

RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

Natalia OSTROMAN, University Lecturer,
Alec Russu Balti State University

In recent years the flow of religious discourse has spilled into the public arena with increasing intensity. Religious broadcasts fill the airwaves and direct-mail. People have religious beliefs, convictions, and sentiments. They harbor predispositions, orientations, and commitments. They behold religious symbols, and these symbols give meaning to their lives, help them construct reality, and provide them with security and a sense of belonging. If we speak about religious discourse, attention should be paid what religion is, first. Clifford Geertz claims that religion is a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivation in men 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. He is critiqued by Talal Asad, offering a more circumscribed definition of religion. It is those kinds of practice and discourse, he states, that are intrinsic to the field in which religious representations acquire their identity and their truthfulness. From this it does not follow that the meaning of religious practices and utterances are to be sought in social phenomena. No matter what discord these two definitions have the features that are mentioned in both are of more importance. They include that religion is made realistic, truthful, symbolic and having identity. Religious discourse, Huber affirms, consists in that which Christians say both institutionally and de facto about God. We can ‘deduce’ neither philosophically nor theologically what religious speech is or what is its essence. It is how people, and specifically how Christians, use language in the context of their faith, i.e., when practicing their religion. (This does not of course exclude the ‘normativeness’ imparted by the rules of a specific religious discourse, especially Christian discourse – a normativeness which in any event is essential to any language.) Religious discourse can be expressed both linguistically and behaviourally. Religious discourse, as Greg Bahnsen claims, involves talk about God, immortality, miracles, salvation, prayer, values, ethics. To speak of the existence or attributes of God, for example, is to make

religious utterances. All religions which are promulgated publicly must in some measure use religious discourse. And Christians in particular engage extensively in utterances concerning God and their faith; after all, Christianity is preeminently a religion of verbal revelation from God and personal profession of faith. Thus Christians are always talking "religiously" - in sermons, prayers, confessions, didactic lessons, catechisms, personal testimonies, songs, exclamations, counsel and encouragement, etc. Courtney S. Cambell suggests that this talk is conveyed through foundational stories, myths, or narratives, in addition to reasoning from abstract principles. These stories provide self-understanding and moral orientation for the religious community as it encounters other communities in a pluralistic world. To conclude religious discourse is a reflection of religious people's life, convictions, principles that have sources in foundational stories, myths, narratives. It is a centered talk about God and ideas related to Him. Religious discourse has no limitations in length. It is realistic, truthful, symbolic and having identity. It has its own norms that guide people's behavior and language.

Bibliography

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