Religion on TIME:
Personal Spiritual Quests and Religious Institutions on the Cover of a Popular News Magazine

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Abstract

This paper suggests that the world of religion portrayed on TIME magazine covers differs dramatically from those created within the walls of religious institutions. TIME embraces private over public religious practice, is skeptical of institutions, and often co-opts religious symbols as a means of promoting entertainment, art, and popular science. Christianity dominates cover pages, with special emphasis on Christian symbols in April (Easter) and December (Christmas).

Key Words: magazines, TIME magazine, religion, covers

Today, religion resides as much in the hands of individuals as it does in traditional institutions. Through the Internet, televangelism, recorded music, religious radio, and religious novels, citizens increasingly engage in a form of spirituality that is independent and nondenominational. Roof (1999) terms it a "religious marketplace," and Hoover (2001) calls it the religion of "personal autonomy." While many traditional denominations continue to thrive, sociologists of religion have noted this simultaneous shift from the public to the private sphere for many years now (Bellah, 1970; Parsons, 1960). Various media may accelerate this situation, given that information previously obtained directly from clergy can now be accessed through the Internet, magazines, television, and other sources. This study seeks to uncover examples of how news media

are depicting this shift from institutional to private religion. Because the covers of *TIME* magazine reflect societal trends, they may prove useful in better conceptualizing the evolution of public and private religious practice.

There are two additional reasons why *TIME* magazine covers should be studied. First, news magazines, as cultural artifacts, may reveal public perceptions about historical events. Spiker (2003), for example, analyzes public sentiments about September 11 using magazine covers, Pompper and Feeney (2002) look at covers of *Life* in describing cultural conflicts about the Gulf War, Johnson and Christ (1995) evaluate how women are portrayed on the covers of news magazines. As Johnson (2002) puts it, "…covers provide benchmarks to history" (p. 3). Furthermore, magazine covers represent marketing tools intended to better sell magazines from the news racks (McManus, 1994; Pompper & Feeny, 2002; Spiker 2003). While some might draw a distinction between analyzing magazine covers as marketing tools rather than as cultural artifacts[1] we find the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Cover art selected for its marketing potential would likely appeal to both consumer wants and would be strategically unwise if it veered to far from cultural norms or biases. Hence, as discovered in Sumner 's (2002) analysis of *Life* covers, the editorial failure to recognize consumer expectations corresponded with reduced circulation figures.

Despite growing interest in magazines as cultural artifacts, magazine covers are understudied (Johnson, 2002; Gerlach, 1987). This is especially true of those covers addressing religious themes. This lacuna of research reflects the larger problem, as noted by Carey (2001, p.1): "Religion is perhaps the most neglected topic in communications." Consequently, how magazines portray the changing nature of the sacred and secular is a question yet to be addressed in the fields of mass communication as well as the sociology of religion.

The second reason for studying *TIME* has to do with its dominance as a news vehicle in the arena of public discussion. Its unique credibility often results in public conversation about national and international issues. It not only depicts specific denominations, but it might also reflect the larger discourse about acceptable religious behavior (e.g., prayer, healing, rituals, etc.). One recent *TIME* cover, for example, is about religious worship on the Internet while another suggests that good health and spirituality are linked. Such topics may stimulate discourse about public and private religion as well as the sacred–secular interface. McCracken (1992) notes that magazine covers not only signify magazine content, but they reflect interests of the consumer as well. Covers chronicle religious events, but they also reflect ongoing discussion about what it means to

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[1] Sumner (2002) prefers that researchers view magazine covers as marketing tools rather tan as cultural artifacts. However, his study limits the definition of "cultural artifact" to suggest that as such, magazine covers should reflect and influence societal practices. In this paper we define cultural artifacts consistently with the Stuart Hall model, which instead surmises that cultural artifacts are human-created texts and objects that, when mass produced, can reflect either cultural practices or "ideals." Hence, true to the "marketing concept," a good cover would, in theory, if not in practice, reflect societal norms or expectations (given that the marketing model would appeal to consumers' desires).

be religious. In other words, magazines can signal changes in religious worldviews among readers.

Why *TIME* and not other magazines? Among the three primary news magazines in the United States, *TIME* leads the category with a 44 percent market share and circulation exceeding 4 million copies each month.[2] Additionally, religion is an important subject in the magazine. A recent Halls Magazine Report confirms that *TIME* allocated about 30 pages to the subject of religion/philosophy in 2003.[3] While this represents only about one percent of *TIME*'s annual editorial space, it nearly matches the space allotted to education, personal finance, and computers. It also surpasses the number of cover stories devoted to travel, dieting and dietary supplements, children, and apparel.

This study adds to a line of inquiry about the changing ways that various media depict religion. Content and audience studies seek to examine the evolving nature of contemporary religious music (Perry & Wolfe, 2001), how fundamentalists are depicted in newspapers (Kerr & Moy, 2002), the religious themes of prime-time television programs (Davis, et al., 2001), how religious audiences response to secular television content (Hess, 2001; Scott, 2003; Stout & Scott, 2003; Warren, 2001), the religious themes of secular movies (Baeaudoin, 1998), and the evolving strategies of using religious images for advertising and marketing purposes (Haley, White, & Cunningham, 2001). This work, however, has not adequately dealt with visual imagery in media texts depicting religion. Of *TIME*'s 32 covers devoted to religion in the last decade, little is known about the social-semiotic nature of such depictions. How such covers act as cultural indicators in binding social discourse about new religious trends is just beginning to be addressed.

This study addresses this problem by analyzing *TIME* covers as *both* written and *visual* texts. First, we review the literature on visual representation and how images help create and sustain worldviews about religion. We examine the processes through which religious meaning is contested through imagery in a magazine portraying both secular and religious perspectives about religion. The literature not only helps frame the questions, but also focuses the analysis on the public–private distinction in contemporary religious worship.

The Importance of "Visual Texts"

One characteristic of postmodern society is greater emphasis on the visual in the development of worldviews (Mitchell, 1994). While visual imagery does not replace written texts, it can make other forms of communication more comprehensible and effective (Mirzoeff, 1999). Mediated images of the sacred are part of the "social discourse of material forms, sensations, texts, and human behaviors that make up religion" (Morgan & Promey, 2001, p. 16).

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[2] This information comes from the *TIME* media kit and is confirmed by SRDS and Simmons data for 2003.

[3] These data are also available from the *TIME* media kit.

New research connects religiosity to visual artifacts (Plate, 2002). Recent studies examine the persuasiveness of religious images for churches (Miles, 2002), the use of religious symbols in popular culture (Carter & Herman, 1990; Morgan, 1998; Schmidt, 1995), and audience interpretation of popular religious images (McDannell, 1995; Morgan & Promey, 2001). What this research does not tell us, however, is whether influential media vehicles like *TIME* reflect a societal shift regarding personal and institutional religiosity. In other words, *TIME* covers might contain images likely to encourage new types of public discourse about religion.

The Power of the Visual

Speaking about the persuasive appeal of photographs, Barthes (1981) emphasizes the power of the visual. Unlike paintings, he argues, the photographic print serves as a referent of an absent event, bringing the 'real' past into the present. TIME covers are potentially as influential as photographs for believers because they "render for the viewers the ontological presence of someone or something" and thus make present things that are, in fact, absent from their day-to-day experiences (Morgan, 1998, p.9). How do *TIME* covers make present religious ideas, constructs, and symbols? We address this question by examining magazine covers according to three issues: (1) the demarcation of private versus institutional religious practices according to visual symbols; (2) the availably, frequency, and repetition of particular religious icons; and, (3) the potential blurring of the sacred with the secular.

Private v. Public Religion

Perhaps no development in the sociology of religion is more significant than the shift from institutional religious worship to personal religious practice (Hoover, 2001; Roof, 1999; Wuthnow, 1989). Both types are present in mass media. Some texts focus on specific denominations, while others depict religious practices common to all denominations (e.g., prayer, faith, etc.). The recent TV programs *Touched by an Angel* and *Joan of Arcadia* are examples of the latter. The first question, then, is whether *TIME* is giving greater emphasis to similar manifestations of private religiosity.

One reason private religiosity might be growing is that journalists may be treating this type of worship with less skepticism compared with coverage of institutions. While some argue that mass media are often supportive of religion (Silk, 1995; Underwood, 2001), and that mainstream religious values work their way into journalistic discourse (Schmalzbaur, 2002), other studies conclude that reporters often view religious organizations and institutions with greater suspicion (Chen, 2003; P. Kerr, A. & Moy, 2002; P. A. Kerr, 2003; Scott & McDonald, 2004). Perhaps this is what Underwood (2001, p.175) had in mind when he said: "The commitment to secularism and modernism runs so strongly in Western media that any concept which smacks of theocracy or intrusion on press freedoms arouses instant hostility" (p. 175).

Of particular interest is whether personal religion benefits from the critical tension between the press and religious institutions. This study explores this possibility by comparing visual representations of institutions with those portraying personal religious

worship. In this way, greater insight is obtained about whether one religious worldview is emphasized over another by a major media vehicle.

Repetition of Images and Symbol "Flattening"

Another reason for the emergence of personal religion in the media has to do with the proliferation of religious symbols in general. In the present information age, concern is expressed about the democratization or over-reproduction of sacred icons. Boorstin (1962) saw this coming 40 years ago in his classic work, *The Image,* and Postman (1992) explores it further in *Technopoly.* According to Hoover (2001), "religious symbols, traditionally legitimated by religious doctrine, history, and practice, today struggle to find any particular or special place" (p. 56). The cross is a common example of this phenomenon. The icon has been duplicated to the point where few members of the youth culture understand its historical or religious significance. Repeated representations of religious symbols make them even more common or "everyday" in the experience of readers. In this paper, we explore how such repetition is occurring in a major news magazine. The goal is to determine which images and elements of religion are made most familiar by the covers of *TIME*.

The Sacred versus the Profane: Blurring Distinctions

Increased duplication of religious symbols raises another question about the potential impact of *TIME* covers. If religious symbols are more common, are they increasingly more profane? (see, Eliade, 1987) Consider a magazine at a grocery store with a cover illustrating a crucifix. While the symbol is clearly sacred to some Christians, it is appropriated by capital; it is used to sell a magazine that, most likely, is surrounded by other magazines celebrating excess (women, diets, automobiles, or other objects of desire). Because magazine covers combine both secular and sacred representations, the purity of the religious message could be undermined. For example, Haley, White, & Cunningham (2001) found that conservative Protestants are often divided on the question of whether the name, "Jesus" should be used to symbolize or "brand" commercial products. A valid issue, then, is whether the depiction of the sacred on *TIME* covers is likely to offend the sensibilities of denominational audiences.

Research Questions and Methodology

The research method of this article is a close-text analysis after the qualitative approaches of Hall (1975, p.16) and Sampson (1993). This approach requires that we treat *TIME* covers as "literary *and visual* construct[s], employing symbolic means, shaped by rules, conventions, and traditions intrinsic to the use of language in the widest sense." This method seeks to find in the text under investigation "the latent, implicit patterns and emphases" (*Id.*, p.16). By so doing, we move beyond the counting-method of content analysis (which offers insight into the "explicit" meaning of the text) in an effort to "uncover the unnoticed, perhaps unconscious, social framework of reference" which together shapes the meaning imbedded in these covers. Similar methods have been used to identify dominant themes in magazine covers through interpretive analysis (Pompper & Feeney, 2002; Spiker, 2003). The following questions guide the research:

1. How is private and public religiosity represented?

2. What symbols are relevant and pervasive, and what do they possibly suggest about the writers and readers of *TIME* magazine?

3. How are constructs of the secular and sacred blurred by these representations?

A decade of *TIME* covers (from January, 1995 through March, 2005) was examined. Using the search term "religion" on the *TIME* website, we located 33 matches. One cover on the WACO incident was eliminated from our analysis due to its political rather than religious framing, leaving 32 covers for analysis.

A systematic review of the covers was conducted beginning with the three general questions. Once the religious icons were identified and coded, the covers were sorted into categories. After the first round of sorting, two researchers discussed the themes, adjusted the categories, and made descriptive notes about the covers. Religious images were also examined within the context of the written text on each cover.

Close-text analysis, like content analysis, has many limitations. It is limited in terms of what can be concluded about media audiences, for example. In other words, we can only speculate about the types of discourse likely to follow the publication of these covers.

We also recognize the possibility that some covers with religious images or symbols may have been omitted using the search term "religion." However, we attempted to minimize this possibility by comparing this term with other possible search terms (e.g., church, God, Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, etc). In all instances, the "religion" term was inclusive. Furthermore, by using the official *TIME* website (rather than a non-affiliated search engine), the resulting covers reflect what *TIME* deems relevant to those interested in the subject of religion, despite the chance that religious symbols might be embedded in other covers.

Findings

When examined with the accompanying text, *TIME* covers convey an affinity for private religiosity and considerable skepticism about religious institutions. That is, questions of religiosity are often presented in the context of the latest scholarly books and scientific findings on various subjects (e.g., archeology, history, and genetics). Overt imagery tends to frame religious topics within the context of the latest findings from the scientific community---and thereby demarcating "faith" from Cartesian (or scientific) logic. Representations of private religious practice were also tied to Biblical themes in all but three cases.

An unexpected finding is the lack of religious symbols or icons on *TIME* covers on religion. This is true of those about religion in general as well as ones on specific denominations. In fact, most covers require a headline to make sense of the image and associate it with a religious subject. When they do appear, religious symbols typically depict private religious worship rather than institutional religion. Furthermore, religious institutions are often signified by people rather than by religious symbols.

Finally, while the U.S. is increasingly pluralistic in terms of religion, this is not the case with *TIME* covers. Judeo-Christian topics and symbols dominate. Although there are overlapping themes ("Should Christians Convert Muslims?" for example), the overwhelming majority of covers contain either Judeo-Christian (25 covers) or Christian (22 covers) themes, with only two mentions of Islam and two depictions of what *TIME* calls "cults." Only one cover was about Buddhism, the only representation of Eastern Religious Philosophy.

In order to present these findings in detail, descriptions are summarized as three emerging themes: (1) "balance of public and private," which notes that while both personal and institutional religiosity is depicted, institutional religion is portrayed more skeptically, (2) "people over symbols," where religious individuals are depicted more frequently than traditional symbols, and (3) "bridge to popular culture," where religious images are used to advocate or reference popular books, movies, and entertainment media.

Balance of Public and Private

Time covers feature stories about both privatized and the public (institutional) religious experience. In fact, the covers are evenly divided, with 16 covers emphasizing personal spiritual achievement, and 16 highlighting particular religious organizations or institutional practices. Both private and institutional representations, however, are predominantly centered on Christianity (with several churches represented). Examples of private religious covers include "Faith and Healing," "Does Heaven Exist?" and "Can We Still Believe in Miracles?" These issues focus on beliefs that cut across religious groups, while institutional covers refer to specific denominations, churches, or sects.

Covers depicting religious institutions often paint them as overtly political, and/or distant from the mainstream practices of American mainstream religion. The visual

symbols in these covers comment on the distance between religious institutions and the larger society; that is, they suggest how groups are perceived and whether they are being accepted.

For example, one cover depicts Christian Coalition leader Ralph Reed's face ominously in black and white alongside the phrase, "The Right Hand of God."[4] The cover about Mormons uses the sterile business-like typeface *Helvetica* for the headline "Mormons Inc." (which accompanies a photo of the LDS Temple in Salt Lake City) suggesting that the denomination is more like a corporation than a traditional religion.[5] And the cover story about the Promise Keepers depicts a bearded adherent outside the mainstream, engaging in public emotional prayer shouts — suggesting that church members are distant from mainstream Americans.[6] The written-text further demarcates them as being new, overtly political, and a cause for fear.

More recently, a February, 2005 cover notes the influence of Christian Evangelicals on George W. Bush's re-election, depicting a golden cross to frame 12 of America's 25 "most influential evangelicals." Behind the cross is a partial image of the U.S. flag.[7] Politics and institutional religiosity are further intertwined with the questions: "What does Bush owe them?" and "Do Democrats Need More Religion?" However, it should be noted that religious organizations are generally made newsworthy or relevant when actively involved in policy or during controversial events (such as allegations of the Catholic Clergy in child abuse cases).

As expected, covers portraying "cults" are the most critical. Unflatteringly tight headshots of cult leaders and bold headlines using phrases such as "web of death" and "cult of doom" are featured in covers about Marshall Herff Applewhite and Soko Asahara.

Graphics designed to raise warnings about religious groups are not confined to cults, however. The cover, "Should Christians Convert Muslims?" shows a glowing golden-colored metal cross wielded like a weapon in a closed fist—suggesting that Christians are overly aggressive in promoting their faith. Further demarcating institutional practice from private religiosity is the lighting of this cross, which glows against a black background. However, the cross becomes dark and muddied where it is touched by the Christian's hand, further suggesting that this "new flock of missionaries" (noted in the written subheading) might be tarnishing the surreal (or less structured) construct of Christianity (represented by the cross).[8] Similarly, in a1998 cover depicting the Pope and Fidel Castro, the pontiff is portrayed in black and white with an anguished facial expression, while the picture of Cuba's leader gives him a larger, brighter countenance through color photography.

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[4] http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,1101950515,00.html

[5] http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,1101970804,00.html

[6] http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,1101971006, 00.html

[7] http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,1101050207,00.html

[8] http://www.time.com/time/magazine/0,9263,7601030630,00.

These portrayals contrast sharply with the images of personal religiosity. The visual representations of private practice are diverse, surrealistic, symbols and generally positive in character. These covers use religious art to raise questions about religious figures or history (esp. Jesus), or to represent contemporary religious values using digitally altered potographs rather than traditional art or actual identifiable people or symbols.

Unlike the often dark or shadowed depictions of religious leaders on some covers, light is offered as a positive symbol identifying personal religious ideas. God is represented on two covers by a shaft of light emitted from the top of the page. In one, this light illuminates an otherwise darkened Oval Office in the White House to alert readers of the influence of faith in U.S. politics. Similarly, another shaft of light falls downward from clouds airbrushed into the background, before descending onto the planet earth (also with its own "real" cloud system) far below. This image represents the cover story titled, "And God Said," which discusses scholarly debates regarding creationism.

In another issue, Heaven is further iterated as a cloud that dissolves into a lighted haze, upon which a man stands, gazing into the sky. The topic is, "Does Heaven Exist?" While these covers frame a religion as challenged by reason, the latent discourse in these and other similar covers tie private religiosity to symbols of enlightenment or illumination (e.g., white light, haloes, glowing objects, etc.). Conversely, this privatized religious "light" is potentially sullied or tarnished when entering the realm of public religious practice (represented as dark, distant, and/or embroiled in controversy).

People over Symbols

The signifiers of religious institutions are diverse, and in most cases, bereft of clear religious signs. In fact, contemporary religious leaders or followers, not religious symbols and icons, typically represent particular organizations.. Conversely, historic and popular religious icons (such as a bearded, thin, white-skinned Jesus, or aged white-haired and bearded Old Testament prophets) are more likely to signify private religious beliefs. Overall, however, these covers lack many religious icons and symbols common in other cultural and religious practices (crosses, menorahs, Star of David, etc.).

As infrequently as religious symbols occur, the repetition of historic images of Christ further embeds the discourse about religiosity as bound by Christianity. However, these representations are not used to signify any particular Christian creed or denomination – perhaps as a strategy of avoiding any suggestion that a particular religious institution can somehow be tied directly to the idea of Christ as religious figure. Instead, these images are used to introduce personal religious questions regarding the historical Jesus (seven issues) or contemporary religious practices such as faith and miracles (two issues). Six covers display a portrait of Jesus (in art, and the shroud of Turin). In another image, Jesus' face is comprised of a photographed actor and an early renaissance painting morphed into one ("The Search for Jesus").

In two representations, Jesus is one of several characters depicted in the artwork. In one, he is the baby of the Nativity, and in another, he is surrounded by angels in a painting said to represent the New Testament story of his ascension into Heaven ("Can

We Still Believe in Miracles?"). All nine Jesus covers immediately precede the Easter or Christmas Holidays. That all the Jesus images coincide with Christian holidays raises no doubt that the taken-for-granted indicator of spirituality or religiosity embedded in these articles is bound by the discourse of Christianity, despite the secularization of these holidays.[9]

These representations of Christ are also noteworthy in their similarity. Because many are taken from historic works of art, Christ's features are similarly depicted (long hair, beard, white skin) in a manner that is, for lack of a better term, predominantly renaissance Catholic. Furthermore, Christ is not represented in any modern context of masculinity, instead being offered as the effeminate Jesus that has been criticized in some religious circles in the past few decades.[10]

This construct of the femininity of Christ raises another issue in the use of symbols as referents of religiosity. The effeminate Christ is both a signifier of the historical Jesus, or perhaps more importantly, as a referent of faith ("Jesus Online"). This construct of personal religiosity or belief systems as perhaps effeminate is further demonstrated by the absence of women as representatives of religious institutions (i.e., male-centric organizations) versus the use of women as signifiers of "spirituality" on the only two covers featuring them.[11] On one of these, a woman, naked but for thin bandages draped over her hips, holds in her prayerfully clasped hands a pair of white-feathered (and glowing) wings over her breasts. The wings seem to engulf her in light and are intended to signify the healing power of faith. In this instance, the woman, light, and angelic wings are brought together as nurturing symbols. The text solidifies this interpretation by noting the relationship between personal spirituality and health.

The other depiction of a woman is a graphic artist's picture of a blue monochromatic (but for her bright red lips) woman who might be of East Indian origin. She is represented in a mode of prayer--- her eyes are close, her hands shy of being clasped with her fingertips just touching together beneath her chin. Rather than the traditional Tilaka or Bindiya mark of Hindu belief, this woman's forehead is marked with a DNA double helix strand that spirals upward into hands that open to the heavens. The cover title brings together the notion of religiosity, belief in God, and genetics, asking if "our DNA compel[s] us to seek a higher power," before offering readers a chance to take a quiz to determine how "spiritual" they are. Again, this construct of spirituality is represented as metaphysical and effeminate, yet within the scope of scientific understanding.

Bridge to Popular Culture

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[9] See, http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,1101010416,00.html &

http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,1101961216,00.html

[10] See for example, Morgan's (1998) chapter titled "The masculinity of Christ".

[11] http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,1101960624,00.html &

http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,1101041025,00.html

The 32 covers are, at best, quasi-religious in nature. Rather than addressing religion exclusively as a matter of belief or practice, covers also introduce alternative subjects (e.g., science or politics), or promote a new popular culture event (such as the Internet or a recent Disney film). Furthermore, consistent with economic marketing factors, ten of these covers align the magazine's religious subject matter with religious holidays (Easter in April and Christmas in December).

While there is an opportunity to depict standard religious symbols, and thus encourage discourse about particular denominations or practices, such messages get lost in the promotion of popular media events. For example, one cover carrying the headline "America's Fascination with Buddhism," does not feature Buddhist or Tantric symbols, but instead a still shot of Brad Pitt from the movie *Seven Years in Tibet*.[12] The subheadings further eviscerate the religious value of Buddhism, informing the reader not only that there are new movies and books about Buddhism, but also by suggesting that Buddhism is a fad among celebrities.

Similarly, another cover asks, "Who was Moses?" with a woodcut depiction of a bearded Moses holding the Ten Commandments.[13] But rather than focus on the religious understanding of Moses in Judeo-Christian belief systems, the printed text delimits the parameters of the inside story as one offering research that gives "a fresh look at a hero of our time." This hero is not the "historic" Moses represented by the woodcut, but instead the Moses in Disney's newly released cartoon, *The Prince of Egypt*. Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ* is similarly promoted on a cover depicting a Renaissance painting of Jesus carrying the cross. While the lead question is certainly one of theology, "Why Did Jesus have to Die?" the smaller text notes new debates arising as "millions flock to see *The Passion*" during the Easter holiday.

Furthermore, religious imagery promotes new academic research or coincides with newly published books. Several examples demonstrate this flattening of religious symbols. Abraham gazes heavenward in a painting to introduce consumers to a "new book [that] explores the challenge of turning him into a peacemaker" among Muslims, Christians, and Jews who believe he is the father of their faith. Jesus is depicted in dated paintings on all the covers, suggesting that there is no contemporary construct of this religious figure. Four covers depicting Jesus serve as referents of new books (one novel and three scholarly books) questioning contemporary religious belief systems.

Conclusion

TIME covers embrace private religious practice, are skeptical of institutions, lack a common code of symbols, and synthesize religion with art, entertainment and scientific information. These findings suggest that, at least in the past decade, *TIME* has appropriated religious symbols and ideas to advance its position as a secular magazine, despite its special emphasis on Judeo-Christian beliefs during particular religious holidays. While the dominant text celebrates both personal and public religious issues as

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[12] http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,1101971013,00.html

[13] http://www.time.com/time/magazine/0,9263,7601981214,00.html

newsworthy events, this study uncovers a clear demarcation between institutional and private religious practice. Hence, the world of religion portrayed in *TIME* is not one where institutions dominate the news consistently.

The use of iconography, color, and arrangement of elements to validate private religious worship could encourage a positive discourse about autonomous religious worship. One defensible interpretation of these findings, then, is that the covers of *TIME* appear to endorse the private religious worldview over the public one. The more negative portrayal of institutions, however, could have consequences for denominational structures. That is, religious organizations that depend on the media to educate and inform the public may find that such channels of information no longer disseminate denominational symbols like they did in the past. These findings, then, might be useful to church representatives as they plan campaigns and analyze their communication with the press.

TIME's synthesis of religion with other areas such as art, entertainment and science suggests that economic influence on content is very strong. It seems that religion cannot stand alone as a news topic without some attachment to the latest book or movie. This may signal the trivialization of religious information discussed by Postman (1992) where deeper, more thorough treatment of morality and ethics is glossed over. The second possibility is that *TIME*'s portrayal of religion is actually a secular discussion, not a religious one. Religion is introduced as the topic, but the emphasis is often on the secular---most often with emphasis on science and philosophy as a means of understanding religious events.

Additional research is needed to understand the varied tone within portrayals of private and institutional religion. Perhaps journalistic standards are applied in warning readers about the potential misdeeds of religious leaders and their teachings. Or, positive depictions of private religion practice may indicate gravitation toward this type of worship within the culture. Future studies should examine this trend more closely. It is clear, however, that the use of negative imagery may encourage public discussion about various sects that is cautious and skeptical. If such discourse actually occurs, this could impact the ways various groups are accepted and accommodated by the larger society.

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