

Religion and Writing

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- Concept definition:

Religion will hereby be used to refer to Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, while writing refers to creative writing.

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"Catholics should consider boycotting the film "The Da Vinci Code" to let the world know the story offends and defames the church. If the kind of 'slander, offenses and errors' contained in Dan Brown's best-selling book and the film based on it had been written about the Quran or the Shoah (the Holocaust), they rightly would have provoked a worldwide uprising." These words, spoken by Archbishop Angelo Amato, secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to the Catholic communications directors on April 28, 2008, illustrate the deep contemporary conflict between writing and religion.

Since the dawn of religion, the phenomenon has become one of the most essential aspects of human culture and communal thinking. It is a matter of day to day life, and has penetrated deep into every facet of human consciousness and affairs. Meanwhile, writing is a human intellectual activity that depends entirely on cultural background. It is a method of expressing cultural ideas, so religion more or less permeates writing.

From their inception, religions pass through various stages depending on their degree of involvement in real life. The first two most apparent stages are: religion as legislator or authority, and religion as heritage. The first is a transitional stage before the final one of religion as heritage, where it withdraws to the sidelines and is confined to moral and charitable matters. Before reaching the heritage stage all religions pass through an active condition in which they interfere in all matters of people's lives by controlling, shaping and setting their priorities, sometimes forcefully. Historically speaking, all religions imposed tremendous limitations on the freedom of writers. Stories about writers who were killed, burned to death or tortured because what they wrote was considered heresy are rife throughout history. This practice is unfortunately still present in some regions.

Defenders of religion always say that people tend to confuse religion with religious discourse, which mainly refers to the interpretation of holy texts by humans seeking the divine. This interpretation has caused multiple understandings or religious groups to spring from the same origin. The fourth Muslim caliph, the cousin of the prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him), realized this 15 centuries ago and said "*The Quran has no tongue, only people who speak its truth*". So although there is only one religion here, there are many different understandings and interpretations and therefore different ways of writing about it. Maybe this is why the Protestant Church remained silent on The Da Vinci Code!

But the problem persists because all human endeavors and ways of thinking are at risk of bias when it comes to interpreting holy texts. Writing is a kind of appeal against the imperfectness of human nature, while religious people consider their religious views to be impeccable and

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incapable or erring. Indeed, Archbishop Amato's reflection is very civilized considering he is talking about a work that can be considered blasphemy. Maybe this is because Christianity has already reached the Heritage stage. Other religions would have taken more violent action.

There is a dilemma between the freedom to write and the protection of religious symbols because religious belief is a human right and needs to be respected. Suitable legislation therefore needs to be established to solve this problem. Nevertheless, the conflict between the two will persist for long time.

The main objective of writing is that of raising questions about life, and endeavoring to find the answers, which leads to conflict between the nature of writing and the nature of religion. All religions are informed by their own holy Text, which is supposed to contain wisdom and absolute truth. In some cases they claim a monopoly over knowledge, saying the Text already provides all the answers anyone needs to know. Some religions even claim they are the source of scientific fact and can predict the future! Another conflict between religion and writing arises with regards to preaching: religion uses this to impart absolute truth, while preaching in literature weakens the text. In this way, writing effects change, while religion leads to stagnation.