

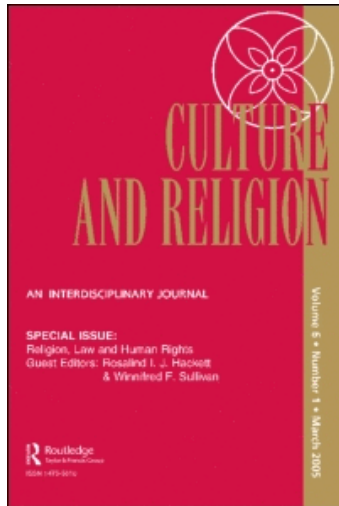
This article was downloaded by: [Morgan, David A.]

On: 13 June 2011

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 938625006]

Publisher Routledge

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## Culture and Religion

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713694811>

### Mediation or mediatisation: The history of media in the study of religion

David Morgan<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Religion, 118 Gray Building, Duke University, Durham, NC, USA

Online publication date: 13 June 2011

**To cite this Article** Morgan, David(2011) 'Mediation or mediatisation: The history of media in the study of religion', Culture and Religion, 12: 2, 137 – 152

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1080/14755610.2011.579716

**URL:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2011.579716>

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## Mediation or mediatisation: The history of media in the study of religion

David Morgan\*

*Department of Religion, 118 Gray Building, Duke University, Box 90964, Durham, NC 27708, USA*

Several different accounts of ‘mediatisation’ and ‘mediation’ circulate in the literature of media studies. This paper begins with a parsing of them, considering their conceptual distinctions and similarities. The argument developed here is for a general theory of mediation and a more particular view of mediatisation. Although developing a critical assessment of a prevailing notion of mediatisation, the paper does not dismiss it, but regards it as exhibiting a limited usefulness. In order to make its case, the paper relies on the case study of Evangelical ephemeral print in Britain circa 1800, examining the production and circulation of tracts in order to show that arguments for mediatisation need to be strongly qualified by historical evidence. Greater reliance on historical precedents will strengthen studies of mediatisation by chastening the often exorbitant and ahistorical claims made for it.

**Keywords:** mediation; mediatisation; Evangelical print; religious print culture

Theories of mediatisation variously argue that structural changes in the industry of communications and media technology proliferate into other social spheres such as politics, religion or consumption, and transform them (Krotz 2008; Hjarvard 2008a; Hjarvard 2011; Lilleker and Scullion 2008; Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999). Mediatisation is often understood to be a modern, even strictly contemporary (‘late modern’ or ‘postmodern’) phenomenon – not only dependent on mass media, but also dependent on digital media as its principal condition (Hjarvard 2008a, 2008b; Lilleker 2002). By contrast, some scholars consider the term to refer to any moment in human history when a medium achieves such a degree of reliability and ubiquity that it is regarded by its users as an undistorted conveyor of truth or reality, or that certain media are able to penetrate directly to their supernatural referent. Examples are not difficult to list such as the notion that news video cannot lie, or that photographs document events as they actually occurred, that séances communicate directly with the dead, that prayer communicates with deities, that the smoke of sacrifices mingles

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\*Email: david.morgan2@duke.edu

in the nostrils of the gods, that icons establish a direct connection to the heavenly saint, that high places serve as the ritual meeting point of humanity and the gods or that certain rocks, trees or springs are oracular sites favourable to petition and divination.

Sometimes the term 'mediation' is used to refer to both ideas: on the one hand, latter-day high-tech media logic and, on the other hand, any medium that dominates a society in such a way that it helps construct a shared sense of reality. But 'mediatisation' is also used by scholars to refer only to the first sense, in which case 'mediation' may be used to designate the second meaning. Alternatively, mediatisation is understood by some as a uniquely modern example of the larger category of mediation. In brief, the literature offers three different uses of the terms in relation to one another: the two terms may be interchangeable; they may refer to altogether different phenomena or mediatisation may be a special instance of meditation.

In this paper, I wish to argue for a broader theory of mediation that is critical of a prevailing account of mediatisation without, however, dismissing its limited usefulness. I will begin by reviewing the dominant meanings of key terminology in the recent scholarly literature, especially with regard to mediatisation in politics, religion and consumption, and to mediation in the study of culture; then develop an account of mediation in the study of religion (with special reference to an examination of British Evangelicalism) in order to critique a prevailing concept of mediatisation and prefer instead a theory of mediation.

### Concepts of mediation and mediatisation

Altheide and Snow use the terms 'mediatisation' and 'mediation' interchangeably, but focus on the latter as their term of choice. They understand it to mean, 'the impact of the logic and form of any medium involved in the communication process' (1988, 195). 'Media logic' was a term they had developed earlier and used to describe the social influence of communication such that 'media logic becomes a way of "seeing" and of interpreting social affairs' (1979, 9). 'Social reality', they argued, 'is constituted, recognized, and celebrated with the media' (1979, 12). Thus, a medium exhibits inherent characteristics in its production and operation that organise 'the selection, transmission, and reception of information' (1979, 11). Altheide and Snow point to a variety of media in human history which have structured human society in distinctive ways such as the calendar, fashion and dance. Although they focus their attention on modern media, Altheide and Snow do not find it necessary to differentiate mediatisation and mediation because for them both terms signify a fundamental process in human communication at any time in human history. Mediatisation is not only a modern or even late modern phenomenon. Media logic is something to be observed throughout the history of human society because media are fundamental to *Homo sapiens* and exert a characteristic and historically peculiar logic in any particular historical moment.

But Altheide and Snow agree with other theorists of mediatisation that modernity is distinctive. Although pre-modern Western society practiced forms of mediation which were widely identified with institutionalised ritual, matters shifted with the beginning of the twentieth century when ‘another dimension of mediation had emerged, one that developed formal properties and competency requirements independent of existing institutional norms’ (1988, 196). Modern mediatisation takes place in the formats of mass communication which are not controlled by traditional institutions, such as church or state, though they are regulated by the state and often heavily patronised by religious organisations. And yet Altheide and Snow do not understand this as a categorical distinction, but as peculiar to the media logic of modern mass communication. ‘Mediatisation’ *per se* does not signify something uniquely modern or postmodern.

Friedrich Krotz has also used the term to designate a process that occurs at any time in human history: ‘By mediatization we mean the historical developments that took place and take place as a result of change in (communication) media and the consequences of those changes. If we consider the history of communication through music, or the art of writing, we can describe the history of human beings as a history of newly emerging media and at the same time changing forms of communication’ (2008, 23). As he is interested in modern communication, Krotz goes on to stipulate:

Today, we can say that mediatization means at the least the following: (a) changing media environments...; (b) an increase of different media...; (c) the changing functions of old media...; (d) new and increasing functions of digital media for the people and a growth of media in general; (e) changing communication forms and relations between the people on the micro level, a changing organization of social life and changing nets of sense and meaning making on the macro level. (2008, 24)

But for those who argue for a distinctively late modern understanding of the term, one finds them also arguing that modern media become so integral to modern life that ‘the media’s definition of reality amalgamates with the social definition of reality’ (Schulz 2004, 89). Schulz uses the two terms as synonyms, but concentrates on mediatisation, which he defines in terms of ‘the role of mass media in a transforming society’ (2004, 98). According to Schulz, mediatisation is a process in which mass media extend human communication, subsume social activities and institutions, join with non-media activities and engage people and organisations in their media logic (2004, 98).

Stig Hjarvard restricts the use of the term *mediatisation*, making it a specialised reference to a very recent phenomenon, and distinguishes it from *mediation*, by which he means something much broader, namely, the use of any medium to achieve communication (2008a, 2008b, 13–14, 2011). Hjarvard regards mediatisation as a latter-day institutionalisation of media production that replaces the role of older and traditionally sovereign institution called ‘religion’. He premises his arguments on the view that, as he puts it, ‘contemporary society is permeated by media, to an extent that the media may no longer be conceived of as being separate from cultural and other social institutions’ (Hjarvard 2008a, 105). Hjarvard is

committed to the view that the mediatisation of religion ‘may be considered a part of a gradual secularization’ in which ‘the media have taken over many of the social functions that used to be performed by religious institutions’ (2008a; 2008b, 10; 2011). By secularisation, he does not mean elimination of religion, but rather the replacement of religious institutions in providing compelling forms of social relations and rituals traditionally controlled by religious authorities. He notes that this assertion applies more to European society than to North American (11).

For Hjarvard, mediatisation is a unilateral process of the diffusion of media logic into traditionally non-mediated social spheres such as religion, education and politics. But other scholars are less sure about this, preferring instead more subtle accounts of commerce and consumption that do not begin with media, but rather with the economic condition of capitalism. For example, Swedish media scholar André Jansson has stressed consumption as a principal site for mediatisation: ‘Due to the mediatization process, which is integral to reflexive accumulation, most kinds of consumer goods have become increasingly image-loaded, taking on meanings in relation to media texts, other commodity-signs, entire lifestyles, and so on’ (2002, 6). Jansson affirms Frederic Jameson’s recognition of ‘the symbiosis between the market and the media’ and continues: ‘In such a context, consuming goods and media texts become pretty much the same thing. Earlier distinctions between thing and concept erode, and ultimately the real world gives way to a realm of postmodern simulation – at least on a theoretical level’ (2002, 6). He seeks to show ‘how media consumption weaves together with other forms of consumption, thus exposing the inseparability of these two domains’ (6–7), claiming that it is no longer meaningful to distinguish them from one another. Rather than ‘media culture’ or ‘consumer culture’, Jansson suggests that analysis focuses on what he calls ‘image culture’, in which ‘consumption is just as much about communication as about functional use value’ (12). Mediatisation in his view is in part responsible for the rise of image culture, a culture in which consumption and media production are indistinguishable as forms of meaning making, that is, as ‘the establishment and expression of cultural communities’ (10). Mediatisation refers to the increased role of ‘mediated cultural products... in the development and maintenance of cultural communities’ (15). Another way of putting this is that media increasingly provide the semiotic means of ‘a shared interpretive framework’ to consumer citizens (15). Although art or religious ritual or imperial propaganda or cuisine or vernacular language or feudal social structure or military culture or city–state citizenship provided dominant resources for the formation and maintenance of cultural community in pre-modern eras, the argument of mediatisation is that media products and their systems of production and distribution – generally speaking, media commerce – offer unrivalled resources for the social construction of meaning in the modern age.

### **Historicising mediation: The case of Evangelical print**

A principal problem with mediatisation is that nothing in it seems essentially new. If mediatisation is a media makeover of religion, must we not concede that it has

happened many times before? It seems clear that in any number of historical eras, the information provided by a particular medium has exerted a powerful effect of its particular 'media logic' over the social practices, community formation and the operation of power and social organisation. For example, the written epistle read aloud shaped the earliest Christian communities by conceiving of the 'gospel' as 'news' from distant communities who entered a network of remote sites held together by written communication. And icon veneration was officially established in Orthodoxy in the ninth century and came to deeply structure its liturgy, theology and devotional life. Cathedral construction eventually transformed European Christianity in the thirteenth century by developing grand exteriors and elaborating interior spaces designed to house relics and sacred works of art for the purpose of the Mass and the veneration of pilgrims. Print took over Northern European Christianity in the sixteenth century and resulted in a host of changes.

The argument that mediatisation is a modern condition of the autonomy of media, separate from the institutions of church and state that once dominated the press and the patronage of the arts, is not entirely convincing since book and tract production in Europe since the late fifteenth century occurred largely in the commercial sphere. Tract production and sales were conducted by independent entrepreneurs in the marketplace, not in most cases by official religious institutions. Church and state were major patrons, but not the only sources of income for publishers and booksellers. Private patronage in the arts began to increase during the Renaissance even as ecclesiastical patronage, especially in Protestant Europe, began to subside. At the very least, this suggests that mediatisation began much earlier than the late twentieth century. In fact, Protestant tracts in the early years of the nineteenth century in Britain and the USA are a case in point. Organised as private associations, they operated independently of formal religious bodies, and were often critical of and criticised by official religious authorities. On the other side, secular book sellers and printers came to resent the tract and bible societies as commercial rivals.

Hjarvard contends that media take over many of the operations formerly dominated by religion institutions. In fact, however, religion and media bear a much more complicated relation in the modern era. To illustrate this, I propose to examine British Evangelical print culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for several reasons. First, examining a European example will show that the prominence of religious print culture before the twentieth century was not only a North American phenomenon (indeed, American tract production was patterned entirely on the British model) and that religious mass mediation in the modern era did not consist of the decay of religious institutions in Europe. Pace a Weberian scenario, Protestantism was not a secularising force if by secular is meant the elimination of strong religious institutions. In fact, Protestant media production was hearty and ambitious, and relied on a highly rationalised model of production, distribution and accounting. Regular annual reports issued by Tract, Mission and Bible Societies quantified production to the

last pence and page and sought to calculate the maximum effect from the means of production (Morgan 1999, 44–46). Far from passively conforming to the pressure of a secular media logic, Protestant book and tract production flooded the marketplace with its explicitly religious wares, challenging secular publishers and ambitiously adapting techniques to the production of religious print. Moreover, print was experienced as transforming the Protestant conception of Christendom from a European geography to a global communication network. This did not mean secularising religion, but giving the faith and its principal institution, the church, a new form, one consonant with its primary activity, as Evangelicals understood it. The conception of information put into practice by Evangelical print producers and avidly consumed by pious readers configured new relations among religion, commerce and media, forging a new era of mediation that transformed the experience of the religion. It is important to understand that this change did not occur by aping media producers, but by adapting to evangelism and the marketplace a conception of information and uses of print first developed during the Protestant Reformation and shaped over the course of ensuing centuries.

Inspired by the trans-Atlantic wave of revivals in the 1730s and 1740s and the call of British and American revival preachers such as George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards for Calvinists to rise above sectarian differences, Evangelical British Protestants in the late eighteenth century welcomed a new round of spiritual awakening in the 1790s, and determined to organise themselves into a set of allied associations committed to benevolent causes. A principal activity of such organisations as the London Missionary Society (founded in 1795, hereafter abbreviated as LMS), the Religious Tract Society (founded in 1799, hereafter abbreviated as RTS) and the British and Foreign Bible Society (founded 1804) was printing books, Bibles or tracts, and circulating them around the world in mission efforts. Encouraged by explorations in the Pacific Ocean, trade contacts in Asia and India, and Britain's growing colonial presence in all of these regions, British Protestants (including many in the Church of England) felt that Evangelical unity was the key to pooling resources in order to export their faith to the non-Christian world.

In the summer of 1793, 24 British clergy issued the first number of a new venture in Protestant print, which they titled *The Evangelical Magazine*. The name was a deliberate attempt to strike a new common ground among the host of sects in Britain – Congregationalist, Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist as well as clergy in the Church of England. Each of these groups bore an embattled history of persecution, struggle, and bitter sectarian rivalry and resentment. But the clergy of this group had been born after what many considered a season of grace, the *trans*-Atlantic revivals. All of the young clergy were dedicated to a balance of doctrinal, practical and experimental religion. And all were compelled by the desire to rise above sectarian tensions and establish a mutually shared platform that overlooked sectarian differences for the sake of evangelism. So in the fall of 1794, the Rev. David Bogue, a Congregationalist minister and

co-editor of *The Evangelical Magazine*, published a call to readers to take up the mission to the heathen. Bogue invited Calvinist Protestants to join in the cause under the single flag of Evangelicalism. And the call was heeded. One year later, he stood before the founders of the LMS, whose directors and members included virtually all of the editors of *The Evangelical Magazine*, and proclaimed that all were ‘assembled with one accord, to attend the funeral of *bigotry*’ (*Sermons* 1795, 130).

Union, print, revivalism and the global scope of the British Empire constituted the primary conditions for a new conception of Christendom among British Evangelicals in the 1790s. The idea of a print network, designed to stretch over the face of the earth and conduct the redeeming power of Sacred Writ deployed in the inexpensive packaging of tracts, books and the Bible, was intended to change the historical idea of Christendom as Europe. The older idea of Christendom as a continental fortress had taken shape under pressure from Islam, whose advancing presence captured former strongholds of ancient Christendom, defined as the Christianised Roman Empire. Losing territory from the Iberian Peninsula in the ninth century to the fall of Constantinople in the fifteenth century, finally terminating Eastern Christendom, firmly identified Christendom with the European continent in the minds of its inhabitants, whether Catholic or Protestant.

But the expanding British Empire helped change that *idée fixe*. Britain saw its imperial ambitions as proliferating the values of civilisation, and zealous Protestants understood that to mean spreading Christianity abroad. In the final decades of the eighteenth century in Great Britain, print media came to shape an international discourse that Evangelicals experienced as a medium of signs, what the Directors of the LMS called ‘blessed symptoms that the spirit of God is moving upon the face of the trouble waters’ of a turbulent Europe besieged by the high infidelity of the French Revolution and its aftermath (*Report* 1798, 16). The Directors were deeply encouraged by mass print as a form of communication because it seemed to convey the benevolent acts of Providence. Correspondence among widely spread Evangelicals and the constant stream of notices advertising international efforts in mission and revival were indications of a spiritual movement in which they took part, what they believed was a new dispensation that may hearken the millennial age. Evangelicals formed a media network, a global, diffused church, whose centre was not bricks and mortar, but the printing press and publishing committee. Writing and reading were devotional exercises of communication and testimony of the new Christendom circa 1800.

It is sometimes said that new media such as Internet or television or radio or the printing press transform religious communities into something else, replacing the material basis of one form of fellowship, interaction and community with another. Change is certainly the case, but the manner of change involved needs to be carefully considered. Protestants in England did not become mere instruments of empire, religious on the surface, but political and economic at the deeper level of cause and effect. In fact, Evangelicals were sometimes sceptical, even publicly



critical of Britain's imperial aims. And the East India Company, the state's economic arm, excluded missionaries from its territories until 1813, when Parliament had no choice but to bow to popular opinion and Evangelical pressure by issuing a new charter that allowed Evangelical outreach. With regard to print media, it is important to recognise that Evangelical Protestantism has always been premised on practices of imperative or hortatory mediation, that is, of telling another what it is he or she needs to know, must know for salvation. Since the Reformation, Protestantism has thrived on the production and distribution of what may aptly be called 'sacred information'. Evangelicalism is about publishing essential information, whether speaking, writing, printing or broadcasting it. Evangelical Christians from Martin Luther to Billy Graham have invested their greatest resources as preachers, writers and cultural producers in this urgent act of communication. Extracting the Word, the written Voice of God from the Bible and transmitting it in spoken, written or graphic form goes to the heart of the Protestant ideal of communication (Morgan 1999, 13–38).

Union meant a new age of Christian cooperation in the face of the global task. A report to the Missionary Society in 1799 clearly articulated the ideal and its import: 'The union among all real Christians, without distinction, which forms the distinguishing feature of your plan, attracts their peculiar admiration, and encourages the pleasing hope, that we shall soon approximate more universally towards each other, assume, as the body of Christ, greater visibility, and hold more general intercourse, for the purposes of promoting his spiritual kingdom' (*Report* 1799, vi–vii). This conveys the ecclesiology, evangelism and millennialism of the Evangelical union. The membership of the LMS and related societies such as the RTS was seeking to realise an Evangelical Christendom as the 'real' church, and saw contemporary political events as symptomatic of providential opportunity. A German clergyman conveyed to the RTS in a letter of 1801 what the communication network meant to him: 'To be sure, there is nothing which can afford nobler pleasure to a Christian mind than to be united with other vital Christians, and to be convinced that there really exists an invisible church of Christ, planted in the midst of the visible, and to enjoy a share in the communion of the saints on earth' (*Account* 1803, 32). It was not a new Reformation they sought, but a revitalised Christendom spread around the world. Print media were to play a key role in realising this Evangelical Christendom because print – not sacrament or liturgy or traditional institutions – was the chief manifestation of the body of Christ, the emerging visibility of the church as a global reality. The strategy was to build a canopy of print around the world to contain the real church, to make visible the true Christendom. The mediated body of Christ did not seek to separate itself or dominate the state, but to grow into greater influence and extent in order to hasten the second return of Christ.

The RTS invested in the massive production of inexpensive, typically short tracts that were widely disseminated at home and abroad. Tracts were commonly distributed free of charge, though they were sold in bulk to distributors who formed repositories for their dissemination. Income for the RTS came from

donations and book sales. Tracts were considered a very attractive medium for several reasons. First, their prosaic mode of discourse was the closest substitute for preaching, the ur-medium of Christian evangelism. The personal address of the 'spoken' discourse of the tract's preaching was aimed at provoking conviction and empathic identification of the reader with the speaker or person described by the tract's text. Second, tracts allowed lay distribution as well as clerical, thereby boosting dissemination and engaging more people in practices of evangelism. And those who distributed tracts were promised a spiritual reward for doing so: 'Not only the reading of a Tract, but the very act of lending it, or giving it away, has been attended with a blessing to the lender and the giver, if not also the receiver' (*Proceedings* 1820, 205). Third, tracts could be targeted to audiences with great precision and discrimination. They were produced with particular problems and readers in mind – whatever the social problem, whatever the individual's resistance to the Evangelical message might be. Tract societies in Britain and North America produced dozens different categories of tracts – those for infidels, drunkards, swearers, backsliders, errant servants, errant children, errant husbands, vain wives, dutiful mothers, Catholics, pensioners, managers, merchants, sailors, soldiers and even those most in need of sacred truth, divinity professors. Fourth, tracts were economically produced, and, as such, they were able to compete with profane pamphlets hawked for profit. Evangelicals thrust themselves into the marketplace, breaking down barriers between their faith and aspects of profane or secular spaces within the culture. Tracts were an effective way of garnering attention, establishing an entry point for the more demanding and far more protracted Calvinist procedures of introspection and conversion. The process began with gaining the reader's attention and igniting a conviction of sin. A tract could accomplish this, going where no preacher might go.

Tracts allowed Evangelicals to tailor their measures to the popular audience, thus creating an ambitious popular culture. Religion was made to meet people, at least in order to gain access to them, before it began to unfold its rigorous demands. People were conceived as a public of self-interested consumers who needed to be attracted to the product in order for it to receive the response that Evangelicals wanted for it. The rhetoric of appeal and persuasion became a fundamental part of Evangelical print culture. Evangelicals not only helped create modern popular culture, but they were also instrumental in establishing a sense of the religious consumer for whom religious print was a commodity that Evangelicals sought to produce and distribute with systematic effectiveness.

Evangelical print culture produced tracts as a remediation of oral culture. Long committed to the spoken, especially the preached word, some Protestant contemporaries were sceptical of the degree of investment in print proposed by the advocates of the Tract Society. In order to counter this anxiety, RTS leaders in Britain and America stressed the consistency of speech and writing, calling tracts 'printed Truth'. Printed texts could even be superior to the spoken word, according to some proponents of religious tracts. One writer in the American Tract Society contended that 'What is written is *permanent*, and spreads itself

further by far, for time, place, and persons, than the voice can reach. The pen is an artificial tongue; it speaks as well to absent as to present friends; it speaks to them that are *afar off*, as well as those that are near; its peaks to *many thousands at once*' (Anon. 1838, 50). For this author and many fellow members of Tract Societies on both sides of the Atlantic, print media were, in McLuhanesque fashion, able to extend the reach of the human senses. Tracts were a way of writing that was imbricated upon a way of speaking, subsuming it into a larger, more effective regime of communication. The mode of address was narrative or direct speech, but addressed to the reader as a personal encounter.

The RTS articulated from its inception a clear set of aims that constitute a kind of ideology of print. The Tract Society offered in its first tract an address on the value and use of tracts. Authored by David Bogue, this short and readable treatise stressed the power of the ephemeral agency of print that encapsulated the Evangelical understanding of ephemeral print as sacred information. Bogue defined the religious tract as 'a select portion of divine truth, designed and adapted to make the reader wise unto salvation' (1799, 4). Tracts were sacred truth conveniently packaged for mass production and dissemination, literally dissemination, because Bogue and his colleagues believed that tracts could be cast wide like seeds to plant the gospel where it might grow into conviction and conversion and lead eventually to Evangelical new birth. Evangelicals placed enormous hope and expectations in tracts as a primary agency of spreading the word. Bogue emphasised the power and convenience of the tract medium. It avoided the limits of face-to-face oral culture to deliver the same message, and could do so irrespective of the limits of time and place. Print had something that orality did not. As Bogue said of the tract: 'It would require some time to deliver its contents, and they might slip out of the memory, and could not afterwards be recalled. But it is given away in an instant; it may be perused and re-perused at pleasure; and the truth may thus flow through a great variety of channels, and profit even many years hence' (Bogue 1799, 5). Unlike the sermon, print was not limited to real time. Stories soon circulated about the ability of tracts to plant the word without any use of the preacher. As bits of paper left along the way in everyday life, where they were found by chance and read by those who had not encountered Evangelical truth, tracts assumed a providential stature: what might appear happenstance to humans was in fact the operation of a higher agency making use of prosaic events.

Tracts also possessed very practical advantages, according to Bogue. They exerted a welcome social control that ought to be applauded by Evangelicalism's cultural despisers: 'In the present state of society', Bogue proclaimed, 'when wickedness stalks abroad in every form with a brazen front, to take away from the mass of vice, though but a small portion, and to add to the sum of virtue but a single grain, will, by the philosopher and the moralist, be neither overlooked nor despised' (1799, 15). The tract, in other words, was the Evangelical answer to the Anglican Establishment's putative bolstering of British political institutions. If the Established Church would secure Britain from above, the Evangelicals would

do it from below. According to Bogue, tracts suppressed vice by virtue of their cheapness: because they were very inexpensive, tracts could compete very well in the commercial marketplace with profane literature. For this reason, the RTS followed the example of the tracts of Hannah More's Cheap Repository by including wood engravings on the covers of many tracts. The RTS also engaged in aggressive competition. The minutes of the publication committee of the Tract Society demonstrate the organisation's careful attention to the forces of the market in underselling secular competitors by offering hawkers special discounts on religious tracts. An annual report of the RTS noted very clearly the organisation's intention behind lowering the cost of tracts for street hawkers, even to the point of suffering an annual loss of £400 in 1815: 'it is hoped gradually and ultimately to suppress more effectually, the foolish and licentious ballads and papers which are displayed on walls, or otherwise offered for sale in various parts of the metropolis and of the country' (*Proceedings* 1820, 257). Bogue assured his readers that customers would be led from reading tracts to further Evangelical literature, indicating that tracts were but the front end of an entire regimen of Evangelical salesmanship. He urged distributors and writers of tracts to prefer or produce tracts that present 'pure truth' clearly and plainly stated, and should be striking and entertaining, that is, capable of grasping the reader's attention and holding it. In a sermon entitled 'The Diffusion of Divine Truth', preached in 1800 before a meeting of the Tract Society, Bogue paralleled speech and writing as equally authorised forms of communication: in addition to the spoken word, 'there is another method of diffusing truth, which can plead in its favour divine example and command. Man has a hand to write, as well as a tongue to speak; and God has employed the pen of the ready writer, as well as the tongue of the learned, to convey a word in season to him that is weary' (Bogue 1800, 10). If there were any doubt about the authority of text, Bogue proclaimed that 'God himself becomes the author of a short Religious Tract: with his own hands he wrote the Ten Commandments of the law.' Tracts were, therefore, in Bogue's words, 'a method of God's own appointment' (1800, 10, 4).

By making speakers into writers, tract authorship was able to overcome the numerical deficiency of preachers. A tract operated in the place of a speaker and many of the hundreds of tracts eventually produced by the RTS addressed the reader in the first person. In the USA, where the RTS served as the template for the American Tract Society and a large number of other tract producing and distributing organisations, Evangelicals were counselled to produce tracts that spoke directly to the reader without high-blown language or sermonic condescension. In both Britain and America, tract distributors were urged to keep on hand a variety of different tracts that could be suited to the needs of individuals.

The power of print culture as Evangelicals understood it was its translation of the oral culture of the preached word, limited to face-to-face, real-time social worlds, into the far more flexible medium of sacred information, mass print that could be inserted into the byways of every social milieu and disseminated over time and space without forfeiting the advantages of orality. The secret was to

imbricate a new mode of discourse on the archetype of traditional Evangelical oral culture. The result, at least in the ideology of Evangelical print, was a seamless join that made print capable of delivering Evangelical truth. As David Morgan has argued, contrary to the widely accepted dogma of Walter Benjamin, aura loses nothing in mass production, indeed, is even enhanced by it (1999, 7–8). The proponents of religious tracts were fond of calling them ‘little messengers’ and a variety of other endearing, animating terms that underscore the power of print to preach. Writers of tracts were urged to create scenarios in which readers empathetically projected themselves into the text by finding its circumstances to match their own. The Tract Society was so enamoured of this fit as the means of affecting readers that it regularly reproduced anecdotes, eventually several volumes of them, as demonstrations of the reception of their tracts (Morgan 2007, 13–36). In one characteristic account from 1808, a woman is given a tract written in dialogue form between a minister and a parishioner, which, according to the report, becomes a dialogue between herself and minister and ends in her conversion (*Anecdotes* 1808, 7–8). According to the anecdote, the entire process unfolded without the assistance of another actual human being, just the inward consumption of the tract.

### **Mediation and causality: Accounting for historical change**

According to at least one version of the mediatisation thesis, religion has been transformed from a non-mediated institutional sphere into mediated practices that are ‘part of a gradual secularization’ (Hjarvard 2008a, 2008b, 10). Stig Hjarvard defines the mediatisation of religion as a historical process in which ‘core elements of a social activity (for example, politics, teaching, religion, and so on) assume media form’ (2008a, 2008b, 13). Yet the case of Evangelical print in late eighteenth-century Britain demonstrates that the simple distinction between secularising media production, on the one hand, and institutional religion, on the other, is not an accurate portrayal of what happened in Europe. Religion today is by no means utterly de-institutionalised. Evangelicals created a vast print enterprise without traditional religious institutions. The many tract, devotional book and bible societies that formed around 1800 were private associations engaging the elective affinities of Protestants in Europe, North America and far beyond. There was not central authority directing the many individual enterprises, some of which operated in tandem with state authority, but most of which did not. Most importantly, their use of print media did not mean ceding responsibility for the creation of the sacred to secular media producers. The religious societies did not need to incorporate the logic of print media into their operation because it was already there, installed during the Protestant Reformation and steadily maintained in the long publication history since the sixteenth century.

But Evangelicals around 1800 did transform print production and circulation and did change the experience of Protestant Christianity as a result. The tract was

perhaps the most inventive device developed and deployed by Evangelicals. Its ephemeral format (a low intrinsic value coupled with a high information value) suited the mobility, anonymity and cultural literacy of contemporary society. People were encouraged to leave tracts on coach seats, on steamships, in empty rooms, along roadsides, in bars and stores where passers-by might find them and be lured into unsuspecting engagement with them. Paper production, steam printing, modern postal delivery and high rates of literacy meant that the tracts could be plentifully produced and that anyone could distribute them along the byways of everyday life. The inexpensive object might lay quietly and be taken up by chance as an ambivalent object that was transformed into the delivery of sacred information. Evangelicals understood the tract to 'speak' to the reader because it was the medium delivering God's voice and was, therefore, best imbricated on the speech of personal testimony or narrative. The remediation of oral discourse in mass print was believed to ensure a closer fit between the message and the receiver. Because the tract was scriptural truth in common language, it did not entail a loss of religion, but rather a pure deployment of it, and in a form that would compete directly with profane print. Therefore, it is not helpful to characterise the Evangelical tract as a form of mediatisation that secularised religion. Tracts are a good example of privatised Christianity, that is, religion that was no longer established or state endorsed, but remained explicit. The sort of re-sacralisation that Hjarvard describes holds well in Northern Europe, and can certainly be found elsewhere in the contemporary world (see Clark 2003; Hoover 2006). But the persistence of formal, yet privatised religions that practice robust forms of mediation challenges the narrowly conceived idea of secularisation embraced by some versions of the mediatisation thesis. The relationship between mediation and religion is more complex.

The power of print in the case of British and American Evangelicals resided in its role in constructing a renewed imaginary, a Christendom of print, an intuited world of shared ideas, sentiments and ideals whose consumption in print artefacts allowed access to an extended community of feeling. Items such as the Evangelical tract served as a touchstone for participation in this 'imagined community', to borrow Benedict Anderson's apt term (1991). This extended form of participation, a capacious mode of belonging, is what I have in mind by *mediation*, and I want to suggest that we do not understand modern, mass-mediated religion well if we do not understand how it operates in, with and under media practices. In recent years, this has been examined in several instances by scholars who have conveyed the centrality of media practices by defining mediation *as* religion (Stolow 2005, 2010; Meyer 2006, 2009, 11–17).

The mediatisation thesis would argue that media production marginalised religious institutions. In fact, that did not happen. Although anti-Evangelical components of the Church of England resented the inroads that dissenting Protestant sects made with their ambitious use of print, the RTS and the LMS worked with clergy, lay leaders and congregations, many of which formally supported the voluntary associations in membership and donations, and

patronised them for their publications to be used in evangelisation. Media production and distribution remained squarely within the control and entrepreneurial ambitions of the Evangelical organisers of the Societies. Media facilitated the Reformation of Protestantism, enabling a continuing shift from orality to print that resulted in a new conception and experience of Christendom as a far-flung network, a print remediation of oral, face-to-face communication.

In its most extreme form, mediatisation offers a naïve and blunt account of historical change: media production unilaterally transforms ancient social institutions such as religion, education, politics and entertainment into itself by replacing their mode of social relations with mediated forms of connectivity. These new media forms exert a logic that restructures the old institution such that the experience of community changes dramatically into the form offered by the new media. This is blunt because it ignores the nuanced give-and-take as well as the amount of time that change entails. It is naïve because it locates the power of agency in one domain – media corporations, technology or media artefacts. Doing so misses the dynamic role of the entire network or matrix of components that interact and might be said to share agency interactively: media producers, new technologies, media commodities, religions, religious entrepreneurs, governments, economies, social movements, local organisations and not least, consumers. Each of these performs within a total network that is far more able to explain change and to do so with a nuance that avoids instrumentalizing any aspect and therefore simplifying change (Latour 2005; Couldry 2003). Thus, in the case of British Evangelical print culture in the late eighteenth century, it is appropriate to identify a range of factors contributing to the matrix of change that saw print media explode and emerge around the globe. Individuals, voluntary social associations, print media, the British Empire, Evangelical dissenters and the Evangelical understanding of print as sacred information all must be factored into the matrix of causation in order to understand the rise of print media in the late eighteenth century as a privatisation of religion that was facilitated by media, but by no means de-institutionalised by it. Media were not an autonomous social force that changed a passive religion. Understanding the many factors as parts of a network, a reticulation of forces collectively conditioning one another, offers a much more nuanced, dynamic and inclusive account of the changes we see in British Evangelicalism (as well as American) at the time.

I believe that mediatisation remains a helpful concept in describing certain forms of media use and their effects, particularly with regard to implicit, ambivalent or what Hjarvard calls ‘banal’ religion that is found today (2008a, 2008b, 14). The intrigue or mystery that many find in science fiction, supernaturalism, exotic religions, magic, occultism, astrology, tarot or uncanny experiences such as *déjà vu*, coincidence or dreams, suggests that images, music and objects seem to carry an implicit sacredness, a potency that operates independent of explicit or institutional religion. The experience of this mystery or power comes to many people today through consumption of entertainment commodities, not in the rituals of ecclesiastical institutions. Simply put, for many today the sacred is most often

encountered in media – films, games, music, television programmes or novels. But broader assertions about religion and media in the modern age must be qualified by the persistence, indeed, robust success of formal, explicit, extensively mediated religions such as Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. Thus, it is helpful to regard *mediatisation* as a peculiar form of mediation, but to recognise in *mediation* a much larger domain of religious activity. Media, after all, have always operated as ‘socially realized structures of communication, where communication is culture’ (Gitelman and Pingree 2003, xv). This constitutes the power of media as ingredients in the social construction of reality, as many writers have noted in discussion of mediation and mediatisation. In the modern era, media have contributed to the meaning-making activity of both explicit and implicit forms of religion. The enchantment of the world happens in crystals and supernatural thrillers, but also in ephemeral pieces of paper which snatch one’s attention on the subway with the catchy ease of advertisements. Yet they do not speak of occult forces or past lives, but invite the reader to accept the friendly hand of Jesus and attend church on Sunday morning.

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