is justified. In 1993, in Uppsala, the Uppsala Group was formed to consider the topic which has been designated "Media, Religion and Culture". Since that time, there have been conferences organized by this group in Boulder, Colorado: Edinburgh; Jyväskylä, Finland; Louisville, Kentucky and this year the conference will take place in Sigtuna, Sweden. This edited collection came into being following discussions at Jyväskylä that were continued in Louisville.

The first four papers in the book look at the ticklish subject of 'Studying Media and the Sacred'. So often academia tends to look down on anything even vaguely connected with 'religion' or 'the sacred'. The often given definition of 'the sacred', which Lundby (43-62) discusses, that of being 'set apart' has certainly been true in many areas of academia. So often, anyone with a religious faith is either pictured as a little stupid or, alternatively, as a fanatic.

Section Two looks at implications of the sacred in history and news and the ways that news stories relate the religious import of media coverage. Having dealt with news and history, the third section looks at digital culture, the internet, film and literature. The phenomenon that is Harry Potter manages to get in even here, I suppose that the *Da Vinci Code* furore came a little too late for the publication.

Given its place of publication, it is unsurprising that most of the authors in this volume are from the Scandinavian countries, but there are also pieces written by scholars from the United States and the United Kingdom. Since the vast majority of works on the media and religion come from an American background or deal with issues relating to terrorism, often conflating Islam with that terrorism usually

with very little knowledge of the tenets of Islam, this book is a welcome addition which would be a useful book to use as a source book or for teaching purposes.

A phenomenon noticeable recently has been the way that scholars have begun to search for religiosity and spirituality in popular culture. Films, books, plays, have dealt with religious subjects and some of the best selling media products have had a religious background: Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ;* Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* and *Angels and Demons,* not to mention the innumerable horror films that relate in some way to religion, if only through the symbols used. Beyond this, there are also those films, etc., which are not, in the strict sense, 'religious', but which have some or even considerable, religious import. The musical *Evita;* the films of Angelopolis, are good examples. Since the enlightenment we have constantly been told that God is dead and religion would soon no longer exist, yet the 2001 census in the United Kingdom had 71% of the population describe themselves as Christian. According to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the UK also has 1.9 million Muslims, around one million Hindus, 330,000 Jews and a variety of other faiths, including (again according to the census) 10,000 people who describe their faith as "Jedi Knight" – truly a relationship between media and religion.

If this developing area of study grows, it can only be for the good. We need more clarification of the relationship between media and religion. In a profession where we write and speak and teach about democracy and freedom of speech, it is quite often acceptable to denigrate religion, as I mentioned above. If the media and religion can become a field with greater depth and recognition, it may go some way to obviating this tendency.