Religion in Social Communication perspective…

Franz-Josef Eilers, svd

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In a recent book on "Digital Religion" edited by Heidi A. Campbell the chapter on Religion by Gregory Price Grieve states that:" …Religion's current meaning is only a few hundred years old, and can be traced back to the European Enlightenment…" (105). The author categorizes religion in terms of metanarratives that possess features or attributes of myth, ritual and faith and seems to reduce religion in view of the digital world to these categories.

In reality, however, Religion is as old as humankind and the word dates back to Roman times where Lactantius (Div. Inst. VII, 28) relates it to the Latin word "ligare" which means binding. "Re-ligare" or "Religion" would then mean to re-connect to the origin of peoples and humankind. It would indicate the relation and connection to the origin, the absolute, a higher 'Being', to a creator. Cicero relates Religion to "re-legere" as "careful veneration of the Gods" (De natura Deorum, II,72). This shows how Religion was those days already very much part of culture and life. In fact these and similar considerations were followed over the centuries and are also expressed in recent times. Thus the German anthropologist Wilhelm Schmidt has 12 volume work on the "Origin of the Idea of God" ("Ursprung der Gottesidee, 1912-1955) where he describes God not only as a person but also as a 'power to determine our lives".   Friedrich Heiler wrote

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(1961) on "Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion" and Mircea Eliade presents in three volumes the history of religious ideas starting from the 'stone age' and going from Buddhism, Christianity and Islam to modern times. Emil Durkheim (1984) divides the world into a holy and a profane part but also refers humans to be part of religious communities. He describes Religion as a "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things." Rudolf Otto approaches Religion under the perspective of the "Idea of the Holy" by developing the concept of the '*Numinosum'* which Stout uses in his "Media and Religion, Foundations of an emerging field" (2012) as an important element.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz defines Religion as "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in people by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (1985). Here especially the communication dimension comes in and one might add that Geertz based his insights also on his anthropological studies in Indonesia, especially Bali.

With all this we see Religion as a forceful field and essential element of any culture and human living.

All this holds for Europe especially in academic development. The very first universities dating back to the 12th century were founded by Philosophy and Theology – like also at a later stage the University of Santo Tomas in Manila where I teach which started 1611 as a theological school. Even medicine and ecology were Church related as the example of Hildegard of Bingen shows, who was a highly talented Benedictine nun (1098-1179) who not only had religious vision but also developed natural medicine and ecology which is revived today all over the world. Even Caxton, the first printer in London is an example because he started his printing press at "Fleet Street" which was those days the quarter of the clergy who were his main customers.

Recently (2012) Oxford University Press published a "Handbook of Religion and the American News Media" with six sections and all in all 39 contributions. The sections are devoted to: 1. History, 2. The Media, 3. Religions, 4, Issues and Beats,

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5. International coverage and finally 6. The religious Press. All this is in relation to North America. The background to it is described by the publishers in the following words: "Whether the issue is the rise of religiously-inspired terrorism, the importance of faith based NGO's in global relief and development, or campaigning for evangelical voters in the U.S. , religion proliferates in our newspapers and magazines, on our radios and televisions, on our computer screens and, increasingly, our mobile devices. American who assumed society was becoming more and more secular have been surprised by religion's raising visibility and central role in current events. Yet this is hardly new: the history of American journalism has deep religious roots, and religion has long been part of the news mix". It would be very interesting to also develop a similar publication like this American Oxford book also for Asia and Social Communicayion in Asia. We have plenty of things to share but it needs also scholars, writers who know how to go about it.

For professional Communication organizations a similar observation can be made: Within the "Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication" (AEJMC) in the United States there is a special "Religion and Media Interest Group" (RMIG) with more than 100 academic members; they have even an own Newsletter: "Religion and Media Interest Group". The "International Association for Communication Research" (IAMCR) had in their last annual meeting July in Hyderabad with the "Religion, Communication, Culture" working group some 40 papers. "Nordicom" the Scandinavian Communication grouping has after some 10 years of existence now beside different divisions also a temporary group for "Media and Religion" (Hornmoen,Harald &Orgeret Kristin Skare 2014,287) .

For Asia similar developments for communications should be expected since the importance and influence of Religion is without question as we can see for Buddhism in Thailand, Sri Lanka and other Asian countries where it existed already long before Christianity… For India, Roshen Dalal has presented 2006 in the Penguin Dictionary series an extensive book on "Religion in India" with the remark that his book is "not a purely academic study, but also looks at religion from the spiritual viewpoint. It reflects the ideas of the greatest thinkers and spiritual leaders of India, who saw that all religions are different aspects of One

Truth, and that a truly religious person can never be divisive." "From the sages of the Upanishads," the text continues "to the Bhakti saints, the Sufi mystics, and the spiritual gurus of more recent times, they all emphasize the Oneness of life and the sense of universal love that underlies every spiritual experience." (p. v) The book lists beside the extensive Hindu section also Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, the tribal religions as well as Islam, Buddhism and Christianity….

It is one of the concerns of the "Asian Research Center for Religion and Social communication" (ARC) to go deeper into these realities under the perspective of Social Communication which could be studied in historical perspective but also on the conceptional and experiential level in relation to modern times with the many new technical developments. We still seem to lack even general overviews, studies and a proper awareness of these fields under social communication perspective.   Where are the studies like Buddhist or Hindu perspectives of communication in general, or in historical view or on the factual level? Up till now there are some contributions mostly as case studies which constitute only a small part of a bigger picture. We still need studies on the role and function of Social Communication   in broader perspectives… for which we will have later an example by Wimal Dissnayake for Buddhism. Such studies might relate to history, teachings and practice. They could be done either from a theological, philosophical or even anthropological or sociological point of view which starts with a deeper understanding of *social* Communication and goes far beyond mere media and technology use as we have outlined partly already in former years. …Our new book series with the UST Publishing House might be a small beginning as also are our "Round Tables"…

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To give another example for a deeper approach: In German language we distinguish between "Geisteswissenschaft" and "Naturwissenschaft" which unfortunately cannot be properly translated into English without losing part of the meaning of these expressions. "Geisteswisenschaft" refers to the humanities like Philosophy, Theology and related fields whereas "Naturwissenchaft " refers to "natural" sciences which developed historically much later as special fields and

were for some time even simply seen as a kind of 'appendix' to the forgoing. This seems to be the opposite today.

Many if not most studies by Communication scholars and even so called 'training programs' today are technology determined ("Media") or based on sociological or at best cultural data but hardly any one takes note of a philosophical or theological perspective. If it is true what Lundby says in the volume on "Digital Religion" which we quoted at the beginning of these considerations that scholars have "a pre-occupation with institutional Religion" (p.134) then we might ask "why"? Is it just they simply lack a philosophical or theological background themselves which would be needed in such academic work? Or is it lack of cultural (religious) insights, cooperation and mutual understanding or prejudice? ARC should go deeper into this and possibly help to   bridge the gap. ..

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The "Mediatization" of Religion has been studied and presented in several recent publications and seems to develop in a special field of concern. Here the "Media" stand at the center and the studies are concerned either on how the media are used by Religion or how they express Religion. The concern shows already in the name clearly an emphasis on *Media* and thus technology but seems not to consider sufficiently the relation between Religion and communication as a *process*. Here it might be interesting to recall the history of the field of what we call today 'communication' in German speaking countries where it developed from Literature and Writing and not from Shannon and Weaver and a "mathematical model" of communication which somehow became the basis of our technology and media determined   field of 'communication' : Who says what through which channel with what success"(Laswell) or the S-M-R models. The German expression was and still is "Publizistik" which means "to make public" (Hagemann). This indicates a *process* and not means, technology or a single 'media'. Anything and any process of making something public is "Publizistik" from speaking to each other and similar ways of human communicating regardless of the 'medium' used. With this understanding the field studies the

process, content, effects of making something public even independent of any use of whichever means. The process of 'making public' relates to persons, culture, to the way of life, ways and effects of 'sharing' far beyond the means used. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger understands communication as "Mit-teilung" to "co-divide", to 'share' which once again indicates a process and is not at all fixed to any special technology or means, except the human person herself (Peters,2000, 19) . In all this also Religion plays a role as far as it is experienced and practiced among communicating humans and within society… Could this not be a good starting point also for deeper studies on Asian religions and cultures? Sri Lankan scholar Wimal Dissanayake (2013, 24) who has on several occasions reflected on the relation between Buddhism and Communications in studies seems to point in the same direction when he writes: "*The architects of these (western!) models claim objectivity for their models on the basis of this decontextualized rationality. The Buddhist view , on the other hand , emphasizes the importance of contextual understanding, situated knowledge, and complexities of lived realities. Its sense of rationality cannot be separated from contexts of lived realities or emotional affiliations. In other words, it is much more a grounded and total rationality. We do not find such a rationality activating or underwriting the available Western models and theories of communication…It seems to me that the pathways of thinking promoted by Buddhism will enable us to move further in that direction.*"   To me here this is a very interesting and challenging way to also approach Religion and Social communication as a process which is beside others reflected in religious practices like the so called 'popular piety' or even liturgy and similar services or common prayer practices as we experienced last year at our Round Table in the Buddhist University in Chiang Mai..

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This are just a few reflections from a somehow European point of view but I am very much convinced that we can say similar and even more convincing things from the perspective of our Asian Cultures and Religions which are even today to quite an extent dominating and determining – directly or indirectly – our lives. Asian Religions and Cultures are not just recent but are as old as the continent

and even older than Christianity. In most cases, Religion is still today at their center in one way or the other. My Chinese and Vietnamese students always impress me in our Intercultural Communication courses when they are asked to give an overview and present their own 2000 to 3000 year old cultures and how they also today still dominate their thinking and their lives…

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