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World religions and professional communication: Theories and practices of the discipline

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Introduction to special edition on religion

Scholarly conversations about the influence of religion on professional communication have largely been absent in our discipline's published literature, yet religion often intersects with the work of teachers, researchers, and practitioners. It intersects with rhetorical patterns at many levels and contexts, including the organizations in which we work and volunteer, the sites where we conduct research and solve problems, and our teaching/training practices with students, clients, co-workers, community partners, and the many other populations we regularly serve in our professional lives. To explore the intersections of religion, globalization, and professional communication, this special edition of *Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization* presents four articles, each addressing a specific way religion interacts with local, national, and world contexts.

In developing this special issue, the editors sought contributions that examine religiosity in global professional communication and found that slippery language and the connotative nature of religious terminology create challenges to defining even the parameters of what it means to study professional communication in global contexts. Paradoxically, there lies the primary reason this conversation is necessary in the discipline.

Religious studies scholar Barbara Holdcroft (2006) identifies the difficulty in examining religiosity by pointing out that even her discipline is divided on defining religiosity conclusively. She settles on Jerry Cardwell's (1980) summarized explanation as an approach to finding a universal application. Thus, the question becomes is religiosity a

cognitive dimension ... concerned with what individuals know about religion, i.e., religious knowledge; [a] cultic dimension, [which] makes reference to the individual's religious practices, i.e., ritualistic behavior; [a] creedal dimension ... concerned with a personal religious belief, [or a] devotional dimension [which] refers to a person's religious feelings and experiences, i.e., the experiential dimension? (p. 6)

In seeking to situate religiosity in conversations in professional communication, then, the editors recognized the need to cross disciplinary boundaries, but found that doing so complicates the conversation even more. For clarification we turned to Richard Rorty (1993), whose lecture on the practice of human dignity and rights seemed an appropriate lens to create that larger definition of pragmatic religiosity. For us, then, understanding how religion intersects with professional communication practices became a discussion that by necessity links the religious with the secular, and morality with the concept of being human. To examine how religious culture influences communication, we draw upon this more universal understanding to determine how the various philosophical stances -- those identified with structured religion and those not -- can and do affect the function of communication.

The point to be made is that professional communication practices themselves are not overtly religious or secular, but are manifest in the deeper, often unexamined practices resulting from a somewhat unconscious subtext. This special issue is a step toward that examination.

The first article, "Religion and the Professional Ethos: The YMCA, Dale Carnegie, and the "Business Man" by Lance Cummings, argues that many Judeo-Christian ways of thinking -- mostly Protestant -- are heavily sedimented into discourse in and around professional communication, even when religion as an overt set of symbols and discourses cannot be seen. To argue this point, Cummings first examines the close ties between Christianity and the pre-disciplinary formations of professional communication in the Young Men's Christian Association's (YMCA) teaching of technical and business writing. Second, Cummings shows that the YMCA's construction of character and business ethos is re-articulated by one of the most influential figures in business culture, Dale Carnegie. In his book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Carnegie used the notion of the "psychological man" to re-articulate the religious, masculine ethos of the nineteenth century for the business world, while retaining ethical checks derived from religious discourses on cultivation, discipline, and self-control. Though many professional communication classrooms and textbooks still retain many of these relational principles and the masculine ethos they entail, this professional ethos is rarely balanced by the deeper ethical implications of Carnegie's holistic vision of professional ethos. Re-incorporating a more holistic vision of the professional ethos, while also reflecting on many of the masculine and individualist leanings, can help us understand professional ethos influenced by other religious and ethical visions, perhaps bringing balance back to many of today's business practices in the United States.

The second article, "The death list of Sandarmokh: Mayme Sevander's work as emancipatory international and intercultural professional communication" by Kyle Mattson, compares the ethnocentric assemblages that Finish immigrants brought to the Soviet Union and the United

States in the early 20th century. He grounds this approach in Sevander's emancipatory work in reading archives, and to his own ethnocultural traces as a descendent of Finland-Swedes, a smaller branch in the much larger milieu of U.S.-Finnish émigrés and their descendants. Mattson first explores the socialist-communist pseudo-belief in Soviet Karelia as a symbolic geography, as distinct from the actual Soviet Karelia with its inherent real-world risks. Such belief pointed forward to socially just outcomes for U.S.-Finnish émigrés, but on the other hand, it broke that promise, unable to prevent its morphing into the mass graves and, through Sevander's communally therapeutic work many decades later, the Death List of Sandarmokh. Mattson explores in very personal terms his own family history of emigrating from Finland to the upper Midwest of the United States. When critically informed about the past, descendent speak provides a method of critical consciousness-raising that can help practitioners transition in their work from the personal to professional, particularly as a starting point for emancipatory project work that involves complex and even painful histories. Though not named descendent speak until now, it is an emancipatory process that already has precedent in Haas' work to reflect on her own ethnocultural traces.

The third article, "Beyond Biography: Using Technical and Professional Documentation to Historically Contextualize Women's Agency" by Emily Peterson, analyzes the roles that professional communication played in advancing the agency of Mormon women in England in the early 1900s. In 1908, Harriet Barraclough -- Relief Society president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Halifax Ward, Leeds, England -- taught the women in her religious community to be "lifters and not leaners," and professional communication -- according to Peterson -- played a role in leaning as well as lifting. This article examines the three existing minute books from the Halifax Ward Relief Society of the Leeds England Stake that cover the society's activities from 1907 to 1921. The minute books document the work and create recognition for women's unseen labor, highlight the creation of identity within the organization, and illuminate the mediating discourse of community leaders. The work of the women in Halifax, England, is significant, quantifiable, and recorded; it is representative of the agency that occurs within structures and is shaped by cultural norms: it is relational and social, it happens on a continuum, and it can occur unintentionally. The meeting minutes also clarify how women's actions are representative of agency within a religious context. Peterson argues that professional communication provides an ideal lens for examining the agency that can occur within religious structures and organizations.

The final article, "Digitally Mapping the Buddhist Holy Land: Intercultural Communication, Religious History, and Networked Rhetoric" by Derek Maher and Guiseppe Getto, presents an exploratory methodology behind a research and instructional program that utilizes versatile digital tools and best practices from religious studies, digital humanities, and professional communication. The authors explore a pedagogy involving digital intercultural communication in a longstanding study abroad program that has enabled college students to study diverse religions in India and Nepal. In a new approach to the program, a semester-long preparatory course was developed to instruct students in Buddhism, religious studies, and key methods of the digital humanities in the semester prior to their journey to South Asia. Student teams studied Buddhist holy sites, developed research plans, and collaboratively organized their research into standard formats developed by the professor for publication on the web. This process began in a

U.S.-based classroom and then traversed the summer program in India and Nepal where students systematically studied and documented sites through geospatially-tagged multimedia data. The process resulted in an interactive website that shared the collected data. Maher and Getto found that digital intercultural projects hold the potential to span cultural boundaries in new ways. For example, pilgrims and tourists visiting the region are likely to constitute a special audience for this research, as they plan and navigate their travels. In addition, digital scholarship opens new vistas for generating and communicating knowledge. The authors encourage the academy to engage in critical self-reflection to elaborate on these new forms of teaching, research, and communication in rigorous ways. Such efforts, they claim, will be repaid by advancing student preparation and professionalization, creating innovative new means of generating and communicating knowledge, and increasing the relevance of scholarship beyond the academy.

The contributions of these four articles include how each assesses the ways in which religion intersects at many levels and forms in the daily lives of people across the globe, yet they also explore how new communication technologies can affect global religious interactions in important new ways. We invite readers to engage with these articles and their authors to continue developing this important line of inquiry and research.

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