

LASTING LEGACIES: A FRAMING ANALYSIS OF
RELIGION NEWS ONLINE AND IN LEGACY MEDIA

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the
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ONLINE AND IN LEGACY MEDIA

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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.....In memory of Sharon Lee Simpson, who always supported and encouraged me as only a mother can. She would have been exceedingly proud of this accomplishment.

For my husband, Marc Powers, who endured my prolonged periods of stress and general state of craziness during these past six years as a graduate student. Without his support and encouragement to keep going, this thesis wouldn't have been completed.

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ABSTRACT

This work examined 514 stories published at religion news niche websites, and the websites of legacy media in the U.S. to determine how stories about religion were framed online. Ten websites, chosen for their history of news coverage, geographic location and religion vertical, were analyzed for the study. Using the categories, or topoi, created by Mark Silk in his 1995 work “Unsecular Media,” this research examined how religion news stories were framed online, which expands earlier research that explored frames as they appear in print. This work also built on the research of additional frames, or topoi as Silk writes, created to examine news framing at Catholic blogs and found that religion news niche websites made more use of these new categories than did legacy news outlets.

Results showed that during the study period the frame or topos of tolerance was the most widely used in religion reporting, regardless of news outlet. This study concludes by discussing how the continuation of journalistic norms, particularly the use of conflict as a frame, perpetuates the criticisms of how religion news is reported.

INTRODUCTION

I fell into the religion beat quite by accident, but I quickly fell in love with the complexity and beauty of the stories that were to be told there. I started my career in journalism as a general assignment reporter at the Southeast Missourian in Cape Girardeau and found religion stories were what ignited my passion. Much of what I learned about covering this intriguing topic I discovered through the school of hard knocks. There were angry phone calls from readers, as well as frustrated sources and editors to contend with. It wasn't easy, but I found resources to help educate myself about best practices. And I began to find better stories and improved ways of telling them.

Almost 10 years later, I realized that people were seeking out religion coverage in the news because these were the stories that helped them make sense of the world, particularly after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. I suddenly realized my role as a journalist wasn't just to report the story but to help clear the clutter and point readers to information that could help inform their worldviews in new ways.

Shortly thereafter, I found myself back at the Missouri School of Journalism, where my professional education began. What better place to marry my love of journalism with my passion for studying religion and its place in society. This thesis addresses some of the questions I've had about how religion coverage is framed in the news, if those frames matter and what religion reporters and editors think about the process.

Much has changed in journalism in the past few years as new media develop and economic shifts take hold. The industry is changing, that's certain, and religion news is changing with it.

Websites such as Beliefnet.com and On Faith, a partnership of the Washington Post and Newsweek, have shaped new religion coverage for the new era of journalism. Although there have been some improvements in the manner in which reporters and editors make decisions about religion news, there are still more changes to be made — as with any topical or specialty beat. An important thing for journalists to realize is that their jobs remain a reflection of the events and stories that matter to our society and to readers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For decades, news consumers have been looking to a newspaper for the day's best stories and most important news. Today, they're more likely to read a tweet or check an RSS feed instead of waiting for home delivery of the newspaper. All these changes in news delivery have meant restructuring the business model and the newsroom to keep up with technology and the economy. And, like all beats in the industry, religion coverage has changed as newspapers seek to publish online first — and fast.

Understanding how religion journalism developed is crucial to understanding how its coverage continues to change as the industry evolves. For most of its history, journalism has been intertwined with religion.

“... [E]arly advocates of freedom of the press were preachers and proselytizers whose religious zeal — and the writings that poured forth from their pens — placed them solidly in the tradition of the world's first ‘journalists.’” (Underwood, 2002, p. 19)

Publishers of this era often printed pamphlets about religious and moral issues.

This “prophetic journalism” as Underwood calls it, became the formula for the early newspapers in the United States. (Ibid, p. 23) It was a staple of the “Penny Press” newspapers, such as James Gordon Bennett's New York Herald, that were looking for sensational stories that would appeal to a mass audience. Of course, religious leaders and the religious press criticized the Herald's coverage because the news often was independent and “from the outside” rather than taking a positive or deferential approach. The controversy that Bennett's publication sparked “has entered journalism's collective memory as religion coverage's ‘myth of origin.’” (Hoover, 2006, p. 20)

It is true that for decades after Bennett, religion was still considered important news among press leaders but the treatment was less oppositional as the “prophetic claims” of early journalists were “captured by and intertwined with the capitalist system that was establishing itself during the early modern era.” (Underwood, p. 27) Eventually, religion moved to the back pages of the paper as other types of stories — business and politics — pushed to the forefront of public conversation.

In many ways, the formula for religion news of this time included a human-interest story and coverage of Sunday sermons. The focus was clearly on the institutions of faith, not on individuals and spirituality as we see today, and only rarely on controversy. For a time, it seemed as if all religion news was good news. After the 1950s, as baby boomers forced changes to religious institutions and society at large, news coverage of religion also diversified. News magazines, such as *Time*, have consistently published news about religion over the past 40 years or more. Several studies have shown how religion news was framed over the decades or how coverage of religion changed over time at the magazine. (Hart, Turner and Kapp, 1981; Lichter, Lichter and Amundson, 2000, Scott and Stout, 2006; Davis, 2008) Sociologists note this shift in the societal paradigm as a move to a “religious marketplace” or a shift toward autonomy.

As society shifted, so did the news coverage of religion. Although the weekly “church page” filled with event listings, sermons and features was a staple of religion journalism by the end of the 19th century and well into the early part of the 20th century, there were some exceptions during this period. Early on the Scopes trial received a more “hard news” approach; and revivals by Billy Sunday and Billy Graham gained wider

coverage in the front sections of most newspapers. Profiles of prominent religious leaders gave way to the canons of conventional news coverage — meaning only scandals and grand controversies would move it out of a separate section and onto the main pages — and stayed there until the 1970s or so.

Religion scholars and historians say national and global religious controversies of the 1970s and 1980s were a turning point for religion news coverage. Stories about church scandals, culture wars and the Islamic revolution in Iran thrust religion news into the national and international limelight and into American public discourse. The election of Jimmy Carter, an Evangelical Christian, as president changed the context within which religion was viewed. Hoover argues that religion is a feature of the political landscape and a dimension of globalization, as well as a “motivator of social movements.” (Hoover, 2006, p. 37) As such, the attention journalists paid to it changed during the 1980s’ culture wars coverage. By the 1990s, it seemed that religion journalism was important to both the industry and to the audience.

In their 2000 report, “Bridging the Gap,” Jimmy Allen and John Dart suggest that the gap in religion coverage closed between 1993 and 2000 because as newspapers expanded coverage during an economic upswing, readers began to get comfortable with public expressions of religion, and training and education for journalists was improved.

However, in recent years, that expanded staffing has been subject to cuts and layoffs. In some cases, entire religion sections of the newspaper have been eliminated and reporters assigned to new beats. (Pulliam, 2007)

Religion might well be undervalued in many newsrooms, as some readers and critics have suggested, but there continues to be a religion angle to many stories published online today. As our society becomes more pluralistic, our foreign policy shaped by the religious values held by government leaders and the citizenry, and the structure of American faith becoming less institutionalized, it is likely that more religion coverage, not less, is to be expected in the press.

But what was the relationship between the two? Has the relationship improved since the days of Bennett's coverage of religious controversy as a means of selling newspapers?

Some would argue that little has changed, but most believe that the improvements that began in the 1990s continue today. Yet the argument still exists that "the way the media handle religion is deeply embedded in a set of historical, cultural, and political perceptions about religion's natural, proper, or desirable place in democratic public life." (Hoover, 1998, p. 11)

This argument about whether or not religion is reported well remains a leading criticism today. Scholars other than Hoover tend to agree that media coverage of religion has remained problematic through the years. Judith Buddenbaum, who has written extensively about religion news in the media, states that there is not enough coverage of religion in the news. She says it is seldom varied, offers little more than a shallow glance at the issues and tends to appear biased against religion. (Buddenbaum, 1990)

Questions remain about where to place print and online religion news— is it hard news or a feature? How are religion beat reporters integrated into the newsroom, and how

do they maintain objective standards and professionalism in the face of controversy? As religion news changes with the industry, these criticisms and questions remain.

Criticisms of coverage

Since the days of the Penny Press, some critics argue that editors have been redefining “‘reality’ to exclude the spiritual realm,” (Olasky 1988, p. 29) and have covered only sensational news about religion. Others argue that as religion gained prominence in American society, it garnered more attention and scrutiny from the press.

Studies of news framing in decades of religion news published in Time magazine have shown that nearly 4 out of 5 stories published involved conflict. Coverage of religious institutions was most prominent during the early days of the religion beat; today that coverage has been replaced with more stories about private religious practices. (Scott and Stout, 2006)

In the foreword to “Blind Spot: When Journalists Don’t Get Religion,” Michael J. Gerson writes that “a journalism that ignores or dismisses the role of religion in our common life misses the greatest stories of our time.” (2009, xviii) He suggests that journalists wearing “secular blinders” won’t spot important historical trends, such as theological debates within Islam, will miss the fascinating stories about religion’s role in social reform and could ignore the philosophical and moral convictions of many Americans. Journalism “is radically incomplete without also covering the creeds we hold about the cosmos in which we live.” (ibid, xx)

Gerlson is one of many who argue that religion news isn't reported well. Other essays in the "Blind Spot" collection examine missed stories of religion in the 2004 presidential election, global politics and coverage of the popes to name a few.

Yet, Buddenbaum suggests that the subject of religion remains "so complex as to make it almost impossible for any reporter to cover to everyone's satisfaction in every single story." (2010, p. 50) This argument about the complexity of the beat also has been a central criticism of religion news. Religious readers and religion scholars alike have suggested that reporters haven't always done their job in writing explanatory pieces about religion. Roberta Green Ahmanson suggests seven steps journalists might take to improve coverage: include religion as a motivator of human behavior; have a basic definition or understanding of religion; look for the "story behind the story, the history and the religion that created the present moment;" question personal assumptions; be wary of pack journalism, or shared knowledge; and understand the important distinctions within religion. (2009, pp. 168-170)

Disagreement about the breadth and quality of coverage isn't one that can be succinctly countered in this space but could warrant its own review of literature.

However, John DiIulio Jr., writing in the afterword of "Blind Spot" puts it succinctly:

[F]or roughly a half century now, our country's leading journalists and top media outlets, print and electronic, have frequently missed or misconstrued just about every significant story about religion in everyday American life, about religion and science, about religion and politics at home, and about religion in world affairs. This may have happened because many journalists have been led by political ideology or pseudoscientific pretense to castigate religion rather than understand it... (p. 174)

Hynds' study of major newspapers during the 1990s shows that there has been improved coverage of religion news since the early part of that decade. (Hynds, 1999) However, the number of religion reporters working today is diminished because of economic factors that are reshaping the industry. (Paulson, 2009 and Townsend, 2009). Many reporters were forced off the beat during budget cuts, and in some cases, sections were deleted. This does not mean, however, that religion news has died.

A study by Vultee, Craft and Welker (2010) suggests that religion coverage has seen some improvement in particular communities but that the addition of "values" coverage conflates matters by attempting to address issues of cultural diversity without making any connection to religion news. The issue of exactly how to portray religion news continues to be of concern.

Regardless of the quantity of religion stories, journalists are still working to make sense of religion news for their readers. To help them do that, journalists often employ a particular routine as they go about telling a story.

Scholars from several fields have suggested that there is a journalism culture at work in most newsrooms that shapes the amount of religion news available and that it is this culture, or media cohort, with the greatest influence on coverage. The idea that other journalists and professional organizations shape routine practices, day-to-day decisions and newsroom values is not uncommon or irrational. Journalism scholars use the term "journalistic routine" to describe this interplay at work. (Hollifield, Kosicki and Becker, 2001) This routine often includes shared values and their use in decision-making.

Much like journalistic culture helps shape how reporters and editors think about news values, the journalistic tool of framing helps them shape and define a story. “The act of framing determines what is included and excluded, what is salient and what is unimportant.” (Capella and Jamieson, 1997, p. 38)

Theoretical framework

Framing is a growing field in communication research, though most of the research is centered on the “ways that politicians, issue advocates, and stakeholders use journalists and other news professionals to communicate their preferred meanings of events and issues.” (D’Angelo and Kuypers, 2010, p. 1)

Framing has been called a concept, an approach, an analytic technique and a theory, and leads to a “fragmented understanding of what framing is and how framing works.” (ibid, p. 3) So, to begin a study on framing religion news, it is important to understand what constitutes a frame.

Framing theory

The sociologist Erving Goffman, best known for studying the construction of self in society, suggests that frames are the point of reference used in defining and perceiving experiences. These frames of reference create the starting point for discovering “what’s going on here?”

Whether asked explicitly, as in times of confusion or doubt, or tacitly, during occasions of usual certitude, the question is put and the answer to it is presumed by the way the individuals then proceed to get on with the affairs at hand. (Goffman, 1997, p. 153)

Frames, according to Goffman, help individuals make sense of the world and the events in it. Yet, Reese argues that frames are “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world.” (D’Angelo and Kuypers, 2010, p. 5-6) So frames can affect both an individual and a society. The underlying definition is that frames help create meaning.

A study of frames in a journalistic sense could examine how reporters and editors create frames or how audiences interpret frames. By examining the way in which religion news is organized, this analysis is more concerned with the building of the frame. Some might also call this an aspect of agenda-setting or gatekeeping, wherein the journalist makes decisions about relaying information to the public.

Scholar Robert Entman says that framing is more than agenda-setting. It offers a way of thinking about events. He says:

To frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.” (1993, p. 52)

But Entman cautioned that framing is a “scattered conceptualization. ... [N]owhere is there a general statement of framing theory that shows exactly how frames become embedded within and make themselves manifest in a text, or how framing influences thinking.” (1993, p. 51)

Regardless of whether or not they realize it, journalists are selecting an aspect of reality with every story they write. As Entman says, “communicators make conscious or unconscious framing judgments in deciding what to say,” (p. 52) but their understanding

of framing is inconsistent at best. Capella and Jamieson write that the concept of framing has been used to mean such different things that a definition “seems to reduce the way the story is written or produced,” including the orienting headlines, the specific word choices, the rhetorical devices employed, the narrative form, and so on.” (1997, p. 39)

Hertog and McLeod, as cited by Reese in a chapter of “Framing Analysis,” argue that frames should be “structures of meaning made up of a number of concepts and the relations among those concepts.” (D’Angelo and Kuyper, 2010, p. 24) Thus, journalists should be helping to create meaning when using frames, not seeking to make a story fit a particular agenda or norm.

Even though framing can seem imprecise both in its intent and its reception by an audience, it has great application for scholarship about religion news. “In the study of religion and media, framing has value far beyond just knowing what is in the news; it also determines the types of information that ultimately contribute to public opinion about particular religions.” (Stout and Buddenbaum, 2009, p. 1)

Niche theory

The journalistic frames selected by reporters have changed throughout American history as the culture and values of society changed. Religion theology had a strong influence on early printing when the views of Puritans and Quakers were popular. In the 20th century, religion news emerged as a beat, along with business and political reporting. However, between 2000 and 2010, religion news generally became the province of specialized publications. (Buddenbaum. p.92)

In these specialized publications — now largely online news sites — the issue of framing is most important to understand. Past studies have only examined news framing of a singular issue, or a singular frame, and none have studied online news. (Silk, 1995; McCune, 1998; Moore, 2003; Patterson, 2005)

Journalist Peter Steiger believes that journalists are caught in the conflict between print and the web and “must decide whom we are going to serve with our journalism.” (2006) In this world of competition and reworked business models, he suggests the media “find ways to provide coverage that in some ways uniquely suits that audience, coverage that they can’t easily get elsewhere or assemble for themselves.”

In many ways, that suggestion is evident in the array of niche media available to audiences. The concept of a niche publication was once the purview of magazine publishers who sought specific audiences that wanted narrow but deep coverage of the news. Today, the niche is also the concern of most news outlets seeking to build online audiences and retain whatever market shares they already have.

A 2008 Project for Excellence in Journalism report titled “The Changing Newsroom” highlighted some of the pressures facing the journalism industry — and carving a niche was among them. The study found that although most newspapers had suffered cutbacks in staffing and news hole, another dynamic was at play. “American newspapers are narrowing their reach and their ambitions and becoming niche reads.” (Pew study, p. 3) The report goes on to detail how despite a shrinking staff and news hole, readers are getting “a similar, or even greater, breadth of coverage in their daily paper than a few years ago; however, much of it comes in more of a digest form.” (p. 13)

Much of that breadth comes in “hyperlocal” news or zoned print editions that focus on particular neighborhoods or districts of a city and act as a pseudo-niche publication.

In Washington, D.C., where the government is both a mainstream media beat and a niche specialty beat, the number of reporters has grown, according to the Pew report. This example shows that coverage of a specialty beat doesn’t have to diminish when times get tough. New technology has enabled publishers to “create niche online publications that could deliver information faster, at lower costs, to ever more targeted audiences and make a profit,” according to “The New Washington Press Corps: A Special Report” published in February 2009 by the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism.

This report suggests that although the news from Washington aimed at the U.S. general public is diminishing, the news “aimed at self-defined specialized groups is growing.” And niche growth means having a sophisticated and demanding audience.

Charlie Mitchell, editor of Roll Call, said:

Lots of big city dailies are struggling to define who their readers are and struggling to define what they are delivering that the reader isn’t getting somewhere else. We know our readers think we’re important. That’s a good place to be.
(journalism.org/ analysis_report/rise_niche, page 2, para. 17)

Some critics argue that niche journalism is detrimental to democracy because it categorizes the news and limits the flow of information. Yet, with the online world, people can find both the news of the mainstream and niche media outlets.

By creating specialized web portals, or what some call “verticals” for their niche audience, news outlets can publish stories of interest to the reader concerned with

particular topics such as health, business, politics or religion, while still offering content for the general reader.

These news niche sites are “delivering the old formula of content, community and core services, but in a new package and transformed as Web portals.” (Rao, 2001, p. 325)

Rao suggests that no single model exists for the perfect portal but that most include four elements: connection, often through search engines; content; commerce; and community — that is, the rules and tools that allow people to interact.

Online niche sites, even most religion news sites, today offer many of these aspects, particularly those that developed as “vertical” portals where the focus is on “providing content in depth rather than in breadth” to “appeal to a specialized segment of the market.” (ibid, p. 326)

The future of online verticals is likely to include those that cater to more sophisticated users, adopt new Internet technologies and provide local content, Rao suggests. Journalism sites are still trying to determine how to pay for these efforts. Some news outlets are erecting paywalls so that only subscribers can access the full content online, but legacy media manages many of these sites. The web portal, or vertical, approach seems more favorable for online sites, particularly those created around niches. However, much research can still be conducted in this area.

Dimmick and others support the theory of the niche, which implies that competitors coexist because of a difference in their niche. One aspect of this theory is the idea of niche overlap, which can be applied to online and print news. This theory asserts that when there is similarity between two products, such as the print newspaper and the

website, there tends to be an overlap in the niche. Because of competition, both niche products cannot exist for long, but if there is “some crucial difference in the niche of populations — some difference that lowers overlap — that will allow them to coexist.” (Dimmick, 38)

Under the niche theory, one might assume that new media would displace an older form or that one form will overtake another. But another possibility exists: competitive displacement. In this case, one product can displace the other and result in a decrease for that product’s resources or a resource increase among the competitors to accommodate the changes in the environment. The question of what happens when resource allotment changes is the focus of this study.

When determining if online religion news is published because it is “uniquely suited” for an audience, one wonders if it is selected with a particular frame in mind. Is that frame different than what readers of legacy media might see? This study asked:

RQ1: *Is religion news framed differently at online-only niche sites than at the websites associated with legacy media?*

RQ2: *Is the conflict frame more prominent in legacy media websites than at niche websites?*

The question about conflict framing is pertinent because it has consistently been a criticism of religion news coverage.

Olasky argues that journalists abandoned their religious principles for humanistic values in the days of the Penny Press and never went back. Editors simply “redefined ‘reality’ to exclude the spiritual realm,” and began covering sensational secular news that

centered on conflict. (Olasky, 1988, p. 29) He and others argue that the pattern of conflict coverage fails to grasp the theological differences of religious groups in today's society and in consistently using the conflict frame, "the media presumably play an equally, if not more, important role in shaping public understanding and attitudes by virtue of their framing..." (Kerr, 2002, p. 54)

Journalists' role is to help deliver the news to the public, and in doing so, Patterson, in his 2005 presentation, argues that "[j]ournalists are often forced into a type of descriptive shorthand" that reshapes the information. He states that information is often typically "accepted, rejected, or reshaped into such a way as to preserve existing perceptions, worldviews and/or stereotypes." Often that means continuing to use the frame of conflict as the most prevalent way to share information with readers — the frame becomes the shorthand for passing information to the reader.

In their study of the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church, Lois A. Boynton and Dulcie M. Straughan found there was a predominant frame of sexual abuse/sexual deviance used in the reporting. A 2002 study by Barrie had similar results. Both studies suggest that the frame was selected in part because reporters lacked an understanding of the Church and its politics. Five media frames "emerged from the analysis that point to the level of conflict and emotion afforded" to stories about the sex abuse scandal, Boynton and Straughan write but note that there are limitations to their study because it only examines one theme of religion coverage.

Although several studies of religion news have highlighted framing, it is important to note that researchers have begun to recognize that outside forces are also

influences on how media frame information. McCune notes that “political advocates and social movements have become increasingly sophisticated at influencing how media frame public debates. (presentation, 1999)

In writing about ritual, media and conflict, Langer et al note that

[A]lthough media often generalize, with a pointed emphasis on conflict, oversimplified views of media as purveyors of stereotypes are misleading. In fact, the role of media is ambiguous; they provide opportunities for dialogue, and detailed and balanced information, as well as stereotypes for media consumers to integrate into already existing attitudes.” (2011, p.108)

Previous researchers have used framing studies to assess news coverage on specialty beats, such as business or religion, to determine whether journalists provide favorable or unfavorable coverage; others have simply identified the various frames reporters use in their coverage of controversial topics or identified how outside sources such as political activists or social movements are using the media to influence story frames and coverage. (McCune, 1998; Patterson, 2005; Duncan, 2007; Paxton, 2009)

This study goes beyond those earlier works that examined specific issues or controversies in print by assessing how frames are used in reporting religion news online. It also examines how journalists use and think about the conflict frame when writing for online audiences.

Selecting the frames or topoi studied by Silk in his book “Unsecular Media: Making News of Religion in America” (1995) is a natural complement to this research study on religion news. Silk’s thesis is that religion news coverage has familiar topoi that are used by all Western journalists. His premise is that “when the news media set out to represent religion, they do not approach it from the standpoint of the secular confronting the sacred.

They are operating with ideas of what religion is and is not, of what it ought and ought not to be — with *topoi* — that derive, to varying degrees, from religious sources.” (Silk, 1995, p. 55)

Journalists use relatively common journalistic values for telling stories — economic, human impact, conflict, powerlessness and moral values — and that often means readers easily recognize the story frame.

The frame does not predetermine the information individuals will seek but it may shape aspects of the world that the individual experiences either directly or through the news media and is thus central to the process of constructing meaning.” (Neuman, 1992, p.61)

Instead of studying frames, Silk suggests analyzing the “general conceptions” (p. 50) that reporters use in their stories. Applying the Greek word *topoi* Silk argues that these concepts provide a better focus for journalists and society by casting “light on our own system of values” (p. 51). Instead of seeing a bias against religion news, Silk sees an acceptance of *topoi* that are religious in nature. He says that “[i]gnorant of religion, even hostile to it, some news professionals may be; but the images of religion that they put on display reflect something other than their personal ignorance or hostility.” (p. 55) He suggests they use the following *topoi* to frame or tell the religion news of the day: good works, tolerance, hypocrisy, false prophecy, inclusion, supernatural belief and declension.

While these *topoi* have been applied in other works, Silk’s thesis can be limiting and is not exhaustive, according to him. Gaitano studied Silk’s *topoi* and found their explanations questionable as they relate to public discourse and public opinion regarding the Catholic Church. Rick Moore applied Silk’s *topoi* to a study of news coverage about

the Rev. Jesse Jackson and found that “a topos can be borrowed and twisted in a way that actually defeats its original purpose” (Moore, 2003, p. 8)

Moore found that a singular religious application of the hypocrisy topos was challenging given how the media presented the news about Jackson’s infidelity. While a topos might have grounding in religious tradition, it can also be used in such a way that “calls into question traditional religious practice.” (p. 10) Gaitano agreed saying that tolerance as a religious concept varies greatly with the “concept of tolerance as found in a relativistic society, where no absolute truths are recognized.” (2010, p. 45)

Poletti (2010) used Silk’s topoi for her study of the blogger Rocco Palmo, who writes about the Catholic Church, but expanded his frames to include new categories about “maintaining orthodoxy” and a “celebration of celebrity.” This study also will use these new topoi of “maintaining orthodoxy,” which informed posts about meetings, church traditions and clarification of Roman Catholic teachings, as well as the “celebration of celebrity” that covered official church announcements and posts about church leaders. While these topoi were created to deal exclusively with framing on blog posts about Catholic Church, they have relevance to this study. These topoi help further test the foundation laid by Silk and could point to areas suitable for continued research.

Such a study of online religion news is best served by a quantitative content analysis because this technique allows researchers to use an objective method to produce a quantifiable description of text. (Neuman, 2000, p. 292) Content analysis also is an indirect way of making inferences about people and their behaviors. For the purpose of this study, it could show how the behavior of religion editors varies between those

working exclusively at online outlets and those working at legacy media. Such a quantitative study also emphasizes the difference that context, whether cultural or historical, can play in understanding behavior. (Berger, 1998, p. 23)

Content analysis

There are seven basic assumptions about what is required for content analyses.

1. There must be a research question to be answered.
2. A strategy for selecting a sample must exist.
3. Terms must be clearly defined. Berger asserts this gives the researchers a chance to “offer operational definitions of concepts or subjects they are investigating.” (Berger, 1998, p. 25)
4. There must be an outline for the coding process and training for coders.
5. The coding process must be implemented.
6. The trustworthiness of the coding must be determined.
7. An analysis of the results of the coding process must be completed. (Kaid, cited in Hsieh, 2005)

There are advantages and disadvantages to conducting content analysis research.

Among its advantages are its inexpensive method of getting information, its unobtrusive nature and its ease of replication. It also helps the researcher avoid the problem of influence, because data collection usually involves a physical media and not human subjects. However, the researcher does still hold some influence over the research design. Major disadvantages have to do with sampling and analysis. To get around problems of sample size, content analysts must either select large samples or narrow their study to

specific kinds of samples. The matter of problematic analysis is overcome by not attempting to make broad generalizations or to assume too much about people and their response to the texts. (Berger, 1998, p.26-28)

In its earliest days, content analysis research was used to code text as data and produce statistical reports and research. This method proved a useful research tool for studying propaganda and political messages, particularly during World War II. Later, the method was applied more readily to mass communication forms such as television and videos where the context of the message, not just the text, was important. With the advent of the computer and the Internet, content analysis research remains prominent. (Neuendorf, 2002)

Qualitative content analysis research goes beyond just counting the words in a text, but examines the language for the purpose of classifying or categorizing words and phrases that have similar meanings. It can include many forms such as conventional analysis, which often aims to describe a phenomenon; or directed analysis, which aims to extend a theoretical framework by identifying key concepts or variables to include in coding categories. (Hsieh, 2005) This researcher employed a directed qualitative content analysis to religion news coverage by applying specific frames commonly used in news reporting.

Such directed content analysis can be applicable if the researcher intends to “validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory.” (Hsieh, 2005, p.1281) This method can help show relationships among the key concepts being studied. Because it is likely that journalists already are applying frames to religion news coverage, this research

builds upon the study of frames by applying it to online religion coverage, which previously has not been studied.

DEFINITIONS

To understand how this study was conducted, one must begin with definitions of online news, religion news and the frames, or topoi, to be analyzed because particular definitions were used throughout the study.

Online newspapers reached mainstream users in the mid-1990s with the popularity of the World Wide Web and were expected to compete with radio and television on breaking news. However, there has been a restraint on the part of newspapers to use the online medium to its fullest potential. Writing in the introduction to “Online News and the Public,” Garrison asserts this is likely because doing so might cause readers to skip the print version, where the money is made. (4) Some scholars suggest that online sites must offer “original news if they are to evolve into more legitimate and original news resources in their own right.” (Salwen, 2005, p.47) For the purpose of this study, the online news sites examined were those that produced “original news” provided by a contributing writer or staff reporter.

In order to differentiate between religion news and other types of news stories, it is crucial to understand how religion has been defined. Many religion scholars, such as Hoover, have explained it as “a set of traditions, dogmas, practices and institutions that exist in an autonomous position.” Webster’s New World Dictionary defines religion as “any specific system of belief and worship often involving a code of ethics and a philosophy, or any system of beliefs, practices and ethical values, etc., resembling, suggestive of, or likened to such beliefs.” For this work, the use of “religion” news

included those stories published about the traditions, dogmas practices and institutions in society, as well as stories that make reference to clergy, faith leaders or affiliated organizations.

Other coding variables to be defined for this work:

Visual use: Use of any accompanying still image, illustration or graphic. Videos included animation, documentary film clips and broadcast journalism reports. Slideshows included those that played automatically or required a viewer to click through the collection of images.

Story type: News was classified as anything with a straightforward report of recent events or happenings. Features were defined as those stories that did not include breaking news events or were profiles of prominent figures or organizations or such.

Commentary or analysis pieces were defined as stories that included personal opinion or presented an analytical, broad approach to recent happenings.

Blogs were defined by their classification on the sites, either labeled accordingly as a section of the news website or promoted as such.

The concepts that are the basis of the frames evaluated here are based on Silk's topoi as derived from "Unsecular Media."

Good works is a topos that notes the goodness of religious character. It is shown in media accounts that "good religion helps those afflicted by disaster, whether man-made or heaven-sent." (p. 59) In some ways, the topos of good works is defined by the lack of negativity in reporting.

Tolerance could easily be considered “an expression of secularist indifference or the desire not to offend,” but it also can include “the principle of noninterference in others’ freedom of worship (p. 66). This topos often plays out in political stories or in the realm of free speech and in those reports about a public religion. It also is frequently applied to stories written about religious groups abroad when differences of opinion and theology arise.

Hypocrisy is not a violation of law but a “deeply embedded Western religious concept” that usually denotes “the false pretense of piety and virtue.” (p. 86) This topos is “irresistible for public and media alike,” Silk writes. It is often used when reporting on scandals involving a church, faith group or leader. Hypocrisy is “fundamentally a topos of personal moral defect that charges religious leaders with violating norms of behavior that they (are presumed) to possess.” (p. 91) Other topoi become attached to stories using hypocrisy as the underlying frame, and often those topoi take dominance in later coverage. (Moore, 2003)

False prophecy is the topos used to call into question the religion itself or the religious belief of a faith leader, usually one who has succumbed to the hypocrisy topos. However, false prophecy has been used as a topos to relate stories about entire faith groups, such as Mormons, not just individuals of faith. In many cases, a false prophecy topos is applied to coverage of cults or fringe religious groups, as well.

Inclusion is the topos in which “a suspect faith is shown to be composed of good Americans worshipping according to their own worthy lights.” (p. 106) This topos has been applied to many a minority faith, but coverage of festivals and rites “plays an

essential role in constructing groups that once seemed threatening into the comfortable institutional furniture of society.” (p. 107-08) However, inclusion is related to the idea of foreignness as its antithesis. The inclusion topos is for “domestic use,” Silk writes. So applying it to stories about faith groups abroad serves to undermine it. Again we are reminded that Silk’s topoi can be limiting and that his categorization applies only to Western cultural norms.

Supernatural belief is a topos that involves reporting on supernatural phenomena that often “fail to meet standards of empirical proof.” In reality, Silk writes, this topos isn’t about the “truth or falsity of the phenomenon in question, but with the faith of those who believe.” (p. 122) This topos, though it often deals with miraculous healings, visions of God, angels and saints, often comes down to a divide over belief and nonbelief. “But absolute faith is not what people tend to have, and the effort to disengage the supernatural from the natural, impossible though it may be, remains a matter of enduring interest.” (Silk, p. 128)

Declension is the last of Silk’s topoi, and the one dealing most with the institutional decline of religion. Silk’s argument about unsecular coverage of religion in the media perhaps proves itself within this topos. The media “show a certain fondness for the traditional role of such churches,” he writes, (p. 135) and yet this is a distrust of religious appeal by the elite class in America. Many argue that this distrust is pervasive in media coverage. In this topos, news media:

reflect, in not always coherent ways, all the confusing religious mythology at large in the society; that the old-time religion is in trouble; that the people’s faith is strong; that the big brick church

on the public square is the place to worship; and that the real spiritual action is on the margin (p.138).

Silk argues that these topoi prevent journalists from “seeing what needs to be seen” (p. 149) and that they must be stretched. These are the frames that were examined in this directed content analysis to determine if they can be stretched beyond legacy media into an online niche for religion news.

Silk outlined the basic topoi in his work; Moore tested one of those topoi in print coverage of Jesse Jackson and Poletti applied new topoi to religion blogging. Yet, none of these studies examined websites, which is where this study is focused.

METHODOLOGY

To proceed with the steps required for content analysis, a sample must be selected and measurable units applied.

“A sample is said to be representative of a population if studying it leads to conclusions that are approximately the same as those that one would reach by studying the entire population.” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 112) It would be nearly impossible to study the entire population of stories published online or in legacy media, so this study will drastically narrow its sample.

The sample population for this study is twofold. It was chosen intentionally and not meant to be a random sample. The first population included news stories pulled from religion niche websites and legacy media sites during a single month in 2011. This time period of February 6, 2011, to March 5, 2011, was selected intentionally because it included no major religious holidays or special events. The relatively limited period included four full weeks beginning with a Sunday and ending with Saturday, and was selected to get a more complete picture of story postings online.

In selecting online sites, choices were narrowed to include religion ‘verticals’ at two national online only sites, CNN.com and HuffingtonPost.com, as well as an online vertical at a legacy media site, USAToday.com. Two regional online-only sites — the St. Louis Beacon and The Texas Tribune — were selected. Five regional legacy media websites also were selected based on their history of publishing strong religion sections

in print. These included the Chicago Tribune, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Houston Chronicle, New York Times and Los Angeles Times.

CNN.com publishes religion news on “Belief Blog,” which “covers the faith angles of the day’s biggest stories,” according to the site at religion.blogs.cnn.com. The aim of this coverage is “fostering a global conversation about the role of religion and belief in readers’ lives.”

The Huffington Post, an Internet newspaper, says it wants to “be home to open, transparent conversations in which people connect, discuss, share ideas, and debate the issues.” The site offers a topics page on religion.

USAToday’s site, Faith & Reason, is a “conversation about religion, spirituality and ethics.” The site operates a companion forum for members of the “community,” a word that isn’t clearly defined.

Both the St. Louis Beacon and The Texas Tribune are known for having staffs with strong backgrounds in legacy media. However, each takes a new approach to publishing news online. Both also are relatively new to the industry.

The legacy sites were selected for their broad print circulation, geographic location and history of covering major religion stories. Each has at least one dedicated religion reporter, as well. Some of the legacy media sites also posted news on a blog within their main news site. These postings were included in the study and coded accordingly.

By examining religion content based on Silk’s topoi and Hoover’s assertion that conflict coverage is primarily the frame that journalists use for reporting religion news,

stories in the sample were coded accordingly. In addition, this researcher examined what types of stories were being published, whether they were blog posts or news found on the main website, whether visual elements were added and if the stories or blogs were staff written, culled from wire services or contributed pieces.

Researchers doing content analyses must be concerned with the reliability of their coding. Stempel states, “The researcher’s primary concern needs to be with what he can do to increase reliability.” (Stempel, 1981, p. 127) Creating precise definitions of the categories, or topoi, to be examined before the study began helped to lessen this worry. Because the coding was completed by this researcher alone, there were fewer worries about coder agreement; however, there are other concerns to be addressed, namely validity.

Coding and reliability

A content analysis is valid if it can withstand new observations based on inferences drawn from the same texts and samples. As Krippendorff said, “Validation reduces the risk of making decisions based on misleading research findings. (2004, p. 316)

He also writes:

Validity tests pit the claims resulting from the research effort against evidence obtained independent of that effort. Thus, whereas reliability provides assurances that particular research results can be duplicated, that no (or only a negligible amount) of extraneous “noise” has entered the process and polluted the data or perturbed the research results, validity provides assurances that the claims emerging from the research are borne out in fact. (p. 212)

Stempel and others suggest asking a second coder to examine the work of a lone coder so that an objective approach can be taken and some definitions clarified. It is also helpful to have some comparison of agreement and a reliability estimate among coders.

Stempel suggests, “A successful content analysis study is the result of a series of good decisions.” Having intercoder reliability and validity help to show the “good decisions” made in the creation of this research study.

This researcher worked with one other coder to establish reliability of the sample units and variables used for this study. The coder, a graduate student at the Missouri School of Journalism, was paid for his work.

An initial codebook was provided and questions answered about concepts, variables and definitions at the outset of the second coder’s work. This researcher provided a reliability sample of 115 units, or 22 percent, from the 514 in the overall study.

After independent work by this researcher and the second coder, reliability was achieved. There was an 86% agreement on coding units of analysis, so the coding sheet and definitions were determined to be adequate.

Another component of this research was semistructured interviews with religion reporters and editors. The researcher conducted interviews by email and telephone and used the data collection to examine how editors perceive the frames they are selecting for news coverage. The editors and reporters were selected to correlate with the news outlets being studied in the content analysis component of this research.

The interview component of this study is important for correlating how the journalists perceive their use of the frames that Silk and Hoover suggest, particularly the conflict frame.

Initially, this researcher had hoped for five interview subjects from a snowball sample. In the end, four of the 10 news outlets chosen for this study responded to requests for interviews. Bringing together the content analysis and the interviews with religion-beat journalists provides an opportunity to add context and explanation to the data sets from the content analysis.

This study is important to the industry and to academics because no one has analyzed how framing applies to online religion coverage or how the frame of conflict continues to drive coverage of this topic, regardless of publishing medium.

RESULTS

A quantitative content analysis was performed to identify the primary and secondary story topoi used in each story. Data collection for this study began February 6, 2011, and concluded March 5, 2011, with 514 units, or stories, from 10 news outlets analyzed.

The Texas Tribune published only three stories about religion and the St. Louis Beacon published none during the month of study. For the purposes of analysis, neither was included in the final data comparisons. The remaining data were analyzed using SPSS software to identify frequencies and cross-tabulations. When analyzing categorical data such as this, it is important to assess significance using non-parametric tests, such as a Chi-square goodness of fit test.

Because the study's sample size is relatively small, the results cannot be generalized. Yet they do show interesting findings, as indicated by the tables below.

Most frequent day of publication

Monday was the most popular day for story postings online, (n=103) with 20% of the total, followed by Thursday (n=102) with 19.8%. Weekend postings were minimal, with only 8% per day for a combined number of 82 stories. The findings indicate rigid publication schedules whereby stories are posted once each week has disappeared, at least online. Although weekend religion sections in print have been around for 100 years, religion news online is no longer segregated to publication on Friday or Saturday.

Table 1
Frequency of posting by day of week

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Monday	103	20.0
Tuesday	74	14.4
Wednesday	83	16.1
Thursday	102	19.8
Friday	70	13.6
Saturday	41	8.0
Sunday	41	8.0
Total	514	100.0

Total stories per news outlet

About 34% of the sample, or 174 of the 514 stories, appeared in The Huffington Post during the month. CNN.com's Belief Blog ranked second, with about 20% of the total, or 102 stories, posted during the month. Legacy media outlets each published an average of 6% of the total, or about 30 stories each.

Table 2
Frequency of postings by news outlet

	Frequency	Valid Percent
CNN	102	19.8
Huffington Post	174	33.9
USA Today	57	11.1
New York Times	55	10.7
Chicago Tribune	27	5.3
Los Angeles Tribune	31	6.0
St. Louis Post-Dispatch	31	6.0
Houston Chronicle	37	7.2
Total	514	100.0

Use of photography and video

More than 50% of the stories published online also had a photograph or illustration to accompany them. About 41% had no accompanying art with their publication. There seemed to be little difference between the percentage of stories that were published with accompanying visuals and those without. Only about 8% of the total stories had a video or slideshow component.

Table 3
Visual use

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Photo or illustration	259	50.4
Video or slideshow	43	8.4
No art	212	41.2
Total	514	100.0

Type of story

The most frequent type of story published was a news story, with about 47% of the total, or 243 of the 514 stories, followed by a commentary or analysis at nearly 27%.

Table 4
Story type

	Frequency	Valid Percent
News	243	47.3
Feature	133	25.9
Commentary/analysis	138	26.8
Total	514	100.0

Other variables

About 31%, or 162 of the 514 stories, fell into a length range between six and 11 paragraphs for text or videos ranging from 61 seconds to 3 minutes. Staff bylined stories made up about 48% of those published, or 249 of the 514 stories in the sample, followed by citizen contributions at nearly 28%, with 143 stories in the sample. Wire service stories accounted for the remaining roughly 24%, with 122 stories out of the total sample. Blogs accounted for about 68 percent of the stories in the total sample. All the stories from the Huffington Post, the one site with the greatest number of stories published, were considered a blog for the purposes of this study.

Frames

The primary story topic based on frequency was the topos of tolerance, with about 37% of the total, or 192 stories out of the 514 in the sample. The second most common topos was maintaining orthodoxy, at about 15%, with 78 stories from the sample. The topos of celebration of celebrity accounted for about 11% of the sample, or 58 stories total. For about 45% of the stories in the sample, there was no secondary topic. A secondary topic of tolerance accounted for nearly 15% of the sample, followed by maintaining orthodoxy with about 13% of the total.

Table 5
Primary story topic

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Good works	26	5.1
Tolerance	192	37.4
Hypocrisy	36	7.0
False prophecy	18	3.5
Inclusion	32	6.2
Supernatural belief	29	5.6
Declension	22	4.3
Maintaining orthodoxy	78	15.2
Celebration of celebrity	58	11.3
Other/none	23	4.5
Total	514	100.0

Table 6
Secondary story topic

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Good works	21	4.1
Tolerance	80	15.6
Hypocrisy	16	3.1
False prophecy	17	3.3
Inclusion	29	5.6
Supernatural belief	19	3.7
Declension	11	2.1
Maintaining orthodoxy	69	13.4
Celebration of celebrity	18	3.5
Other/none	234	45.5
Total	514	100.0

Using cross-tabulations and a Chi-square goodness of fit test results were further analyzed. Table 7 shows the correlation between news outlets and primary story topic. The three religion niche news outlets included in the analysis published a combined 135 stories — 26% of the total — under the topos of tolerance. The legacy media outlets published a combined 57 stories, or about 11%, using that same topos during the same period.

Table 7
Cross-tabulation of news outlet and primary story topic

News outlet	Primary story topic										Total
	Good works	Tolerance	Hypocrisy	False prophecy	Inclusion	Supernatural belief	Declension	Maintaining orthodoxy	Celebration of celebrity	Other/None	
CNN	1	53	9	1	4	4	0	7	16	7	102
Huffington Post	8	59	7	3	17	10	6	41	15	8	174
USA Today	0	23	3	1	1	4	5	10	9	1	57
New York Times	1	23	8	5	3	5	3	1	5	1	55
Chicago Tribune	5	10	2	2	0	1	1	5	1	0	27
Los Angeles Times	3	5	5	4	4	1	1	2	4	2	31
St. Louis Post-Dispatch	3	7	2	2	1	4	3	6	3	0	31
Houston Chronicle	5	12	0	0	2	0	3	6	5	4	37
Total	26	192	36	18	32	29	22	78	58	23	514

Because of the high level of cells with values less than five, a Chi-square goodness of fit test could not be calculated. However, the primary story topics were ranked with 1 indicating the highest number of stories in a particular topic. The table below shows those ranks.

Table 8
Ranks of story topics by news outlet

News outlet	Primary story topic									
	Good works	Tolerance	Hypocrisy	False prophecy	Inclusion	Supernatural belief	Declension	Maintaining orthodoxy	Celebration of celebrity	Other/None
CNN	4	2	1	5	2	3	5	3	1	2
Huffington Post	1	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	2	1
USA Today	5	3	5	5	5	3	2	2	3	5
New York Times	4	3	2	1	3	2	3	7	4	5
Chicago Tribune	2	5	6	4	6	4	4	5	7	6
Los Angeles Times	3	7	4	2	2	4	4	6	5	4
St. Louis Post-Dispatch	3	6	6	4	5	3	3	4	6	6
Houston Chronicle	2	4	7	6	4	5	3	4	4	3

According to these ranks, the topos of tolerance was most prevalent at the online religion verticals and not the legacy media sites. The Huffington Post was the news outlet that most commonly published stories using the tolerance frame, and CNN was second in that respect. The Los Angeles Times was the news outlet with the fewest stories in the tolerance frame. However, there were ties among news outlets in nearly every story topic ranked. In some instances, the ties were among legacy media outlets, such as with the tolerance topos. In other topos, such as supernatural belief, the religion verticals were tied for a particular rank. In 4 of the 10 topos, a religion vertical and a legacy media site were tied for a rank. This could indicate that the topos is common regardless of which media

outlet is reporting the story, but no definite correlation can be made from this data sample.

Because of the vast number of stories the Huffington Post published compared to other sites in the study, it was ranked highest for nearly every frame analyzed.

The New York Times, a giant among legacy media, was more likely to use a topos of false prophecy when reporting its stories during the period of this study. The Chicago Tribune fell at the other end of the spectrum and had the fewest stories published using that frame. Other legacy media sites such as the Chicago Tribune and Houston Chronicle were likely to post stories using a frame of good works in their reporting. The legacy media sites were near the bottom of the rankings for their use of the topos of maintaining orthodoxy and celebration of celebrity. The ranks seem to provide a clear answer to **RQ1: *Is religion news framed differently at online only niche sites than at the websites associated with legacy media?***

Online niche sites do frame religion news differently than legacy media sites do, though most websites still adhere to the basic journalistic norms and news values. More of the online-only religion verticals were apt to make use of Poletti's topos, which could be an area of further study.

But almost 46% of the stories published had no secondary story frame. The topos of tolerance was used as a secondary story topic in nearly 16% of the stories posted. Maintaining orthodoxy was used as a secondary topos in about 13% of the stories published. The topos of declension was used as a secondary topic in only 2% of the stories in this sample.

Based on the high percentage of stories — 37% of the total sample — using the topos of tolerance, it would seem as if religion reporters are continuing to use a familiar news value: conflict. Under Silk’s definitions, tolerance is used to note the lack of such and not its existence. This will be further reviewed in the discussion section.

Based on this data the answer to **RQ2: *Is the conflict frame more prominent at legacy media websites than at online niche websites?*** is a simple yes. Silk defines the topos of tolerance as stories primarily about cultural and political differences, tension between religion and politics or religion and society. Without using the actual word conflict, Silk sets out to describe one of the most used frames or news values in journalism. And it would seem that such a frame still holds value as a means of relaying information from journalist to reader.

Other content analysis findings

Maintaining orthodoxy was the third most prevalent topos based on frequency and accounts for almost 15% of the sample total. Niche outlets most commonly used this as a secondary topic of the stories published.

Table 9
Cross-tabulation of news outlet and secondary story topic

News outlet	Secondary story topic									
	Good works	Tolerance	Hypocrisy	prophecy	False Inclusion	Supernatural belief	Declension	Maintaining orthodoxy	Celebration of celebrity	Other/None
CNN	3	16	4	0	6	2	0	19	3	49
Huffington Post	6	18	1	6	15	9	5	14	5	95
USA Today	3	9	3	1	0	0	2	15	2	22
New York Times	0	12	1	6	2	1	3	7	2	21
Chicago Tribune	4	4	0	0	3	0	0	2	3	11
Los Angeles Times	2	10	5	3	1	1	0	3	0	6
St. Louis Post-Dispatch	3	7	2	1	2	3	0	3	2	8
Houston Chronicle	0	4	0	0	0	3	1	6	1	22
Total	21	80	16	17	29	19	11	69	18	234

The Chi-square goodness of fit test was calculated comparing the frequency of the secondary story topics occurrence with the news outlets in the study. The hypothesis was that each value would occur an equal number of times. However, 56 cells had counts less than 5. The significance value was $\chi^2=133.93$ $df=63$ $p<0.001$.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide solid information that show changing patterns in how religion news is delivered online, how publishing patterns change for news outlets focused on online delivery methods versus print-based, and how citizen contributions and blogs are helping to develop religion news at online sites.

The frequency tabulations show marked patterns in the publishing model of religion verticals, or niche websites, that clearly differ from the model used by legacy media over the past century. One of the criticisms of religion coverage over the years has been that it is relegated to a single day of the week, usually Saturday, and typically includes feature stories not hard news. The data from this study show that there are definite publishing cycles throughout the week for religion news online and that religion stories publish more than once a week. The notion of a religion section published only once per week has died in the online realm where news breaks 24/7. Pulliam notes that religion sections were being deleted from print during the mid-2000s and both Townsend and Paulson lament the decline of the specialty beat by 2009. However, online religion sections seem to be thriving — the majority of the niche sites published more than one story per day during February 2011. Only one of the sites, the Chicago Tribune, published slightly fewer than 30 stories during the period of this study.

In addition to a greater frequency of stories being published at online media sites, the types of stories published in online religion sections differs from what most critics expect to see in print counterparts. Nearly half the stories published — 47% — were

categorized as religion news, not features. Religion reporters don't seem to be staying away from breaking news, stories about conflict or controversy. The next largest category of story type to be published online was commentary or analysis, with almost 27% of the total sample. This also shows a new pattern emerging in religion coverage, though the distinction might warrant further research.

In the semistructured interviews conducted with religion reporters, questions about framing were asked in regard to who discusses issues of story framing and how those conversations are handled. Responses varied among the news outlets, with one reporter at a legacy site saying there were no central frames for stories and “no one keeping track of how or how often we've portrayed a particular religion.” A reporter for an online religion vertical said the discussion about framing is often initiated by the reporter when the work is original to the site. When the article is written by a blogger or is a wire selection, three religion editors have the conversation. Because there is infinite space for publishing a variety of articles online, there often is not a discussion about frames at this particular religion niche site because the web-based newspaper lets them publish stories “from all kinds of frames.”

One of the most prevalent criticisms of religion coverage is that there is not enough news about religion being published. But this study shows that in an online setting, religion stories are published continually throughout the week whereas print readers must wait for the weekend religion section.

In her correspondence with this researcher, Laurie Goodstein, New York Times national religion correspondent, says she had a sense that the newsroom was covering religion more now than in the past:

My sense is that there is more religion-related material in the paper and on our website than there was a few years ago, but it's just anecdotal. The Op-Ed section is doing a lot of religion and church/state themed material on the website, which might be why it seems like there's more lately. (personal correspondence)

However, Goodstein was unable to cite specific figures for her hypothesis about increased coverage. This researcher found only a few religion stories from The New York Times that fit into the category of commentary or analysis. Most were solid news stories or would be considered news features.

A second criticism of scholars who study religion news has been with regard to the quality of coverage. Buddenbaum says religion is seldom covered with the breadth or knowledge required to make the subject understandable or comprehensible to the average reader. This criticism is likely to remain, given the diversity of coverage available online.

For example, stories from the Huffington Post were predominantly written by contributors of a particular faith or members of the clergy who were explaining finer doctrinal points. Some contributors wrote about broader topics such as societal or cultural values in light of recent world events and didn't seem to make an overt religious connection. This finding seems to match that of Vultee, Craft and Welker, who state that values coverage conflates the definition of religion news.

By contrast to the religion verticals, the stories from legacy media sites included coverage of a clergy sexual abuse scandal in Philadelphia, an analysis on the legacy of

the Los Angeles Roman Catholic Diocese's bishop upon his retirement and the impact of the Muslim Brotherhood's theology on the political uprising in Egypt. These sites seldom included contributor pieces unless the stories were also classified as op-ed. Most were staff written or were wire selections and followed a more traditional model.

These findings seem to signal a great shift in religion news and its variety of topics online as compared to what print readers see once a week, if the religion section survived industry cutbacks. Many legacy media once known for their award-winning religion coverage — the Dallas Morning News among them — have faced severe staffing cuts and in some cases, the specialty beat of religion reporting has been eliminated altogether.

Tolerance as a topos widely used

Many of the stories published during February 2011 included some aspect of tolerance and/or conflict within groups, whether religious or cultural because of the unrest and political movements in the Middle East. The theme of tolerance of religious belief emerged among the religion news stories in this study; it is likely because of the great number of stories written about the Arab Spring, the term given to the political demonstrations and social protests that began in late 2010 in Tunisia and continued in the Middle East throughout 2011. The movement was often framed as a religious one as well a political one, at least in its coverage from the U.S. Examples of stories from legacy media using this topos were reactions from a local religious community, whether Coptic Christians, Muslim or Jewish, to the events in Egypt, where the fall of President Hosni Mubarak became a turning point for the region. Meanwhile, commentary pieces

published at religion news sites such as the Huffington Post included essays written by bloggers explaining the theological aspects of the Arab Spring and how it related to Americans, or religious lessons to be learned from the movement toward democracy.

Weston and Dunsky (2002) show that using the conflict frame for international reporting on the Middle East was most common among reporters writing for an American audience. Although their study examined how Arabs were portrayed by media both in the U.S. and abroad before the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, it is important to note that they saw a connection between U.S. foreign policy and fair coverage that likely hasn't changed.

“... [R]eporting on Arabs whose political and cultural values directly challenge U.S. interests in the region — Palestinians in particular — routinely makes use of stereotypical devices including lack or muting of voice, biased framing of issues and lack of appropriate historical context. (p. 163-64)

Coverage of the Arab Spring using a religion lens often included frames that made the news “emotionally accessible to American readers.” (ibid, p. 163). The frame of tolerance, particularly from a cultural standpoint, often was used to call for unity with those abroad among religious groups or solidarity in the U.S. As Silk notes, the frame of tolerance is most often used when writing about groups outside the U.S.

Langer and Grimes say in their book “Ritual, Media and Conflict,” that media play a crucial role in selecting the frame or force in which a story is told. (2011, p. 122)

The aim of media is to focus attention and transmit information, but media also tend to overemphasize those aspects of an event that will guarantee a high level of stimulation. A global world, where communities experience their relationships to each other through media, giving small groups, or even individuals, the

opportunity to influence public debate, makes media representation a powerful factor in identity making. (ibid, p. 94)

One might argue that any media coverage of the Arab Spring helped create a new identity for those involved in the movements across the Middle East. Whether the story was told as religion news or not, the media did help create the lens through which Americans viewed the events.

By using the topos of religious tolerance, the media were able to continue to write with generalizations and the limited context of religious understanding that Buddenbaum, Hoover and others have insisted should take place. A historical context for this story often was lacking in its reporting, perhaps because it was another trend that journalists missed in their “blind spot.”

Khaled Almaeena, in a 2007 Nieman Reports, writes that the media too often use the “offensive language of stereotypes and generalizations, half-truths and inaccuracies” when writing about Islam or Muslims. (2007, p. 40) He goes on to note “[E]very journalist arriving at a story brings to the coverage a certain set of cultural and societal perceptions. That seems inevitable.” He concludes his piece by asking journalists to “build bridges across the abyss” to better understanding and fewer stereotypes.

It would seem that reporters and contributing writers still need a better understanding of the issues and themes of religion news for the beat to overcome some of its most ardent criticisms.

Limitations of this study and areas for future research

There were several limitations to this study that could make it difficult for other researchers to replicate. First, news of the Arab Spring was prevalent during the period of this study and made it a coverage topic that was episodic. Thus, a majority of the stories coded fit into Silk's tolerance topos. These stories were mostly about the political and cultural differences of those involved in the movement and impacts on religious bodies. (See Appendix for examples.) Another study sample might not find the same results given changes in the global landscape following the demonstrations and subsequent political changes in the Middle East since February 2011. It was not expected that such coverage would have been so prevalent during this study.

Second, this study looked at a sample of religion sites chosen because of their niche coverage. An accompanying selection of legacy media news outlets also was selected for comparison of religion coverage. In all, only 10 news outlets out of the many thousands operating in the U.S. were selected. A broader selection of news outlets could have been sampled and likely would have yielded different results. The results of this study are not meant to be applied across the entire population of websites publishing religion news.

This researcher, at the outset of this study, expected to collect at least 300 samples, given that it was likely for each news outlet to post at least one story per day. More than 500 stories were analyzed and coded during the course of this work. Only one news outlet — the St. Louis Beacon — did not publish a single story on religion during

the month. Likewise, The Texas Tribune published only three stories related to religion during the same time period. These stories focused on themes such as the death penalty or abortion and often included some mention of politics as well. Despite their selection for study because of their online publishing model, these sites were not included in the data analysis and further added to the study's limitations.

A third limitation of this study was the number of stories that had no secondary story topic. There could be various reasons for this occurrence — the need to add new topoi being one of them. Silk offers no topoi for stories that deal with religion and crime, for example, thus necessitating an “other” category in coding. Creating new topoi could eliminate such categorization and help scholars studying religion news in the future.

This study showed frequencies and cross-tabulations only; it did not attempt to explain any other relationships between the variables examined. Future studies could be developed to examine these relationships and the use of specific topoi as defined by Silk.

As noted earlier, there are many areas worthy of study between religion verticals and the websites of legacy media. The use of visuals and the prominence such stories are given online are just two areas worthy of future study.

CONCLUSION

Conflict coverage of religion continues, whether the stories are posted online or published in print and whether they originate at a religion vertical, or at the website of a legacy media outlet. Based on the data collected throughout this study, Silk's theory of the same seven topoi being applied to all religion news remains accurate. In fact, it would seem that the topos of tolerance in particular is the single means of communicating religion news to the broader audience.

However, there are other findings that would indicate new topoi should be developed. Poletti's topoi of maintaining orthodoxy and celebrating celebrity were both popular means of relaying information to readers in the stories of this study. Further research of these two topoi could be developed to see if the trend continues. Of course, even more topoi could be developed and studied by future researchers interested in news framing and religion.

Despite a reconfigured news industry, significantly fewer religion reporters covering the beat and new means of storytelling for online audiences, this study shows that traditional journalistic norms and values prevail. One could argue this is because the next generation of reporters — those trained in new storytelling methods — have not begun their careers. However, it does seem that even the innovators among today's working journalists aren't using these new tools and methods yet in their work. Although blogs were popular for the beat, many of the sites in this study seemed to be a "catchall" for any story dealing with religion. A few, such as the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and Los

Angeles Times, are used to break news not found elsewhere on the site. Others, such as the Chicago Tribune and USA Today, were more interactive and asked questions of readers.

Two examples of publications with the catchall philosophy are the Huffington Post and CNN's Belief Blog. Both sites are relative newcomers to the religion beat, having marked a one-year anniversary in 2011. The Huffington Post, with its network of bloggers and commentators, has vastly expanded its religion news coverage. However, the quality and depth of that coverage would seem to be lacking as compared to what is found at legacy sites, where stories are primarily staff written.

The CNN blog included an interesting mix of legacy-style reporting and blog writing in its posts. There were stories about "Porn Sunday" on Super Bowl Sunday, announcements about the Christian music industry and stories about clergy sex abuse scandals. Most of the blog postings were tied back to legacy-style reports found on the main news site or on sister publications.

The addition of these two sites, and the audience that they bring to religion news, is another area where future research could be considered. The addition of bloggers into the world of religion news coverage brings with it changes to the level of complexity in reporting since many bloggers are not trained in the nuances of religion reporting. In addition, these bloggers can broaden the readership audience for these religion news websites. In some cases, the audience could be driving these changes to the industry as more people are resorting to mobile devices and online mediums for their daily news diet.

The reality is that religion news is often ill-defined by news outlets and includes a variety of story types and topics. As a specialized beat, such coverage has all but disappeared from the news industry. It doesn't matter what new tools are introduced, the religion beat has suffered under the economic downturn, and what few specialty beats remain at any given news outlet are thinly staffed and have significantly more content to produce for multiple publishing platforms. Pulliam might have been correct when she wrote about the deletion of religion sections in print and the downsizing of the beat; what she likely didn't know at the time was that online coverage also would suffer.

Vultee, Craft and Welker suggest in their 2010 study that religion coverage has improved but that the "values" coverage that addresses issues of cultural diversity conflates the matter. If the addition of cultural diversity as a theme of coverage counts as added religion news, then Silk's topos of tolerance should show a jump in coverage, which this study found. However, the question remains whether to portray stories about tolerance, unity and differences of opinion among cultures or political groups as religion stories at all. Some news outlets classify these stories differently for the online audience, and often such stories aren't published in print sections.

The broad criticism that religion news lacks quality, depth and breadth is one that can't truly be answered as the industry experiments with the addition of niche news sites and expanded topical coverage online. In some respects, it could be detrimental to religion news coverage to write with the breadth and depth required to explain all the nuances of various faiths. However, it is important for journalists to build religious

literacy into their reporting. This type of writing can help expand the public's knowledge of faith and show how diverse the beat actually is.

Another finding of this study is that the journalism culture hasn't changed even if the stories being covered have. All the journalists interviewed for this study said that they alone, and sometimes their editors, shape the stories that readers see. This leads one to question where gatekeeping and agenda-setting fall; are religion reporters and editors making the right decisions when they frame stories in particular ways? Can the recognition of the audience — and interaction with readers online — help to shape religion coverage for the future? This is one area of research worthy of continued study.

At the Los Angeles Times, there are two reporters covering religion and one editor working the beat. All are involved in decision-making about the stories. However, depending on the story, there aren't many conversations about news framing. "It really depends on the story and the context," says Los Angeles Times religion reporter Mitchell Landsberg.

If there's a larger news context — the 'war on terror,' for instance, or the presidential campaign, or the Catholic sexual abuse scandal — that may dictate the framing. If there isn't, we'll consider the context — social, historical, economic, etc. — and consider framing it that way.

This "journalistic routine" of shared values and judgments, otherwise known as framing, continues to give readers the same sorts of news year after year. Seldom are new views taken, even if the means of publication differ so a story profile of the Muslim community in a given city might employ the topos of tolerance even if it's told in video format instead of text.

This study only chipped away at the vast amounts of research that could be done in the realm of religion news published online. From this sample of 514 units, some patterns emerged that warrant further research. These include the pattern of publication showing that Monday and Thursday are the days when most religion news is published online. How does that news correlate with what readers see in their print religion section? This researcher hypothesizes that such days are higher in online traffic and by publishing more stories on Mondays and Thursdays, the number of readers visiting a website is greater; often online readers are trained to visit sites when they know content will be new. However, there isn't sufficient data to determine whether this hypothesis is valid. It could be yet another area for further study.

Other components of this research worthy of study: Why is it that most religion stories lack a visual element? Almost half the stories in this study had no art accompanying them. Readership studies continue to show that images help draw a reader to the story package; wouldn't that correlation be true of online readers of religion news as well?

One aspect of this researcher's work examined whether religion news was posted on a blog or as part of the main news section online. It also attempted to differentiate between staff-written stories and those contributed by readers and others in the community. As the industry continues to develop its citizen journalism arm, it is important to note how religion news also changes in the process. Many of the stories posted by the Huffington Post blog and analyzed for this study were contributed pieces.

In essence, the audience of readers could be contributing to the news, thus shaping the agenda and quality of coverage.

Matthew Franck, religion editor at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, said in an interview with this researcher that the paper is reconsidering how it uses blogger contributions to its religion section and whether those pieces should be published in print.

The situation at the Post-Dispatch, where contributors write weekly columns or reflections for the “Civil Religion” blog, was born out of the main religion reporter’s sabbatical during the early part of 2011. However, it could become the norm because it meant “rethinking our resources.” In some ways, the addition of the community blogger helps reporters better understand what kinds of stories and topics of coverage readers want to see in their news outlets.

Franck said it might be a better use of staff resources and of religion writer Tim Townsend’s time to let others write for the weekly print column. Traditionally that sort of contribution would have been published on an Op-Ed page, but because of its reflection of faith, it might seem more authentic coming from a member of the community, Franck said during the interview.

The addition of community bloggers to the religion section does raise a question about the breadth and depth of coverage found online. The variety of stories analyzed during this study was vast. Dozens of examples could be cited, but only a few are needed to show the range. Figures included in Appendix VI show screen grabs of religion websites and the types of stories being published. Of the variables examined in this study, length and story type seem to be two that could warrant further study. There is still no

answer to the criticism about the lack of breadth and depth in the stories reported on the beat. Perhaps a broader study about how the tenets of journalistic routines are applied could address such an issue.

As religion news continues to develop its niche online, it could serve as a model for other types of specialty coverage such as politics, sports or business. Does this niche model help create a greater sum of news or detract from the ability of journalists to inform the general readership about the world's events? One could argue either; some critics have suggested that sequestering specialty coverage actually hurts democracy, a driving force in journalism. Others suggest it is a way to develop a loyal readership who can help refine coverage and engage with reporters covering the news. No one model has arisen as the best approach; journalism researchers will likely continue to ask these questions as new publishing platforms and approaches develop.

Religion news still remains despite these many changes to its means of publication. This study aimed to show how journalistic norms and frames were applied to religion news and whether a single frame of conflict remains prevalent in the world of online news. Data shown here seem to prove that such assumptions are valid, at least for the limited aspect of this study. Future researchers will have to examine larger samples to see if such hypotheses can be tested and the results generalized.

Regardless, religion news online continues to have readers, and reporters are continuing to dig deeper for context and depth of coverage to provide them. Given the limitations of the few religion specialists remaining in the industry, such work seems overwhelming. Yet they remain faithful to their task.

APPENDIX I: Codebook and Coding Scheme

Definitions

The following definitions are key to this particular content analysis:

“Online news:” Those websites that produce “original news” provided by a staff writer or paid reporter or citizen contributor.

“Religion news:” Those stories published about the traditions, dogmas, practices and institutions in society. To qualify as religion news, the story must mention or refer to a religious person or institution; it must use language commonly associated with religion or be accompanied by visuals showing religious persons, places, symbols or institutions.

Stories referring to institutions or places of worship being used for secular purposes will be excluded, as will stories about clergy unless they are clearly identified as such within the text of the story.

Variables included:

“Visual use:” Use of any accompanying still image, illustration or graphic. Videos included animation, documentary film clips and broadcast journalism reports. Slideshows included those that played automatically or required a viewer to click through the collection of images.

“Story type:” News was classified as anything with a straightforward report of recent events or happenings. Features were defined as those stories that did not include breaking news events or were profiles of prominent figures or organizations or such. Commentary or analysis pieces were defined as stories that included personal opinion or presented an analytical, broad approach to recent happenings.

“Blogs” were defined by their classification on the sites, either labeled accordingly as a section of the news website or promoted as such.

Frames, or topoi, commonly used by journalists reporting on religion, according to Silk:

1. Good works
2. Tolerance
3. Hypocrisy
4. False prophecy
5. Inclusion
6. Supernatural belief
7. Declension

In this study, each story will be analyzed for the following characteristics and, where applicable, coded with the associated numbers for each topic, beginning with 1 at the start of the sample and continuing through the end.

0 = Other or none: Stories that do not fit the topics listed below

1 = Good works: charity, social service, social justice, charitable organization (listed by name), social service organization/agency (listed by name). (This is one of Silk’s topoi.)

2 = Tolerance: homosexuality, cultural differences, political issues, differences of opinion. (This is one of Silk’s topoi.)

3 = Hypocrisy: criminal offenses by clergy/church officials, criminal offenses by high-profile nonclergy, sexual abuse, financial malfeasance, scandal, immorality by

clergy/church officials, immorality by high-profile non-clergy. (This is one of Silk's topoi.)

4 = False prophecy: schism, feuds among religious groups, leaders, organizations.

(This is one of Silk's topoi.)

5 = Inclusion: faith traditions other than Christianity, Judaism or Islam, cultures other than dominant culture of primary country/region in story. (This is one of Silk's topoi.)

6 = Supernatural belief: feasts celebrating/honoring religious figures or leaders, prayer, devotions, worship, visions of saints or religious beings. (This is one of Silk's topoi.)

7 = Declension: church closings, financial problems, decline of tradition, organized religion, references to decline in spirituality or religious belief among Americans. (This is one of Silk's topoi.)

8 = Maintaining orthodoxy: clarification of doctrine, rationale for political positions, interpretation of faith teachings, meetings of clergy, organized bodies of faith. (This is a topos Poletti created.)

9 = Celebration of celebrity: Commemoration of church officials, faith leaders, clergy, statements by such; high profile people of faith, cultural leaders talking about or acting on faith. (This is a topos Poletti created.)

Secondary post topic (definitions same as above)

0 = Other OR no secondary post topic

1 = Good works

2 = Tolerance

3 = Hypocrisy

4 = False prophecy

5 = Inclusion

6 = Supernatural belief

7 = Declension

8 = Maintaining orthodoxy

9 = Celebration of celebrity

Coding Sheet

On the next page, you will find a sample coding sheet.

Coding sheet

Framing of religion news in online and legacy media

V1. Story identification number

V2. Story date (month, day; all stories are from same year.)

V3. Day of Week (1 = Monday, 2 = Tuesday, ... 7 = Sunday)

V4. News outlet (1 = CNN, 2 = Huffington Post, 3 = USA Today, 4 = New York Times, 5 = Chicago Tribune, 6 = Los Angeles Times, 7 = St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 8 = Houston Chronicle, 9 = St. Louis Beacon, 10 = Texas Tribune)

V5. Use of visuals (1 = photograph or illustration, 2 = video or slideshow, 3 = no art,)

V6. Length: (paragraph count for text or video length) _____

1 = up to 5 paragraphs/up to 1 minute 2 = 6-11 paragraphs/61 seconds to 3 min

3 = 12-19 paragraphs/3min, 1second to 6 min. 4 = 20+ paragraphs/6 min, 1 second+

V7. Story type (1 = news, 2 = feature, 3 = comment/analysis 4 = other)

V8. Byline (1= local/staff, 2=wire service, 3=citizen/contributed)

V9. Blog (1=yes; 2=no) _____

Topic(s) of Story

V10. Primary story topic

1 = Good works

2 = Tolerance

3 = Hypocrisy

4 = False prophecy

5 = Inclusion

6 = Supernatural belief

7 = Declension

8 = Maintaining orthodoxy

9 = Celebration of celebrity

10 = Other

V11. Secondary story topic

1 = Good works

2 = Tolerance

3 = Hypocrisy

4 = False prophecy

5 = Inclusion

6 = Supernatural belief

7 = Declension

8 = Maintaining orthodoxy

9 = Celebration of celebrity

10 = Other OR no secondary topic

APPENDIX II: Tables of descriptive statistics

Table 1
Frequency of posting by day of week

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Monday	103	20.0
Tuesday	74	14.4
Wednesday	83	16.1
Thursday	102	19.8
Friday	70	13.6
Saturday	41	8.0
Sunday	41	8.0
Total	514	100.0

Table 2
Frequency of postings by news outlet

	Frequency	Valid Percent
CNN	102	19.8
Huffington Post	174	33.9
USA Today	57	11.1
New York Times	55	10.7
Chicago Tribune	27	5.3
Los Angeles Tribune	31	6.0
St. Louis Post-Dispatch	31	6.0
Houston Chronicle	37	7.2
Total	514	100.0

Table 3
Frequency of visual use

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Photo or illustration	259	50.4
Video or slideshow	43	8.4
No art	212	41.2
Total	514	100.0

Table 4
Frequency of story type

	Frequency	Valid Percent
News	243	47.3
Feature	133	25.9
Commentary/analysis	138	26.8
Total	514	100.0

Table 5
Frequency of primary story topic

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Good works	26	5.1
Tolerance	192	37.4
Hypocrisy	36	7.0
False prophecy	18	3.5
Inclusion	32	6.2
Supernatural belief	29	5.6
Declension	22	4.3
Maintaining orthodoxy	78	15.2
Celebration of celebrity	58	11.3
Other/none	23	4.5
Total	514	100.0

Table 6**Frequency of secondary story topic**

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Good works	21	4.1
Tolerance	80	15.6
Hypocrisy	16	3.1
False prophecy	17	3.3
Inclusion	29	5.6
Supernatural belief	19	3.7
Declension	11	2.1
Maintaining orthodoxy	69	13.4
Celebration of celebrity	18	3.5
Other/none	234	45.5
Total	514	100.0

Table 7**Cross-tabulation of news outlet and primary story topic**

	Primary story topic										Total
	Good works	Tolerance	Hypocrisy	False prophecy	Inclusion	Supernatural belief	Declension	Maintaining orthodoxy	Celebration of celebrity	Other/None	
News outlet											
CNN	1	53	9	1	4	4	0	7	16	7	102
Huffington Post	8	59	7	3	17	10	6	41	15	8	174
USA Today	0	23	3	1	1	4	5	10	9	1	57
New York Times	1	23	8	5	3	5	3	1	5	1	55
Chicago Tribune	5	10	2	2	0	1	1	5	1	0	27
Los Angeles Times	3	5	5	4	4	1	1	2	4	2	31
St. Louis Post-Dispatch	3	7	2	2	1	4	3	6	3	0	31
Houston Chronicle	5	12	0	0	2	0	3	6	5	4	37
Total	26	192	36	18	32	29	22	78	58	23	514

Table 8
Ranks of story topics by news outlet

News outlet	Primary story topic									
	Good works	Tolerance	Hypocrisy	False prophecy	Inclusion	Supernatural belief	Declension	Maintaining orthodoxy	Celebration of celebrity	Other/None
CNN	4	2	1	5	2	3	5	3	1	2
Huffington Post	1	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	2	1
USA Today	5	3	5	5	5	3	2	2	3	5
New York Times	4	3	2	1	3	2	3	7	4	5
Chicago Tribune	2	5	6	4	6	4	4	5	7	6
Los Angeles Times	3	7	4	2	2	4	4	6	5	4
St. Louis Post-Dispatch	3	6	6	4	5	3	3	4	6	6
Houston Chronicle	2	4	7	6	4	5	3	4	4	3

Table 9
Cross-tabulation of news outlet and secondary story topic

News outlet	Secondary story topic									
	Good works	Tolerance	Hypocrisy	False prophecy	Inclusion	Supernatural belief	Declension	Maintaining orthodoxy	Celebration of celebrity	Other/None
CNN	3	16	4	0	6	2	0	19	3	49
Huffington Post	6	18	1	6	15	9	5	14	5	95
USA Today	3	9	3	1	0	0	2	15	2	22
New York Times	0	12	1	6	2	1	3	7	2	21
Chicago Tribune	4	4	0	0	3	0	0	2	3	11
Los Angeles Times	2	10	5	3	1	1	0	3	0	6
St. Louis Post-Dispatch	3	7	2	1	2	3	0	3	2	8
Houston Chronicle	0	4	0	0	0	3	1	6	1	22
Total	21	80	16	17	29	19	11	69	18	234

Table 10
Frequency of story length

Length	Frequency	Valid Percent
Up to 5 paragraphs or up to 1 minute video	65	12.6
6-11 paragraphs/ 1:01 to 3 minutes video	162	31.5
12-19 paragraphs/3:01 to 6 minutes video	146	28.4
20 paragraphs/6 minutes + video	141	27.4
Total	514	100.0

Table 11
Frequency of byline

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Local/staff	249	48.4
Wire service	122	23.7
Citizen/contributed	143	27.8
Total	514	100.0

Table 12
Frequency of blog

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Yes	353	68.7
No	161	31.3
Total	514	100.0

APPENDIX III: List of questions used in semi-structured interviews

1. How many people are involved in making decisions about the religion news to be published at your media outlet? Has that number risen or fallen in the past year?
2. Is there more religion news covered at your news outlet today than there was five years ago? Three years ago?
3. When decisions are being made about religion coverage, what discussion is there about story framing? Typically, who initiates that discussion?
4. In most cases, who decides how a story is framed — reporters or editors?
5. If there is a discussion about framing, what considerations are given as to how a particular religion or religious group is portrayed in the news?
6. When considering the frames used in reporting religion news, is there any concern among editors or reporting staff that one of several frames is consistently used to tell stories, e.g., a conflict frame or a frame of hypocrisy?

APPENDIX IV: Letter to reporters/editors seeking interviews

Dear religion news reporter/editor:

I am working on a graduate research project at the Missouri School of Journalism under the direction of Debra Mason and would appreciate any help you could offer by answering a few questions about coverage decisions and website prominence given to religion news.

My research centers primarily on how online sections have replaced print religion sections, and how editorial decisions and coverage decisions are made differently for each medium.

I've included a list of questions for you to answer but any additional information you might provide will be helpful as well.

You can reach me by e-mail at johnstonlc@missouri.edu or by phone at 573-225-4785. I'd be happy to answer any questions or concerns you have about this project.

Thanks,
Laura Johnston
Missouri School of Journalism

APPENDIX V: Responses from religion reporters/editors

Jaweed Kaleem, Huffington Post, religion reporter

1. How many people are involved in making decisions about the religion news to be published at your media outlet? Has that number risen or fallen in the past year?

There are four people, including myself, who are directly involved in decisions about religion news coverage. The number has increased in the last year, when there were 2.5 people (one person was part-time and became full-time and I was hired as a full-time reporter). My title is Religion Reporter, there are two Assistant Religion Editors and one Senior Religion Editor.

2. Is there more religion news covered at your news outlet today than there was five years ago? Three years ago?

Yes, there is more religion coverage than five years ago, when The Huffington Post launched. The site has always covered religion, but a dedicated religion section launched in Feb. 2010. Coverage has dramatically increased since.

The next few questions address how religion news is framed. In media research, framing is defined as the set of organizing principles that help people make sense of the world. In religion news, some of the typical frames include good works, tolerance, hypocrisy, belief in the supernatural (includes belief in prayer, visions, worship, etc.), schisms or conflicts within faith groups, and declines in the faith related to decreasing attention to traditions, financial problems or church closings. Of course, some of the typical values considered important in making decisions about news coverage also apply. These would include prominence, conflict, timeliness, proximity and others.

3. When decisions are being made about religion coverage, what discussion is there about story framing? Typically, who initiates that discussion?

The discussion about framing is initiated by the reporter (me) when the discussion is about original articles. It is initiated by the three religion editors otherwise when its about wire articles and blogger pieces.

4. In most cases, who decides how a story is framed — reporters or editors?
For all original articles, it is reporters. For blogger pieces and wire articles, it is editors. The Senior Religion Editor also writes a column and religion round-up, for which he decides on the frame himself.

5. If there is a discussion about framing, what considerations are given as to how a particular religion or religious group is portrayed in the news?

Here is our mission statement, which should answer this question.

HuffPost Religion is dedicated to providing positive encounters with religious wisdom and ideas. The site offers the opportunity for learning and cooperation across religious divisions; and encourages productive discourse on the many different ways ways religion influences personal, communal, national and international life. The tone of HuffPost Religion is intelligent, creative, forward thinking, rigorous and is marked by generosity towards religious people and respect of religious tradition.

6. When considering the frames used in reporting religion news, is there any concern among editors or reporting staff that one of several frames is consistently used to tell stories, i.e. a conflict frame or a frame of hypocrisy?

This discussion is not overly frequent since we are a web-based newspaper and have plenty of room for stories to run from all kinds of frames.

*Laurie Goodstein, national religion correspondent
New York Times*

Hi Laura/Debra,

I'm happy to respond, but felt it's better done by writing you a brief note than going through the questions. The reason is, our structure here may be a little unusual.

Our religion coverage is completely decentralized. There are reporters and editors in every section who handle stories that touch on religion. I wouldn't even be able to count them. This includes not only the news sections (national, foreign, metro, business, sports) but also the feature sections (arts, style, travel, etc).

There is no religion section, and no religion editor. As the senior national religion correspondent, I am often asked to vet religion-related stories when an editor feels at a loss. But many, many religion-related stories run that I didn't look at and didn't even know about.

Given that, the questions about "framing" really don't pertain here. In general, this is a bottom-up operation, with reporters pitching stories to editors. With so many reporters and editors all over the newsroom making decisions, there is no central frame for stories, no one keeping track of how or how often we've portrayed a particular religion.

However, there are some logistical questions I could answer:

I cover religion for the national desk, and we now have a second reporter who covers some religion-related stories, part of the time. He's also doing a lot of politics, though, and spot news.

Metro usually has a religion beat reporter, but the position is unfilled right now.

The paper also has two freelancers on contract who are rotating religion columnists, who each write one column every other week. Their columns run in the national section.

My sense is that there is more religion-related material in the paper and on our website than there was a few years ago, but it's just anecdotal. The Op-Ed section is doing a lot of religion and church/state themed material on the website, which might be why it seems like there's more lately.

When Metro puts a reporter on the religion beat (they'll take someone who's already on staff here and assign them to it), we'll have the same number of religion beat reporters we did when I came to the Times 14 years ago.

I'm sorry not to work within your rubric, but I hope this is helpful. Call me if you need more.

Mitchell Landsberg, Los Angeles Times

1. How many people are involved in making decisions about the religion news to be published at your media outlet? Has that number risen or fallen in the past year? **That's hard to say. We have one religion editor and two reporters, including myself, who cover religion more-or-less fulltime. We're all involved in decision-making. Beyond that, other editors get involved depending on the story. These could include our managing editor, Metro editor, deputy Metro editor, City editor, National editor and his deputies or Foreign editor and his deputies. The number has stayed constant in the past year.**
2. Is there more religion news covered at your news outlet today than there was five years ago? Three years ago? **The answers to both questions are no. There's less.**

The next few questions address how religion news is framed. In media research, framing is defined as the set of organizing principles that help people make sense of the world. In religion news, some of the typical frames include good works, tolerance, hypocrisy, belief in the supernatural (includes belief in prayer, visions, worship, etc.), schisms or conflicts within faith groups, and declines in the faith related to decreasing attention to traditions, financial problems or church closings. Of course, some of the typical values considered important in making decisions about news coverage also apply. These would include prominence, conflict, timeliness, proximity and others.

3. When decisions are being made about religion coverage, what discussion is there about story framing? Typically, who initiates that discussion? **There's some discussion, depending on the nature of the story. It would typically be initiated by either the reporter or our religion editor.**
4. In most cases, who decides how a story is framed — reporters or editors? **Both. It's really a collaborative process, although the editor has the final word.**
5. If there is a discussion about framing, what considerations are given as to how a particular religion or religious group is portrayed in the news? **That's a difficult question to answer because it's so broad. It really depends on the story and the context. If there's a larger news context - the "war on terror," for instance, or the presidential campaign, or the Catholic sexual abuse scandal—that may dictate the framing. If there isn't, we'll consider the context—social, historical, economic, etc.-- and consider framing it that way.**
6. When considering the frames used in reporting religion news, is there any concern among editors or reporting staff that one of several frames is consistently used to tell stories, i.e. a conflict frame or a frame of hypocrisy? **Yes.**

*Matthew Franck, religion editor
St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

1. How many people are involved in making decisions about the religion news to be published at your media outlet? Has that number risen or fallen in the past year?

7 reporters who report to Franck, most are chiefly education editors. In managing that team of reporters, about one-seventh of his time is devoted to religion.

“This is the type of paper where reporters are in control of making decision about how to cover the beat, especially for religion and specialty beats.

“I am interested in religion and very religious (later IDs as Mormon) and from that standpoint I am probably more engaged than most who might have occupied this post.”

“Religion writer Tim Townsend has a Yale divinity degree” and a good understanding of what it takes to cover the beat. He was on book leave for eight months and the paper put a general assignment reporter on the beat, “so I was involved in the coverage” during that time.

2. Is there more religion news covered at your news outlet today than there was five years ago? Three years ago?

“This paper has stuck with and plans to stick with a full-time religion writer. To my knowledge, we’ve not had more than one. In that respect, we’ve not reduced” resources but there has been reduced space in print, which “affects more about how many wire stories we grab or international religion news we grab.” There is a fully dedicated page on Saturday to religion coverage, and that can “sometimes spill over to the next few pages” but he has been finding of late that it’s limited to a single page of coverage.

The website has helped, particularly with an experimentation with the blog.

That experiment was partly because of Townsend’s absence and the need to fill a slot that had been his column, Franck said. The solution was “reverse publishing” from the Civil Religion blog for print. Because some of those 12 contributors to the blog have developed into regular, consistent writers, it’s likely that the reverse publishing model will continue. “It’s not a bad model going forward.” It’s an aspect of coverage that gives a “perspective on faith.”

Because of the circumstances, Franck said he has been rethinking the religion page – not only the news and event listings— but also the idea of having op-ed pieces on faith on the page. Bloggers have contributed content that would have also run on op-ed page traditionally; and so with Townsend’s absence, they have opened the door for that on religion page now.

Sometimes blog comments are condensed for print but the treatment is not the same as a column.

Since Townsend’s return, Franck said he has been “rethinking our resources.”

He said: “Tim writes for A1 and not all religion writers write for A1 – too many write for a religion section and it’s just a rotation of features on different faiths and they work through the denominations.” The Post addresses A1 stories and thinks of itself as a paper that covers institutions, such as the Catholic Church and Missouri Lutheran Synod. He cited national awards won by Townsend as examples.

He said they are rethinking Townsend’s “usefulness as a columnist.” In some instances it might be better to let a member of the community write if it’s to be a reflection of faith. He cites an example of a Lutheran blogger writing about the Paterno scandal. “That might be a column topic that Tim would have done, but it’s not a great use of his resources.” Often, Townsend is breaking news in his column, Franck said.

The next few questions address how religion news is framed. In media research, framing is defined as the set of organizing principles that help people make sense of the world. In religion news, some of the typical frames include good works, tolerance, hypocrisy, belief in the supernatural (includes belief in prayer, visions, worship, etc.), schisms or

conflicts within faith groups, and declines in the faith related to decreasing attention to traditions, financial problems or church closings. Of course, some of the typical values considered important in making decisions about news coverage also apply. These would include prominence, conflict, timeliness, proximity and others.

3. When decisions are being made about religion coverage, what discussion is there about story framing? Typically, who initiates that discussion?

Franck said he's often given Townsend leeway to do "stories that fit his background."

Oftentimes he is involved "in the crafting of a story." He sees his role as one of producer rather than editor. "With Tim, he understands from an academic standpoint how denominations interplay." During Townsend's sabbatical, the general assignment reporter needed more guidance. He often had to ask the reporter to "get more experts so we weren't tone deaf on that faith."

Franck said he keeps own faith at bay, but there have been discussions of late about how to frame Mormonism in light of Romney being the possible Republican nominee for president.

"I have a pet peeve about how all faith is portrayed in thoughtless manner, by random doctrinal points rather than core beliefs or how it's practiced." There's a high end of religion reporting that includes a genuine reflection of a faith rather than what it's Wikipedia highlights are.

4. In most cases, who decides how a story is framed — reporters or editors?

Have those discussions, but in a rare position with Townsend having an education in religion. You have to have a grounding and know the issues if you're going to step into "hostile waters," he said. It takes some courage to find the significance in coverage, he added.

5. If there is a discussion about framing, what considerations are given as to how a particular religion or religious group is portrayed in the news?

Not been accused of using traditional stereotypes.

6. When considering the frames used in reporting religion news, is there any concern among editors or reporting staff that one of several frames is consistently used to tell stories, i.e. a conflict frame or a frame of hypocrisy?

He does think the hypocrisy frame is overused and misused a lot. Sometimes readers find a validation in that frame because it's what they've been looking for in coverage, he said. "Readers don't know how much restraint we use" in telling stories so they don't always fit into the same mold, he said.

APPENDIX VI: Examples of stories from the websites in the study

Screen grab from Houston Chronicle's "Believe Out Loud" blog, Feb. 21, 2011

This week only!

Believe Out Loud HoustonBelief

home blogs forums faith news about us

Kate Shellnutt

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BELIEVE IT OR NOT

News and trends from the religious realm with **Kate Shellnutt**

« Officials wrongly used Texas prison chapel as courtroom | Main

February 21, 2011

Om in the heart of Texas: Statewide yoga conference in Houston this weekend

Even in Houston, yoga has become so mainstream that nearly everyone has a basic familiarity with its sun salutations, downward dogs, coordinated breathing and *om* recitation. But the [Texas Yoga Conference](#) brings specialized instruction to the practice, with workshops on its connection to healing, attitude, ninjas, aging, running, fertility, martial arts, dance, breathing, diet, meditation and a number of spiritual topics.

RECENT ENTRIES

- [Om in the heart of Texas: Statewide yoga conference in Houston this weekend](#)
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SURVEY

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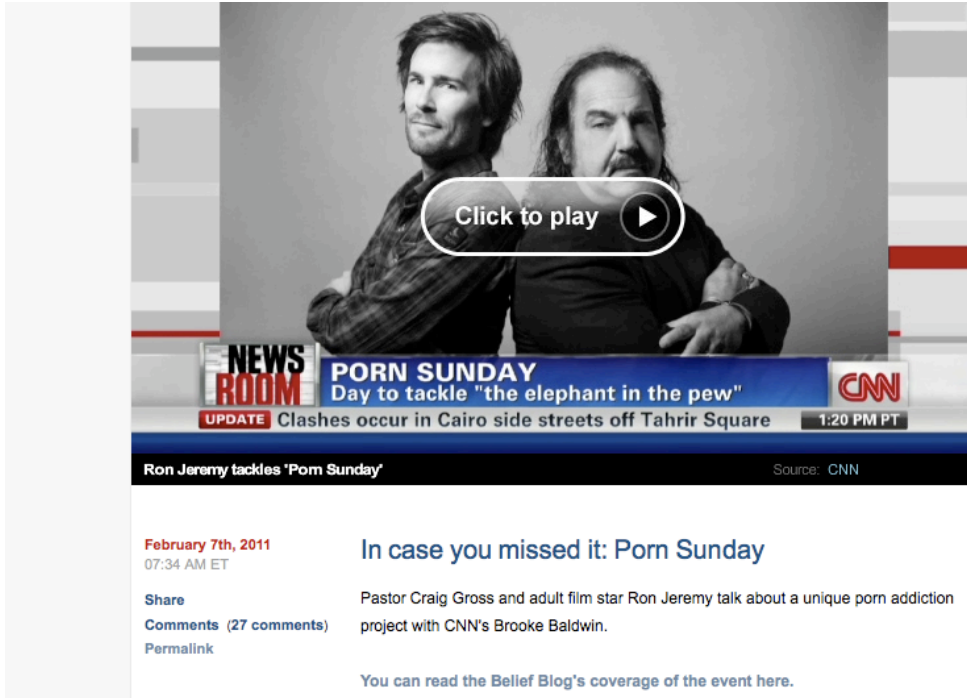
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CATEGORIES

Atheism

Screen grab from CNN's Belief Blog, Feb. 7, 2011



NEWS ROOM **PORN SUNDAY** Day to tackle "the elephant in the pew" **CNN**

UPDATE Clashes occur in Cairo side streets off Tahrir Square **1:20 PM PT**

Ron Jeremy tackles 'Porn Sunday' Source: CNN

February 7th, 2011
07:34 AM ET

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[Comments \(27 comments\)](#)

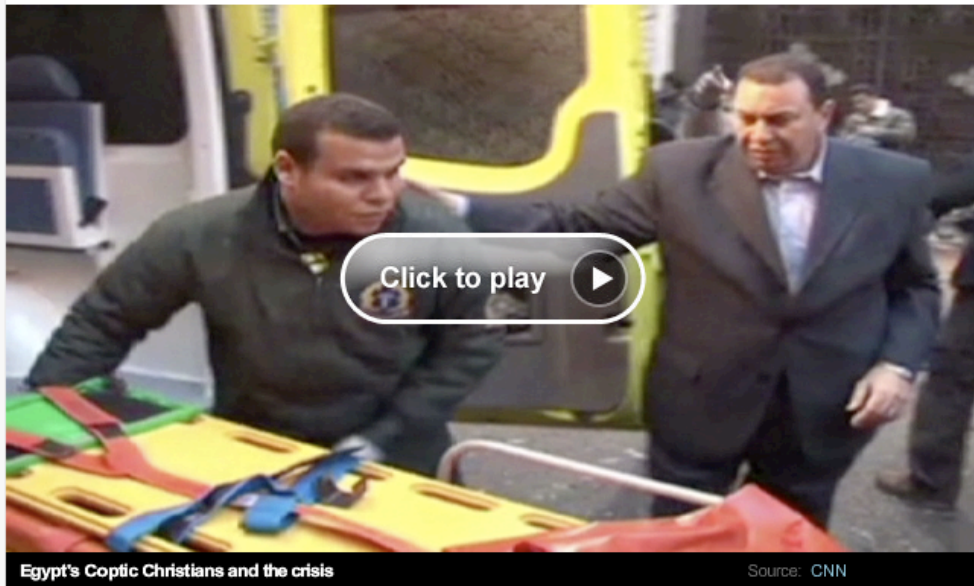
[Permalink](#)

In case you missed it: Porn Sunday

Pastor Craig Gross and adult film star Ron Jeremy talk about a unique porn addiction project with CNN's Brooke Baldwin.

[You can read the Belief Blog's coverage of the event here.](#)

Screen grab from CNN's Belief Blog, Feb. 7, 2011



February 7th, 2011
07:31 AM ET

[Share](#)
[Comments \(5 comments\)](#)
[Permalink](#)

Egypt's Coptic Christians and the crisis

CNN's Nadia Bilchik talks to Randi Kaye about Egypt's Coptic Christians and their views on the crisis.

Screen grab from the Huffington Post's religion section, Nov. 16, 2011

RELIGION SPIRIT BUDDHISM CHRISTIANITY HINDUISM ISLAM JUDAISM

FROM AP: Afghan elders' grand council considers US presence... 3 minutes ago

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Idolatry?



Comments (264) | Tim Tebow

CSLennon, Twitpic / WENN

FEATURED  **BLOG POSTS**



Wilfredo Amr Ruiz: Islam in America ... en Español
Muslim Chaplain, Attorney and Political Analyst

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 **You Can't Evict The Human Spirit**

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84

Screen grab from CNN's Belief Blog, Feb. 7, 2011, example showing story topos of tolerance



Call for unity among Christians, Muslims

Source: CNN

February 7th, 2011
07:29 AM ET

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[Comments \(29 comments\)](#)

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Call for unity among Christians, Muslims

Egyptian protesters in Atlanta call for unity among Christians and Muslims. CNN's Don Lemon reports.

Posted by: [The Editors](#) - CNN Belief Blog

Screen grab from Los Angeles Times religion blog, Feb. 13, 2011

Some wonder if José Gomez will make L.A. archdiocese more conservative

February 13, 2011 | 11:15 am 🐦 (16) 📘 (6) 💬 Comments (0)



Roman Catholic Archbishop José Gomez has been on a listening tour across Southern California as he prepares to take over leadership of the L.A. archdiocese.

Times religion writer Mitchell Landsberg talked to Gomez about his meetings, where some parishners have asked him about plans to make what is considered a progressive archdiocese more conservative:

Since he arrived in Southern California last May, the archbishop has put thousands of miles on the Ford Taurus he brought with him from San Antonio. He has crisscrossed the region, seemingly determined to meet every one of the 4 million to 5 million Catholics who make the Archdiocese of Los Angeles the most populous in the United States — more than six times the size of the one he left.

Text of story from New York Times, Feb. 13, 2011 appearing under headline: “Jews in U.S. Are Wary In Happiness for Egypt” by Laurie Goodstein

Across the political spectrum, American Jewish leaders say that when they consider the future in Egypt and what it means for Israel, it is as if they are standing on a shaky tightrope stretched between poles of hope and dread.

In many ways, the collapse of the 30-year regime of President [Hosni Mubarak](#) is being welcomed by the leaders of American Jewish organizations as a historic moment worthy of rejoicing. After all, they said in interviews on Sunday, they can identify with the rebellion in Egypt because thousands of years ago the Jewish people rebelled against enslavement by an Egyptian pharaoh.

“I can’t help but look at them and see people rising up and saying, We want to be free,” said Rabbi Steve Gutow, president and chief executive of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, an umbrella organization that represents 140 national and local Jewish groups.

“Certainly there are things to worry about,” Rabbi Gutow said, “but this has to be a moment to be supported and celebrated and looked at with a sense of awe.” But he, like other leaders, said he was watching warily to see who takes power in Egypt, whether the new government respects human rights, how it relates to the United States and whether it will preserve the longstanding peace treaty with Israel.

American Jewish leaders welcomed reassurances by Egypt’s military on Sunday that the country intends to honor the treaty with Israel. Egypt has maintained what many policy makers called a “cold peace” with Israel since the treaty was signed in 1979 — a relationship that was not overly friendly, but at least allowed the two countries to avoid open aggression.

“We are very much in wait-and-see mode,” said Nathan J. Diament, director of public policy for the [Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America](#). “It’s encouraging, but it’s hard to assess what the value of that statement is, not knowing who’s saying it and what their authority is.”

Several leaders said they were skeptical about the outcome in Egypt because of precedents in Iran and Gaza. The overthrow of the shah in Iran ushered in an extremist Islamic regime. In Gaza, open elections in 2006 encouraged by the American government resulted in victory for [Hamas](#), which Washington classifies as a terrorist organization.

David A. Harris, executive director of the [American Jewish Committee](#), a centrist policy group, said, “You could end up not with Jeffersonian democracy, but with [Hezbollah](#), Hamas and the likes of the Iranian regime.”

He said he would be watching how Egypt’s new government treats the minority Christian Copts and the tiny remnant of Egypt’s Jews, a once vibrant community that now numbers no more than 150 people.

“There should be hope,” said Mr. Harris, who has traveled to Egypt many times and is in touch with some government and nongovernment officials there. “It’s an extraordinary moment. But hope is not a policy.”

Some Jewish groups, like the [American Israel Public Affairs Committee](#), or Aipac, a prominent pro-Israel lobbying group, favor the Obama administration’s review of the substantial military aid the United States gives to Egypt, said Josh Block, a partner in the Davis-Block consulting firm and a former spokesman for Aipac.

“It’s obviously appropriate for the administration to review America’s aid to Egypt,” Mr. Block said. “There are key factors to look at,” he said, including whether Egypt continues to support peace with Israel and sanctions against Iran; helps in the pursuit of terrorists; and allows international traffic, including Israeli and American transit, through the Suez canal.

Jeremy Ben-Ami is the president of [J Street](#), a liberal lobbying group founded three years ago as a counterpoint to Aipac. He said he did not agree with policy makers who argue that now is not the time to push for a settlement between the Israelis and the [Palestinians](#) because Egypt and Jordan could eventually abandon their truces with Israel.

Mr. Ben-Ami said that J Street would hold its conference in Washington in two weeks and expected to draw about 2,000 people. “We will give the president a friendly push to act now, to get out ahead of events,” he said.

“There are many of us in the pro-Israel, pro-peace movement,” Mr. Ben-Ami said, “who see this as a critical moment to recognize that just as Mubarak and the autocrats of the Arab world are unsustainable, so,

too, is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as it stands now. The occupation of the West Bank, the current status quo, are unsustainable. Everybody knows it can't hold."

Post from St. Louis Post-Dispatch blog, "Keep the Faith" by Tim Townsend from Feb. 19, 2011

In Pujols' case, What would Jesus do?

Keep the Faith > BY TIM TOWNSEND • ttownsend@post-dispatch.com > 314-340-8221 | Posted: Saturday, February 19, 2011 7:45 am

As contract talks broke down between Albert Pujols and the Cardinals this week, St. Louis baseball fans began nervously asking themselves a host of questions.

He's a Cardinal for life, right? He would never pull a LeBron, would he?

Wrigley? He likes winning too much, doesn't he?

But a particular group of Cardinals fans — made up of those who share Pujols' faith — was asking a different kind of question. What does holding out for the largest contract in the history of baseball say about Albert's Christian testimony?

Pujols and his wife, Deidre, are evangelical Christians. They describe their charity, the Pujols Family Foundation, as "a faith-based nonprofit organization" and participate in Christian events around St. Louis — from small, church-based gatherings to large evangelical celebrations like Christian Family Day at Busch Stadium.

So as Pujols began looking to many like a typical mega-wealthy superstar athlete angling for a record payday, some have asked how Pujols' public, God-fearing image squares with a private quest for wealth.

The Rev. Darrin Patrick, pastor of The Journey, a church in St. Louis that counts a number of professional athletes as members, said Jesus warned against greed.

"Nobody really confesses to that sin," Patrick said. "Lust, anxiety — sure. But very few people say, 'I'm greedy,' and I absolutely think that (Pujols) should be on guard for that."

A verse from 1 Timothy says, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains."

That's the fear of many people who love Albert Pujols, both as fans and as Christians. They fear, as the author of Matthew's Gospel wrote, that no one can serve two masters.

"For a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other," the Gospel says. "You cannot serve God and wealth."

The Rev. Sean Michael Lucas, a former professor at Covenant Seminary in Creve Coeur and currently pastor of a Presbyterian church in Hattiesburg, Miss., describes himself on his Twitter page as, among other things, "Cardinals fan, lover of Jesus."

At the end of January, Lucas tweeted, "... how is AP's testimony affected if he holds the Cards hostage for \$30m/10yrs? @ what pt does 1 Tim 6:10 apply here?"

In another tweet, Lucas wrote, "Unless there is a big part of this contract that goes to Pujols Foundation (\$30-50m) he's open 2 the question. Legitimately."

The Rev. Scott Lamb, a Baptist pastor, formerly with a church in St. Louis and co-author, with Tim Ellsworth, of a new Pujols biography called "Pujols: More Than a Game" that focuses on the first baseman's faith, said the contract talks have opened up an interesting debate in Christian circles that goes beyond baseball to the uncomfortable intersection of the New Testament and capitalism.

"Consumption mentality is very American, but it's not very biblical," Lamb said. "People are asking whether (Pujols) should grab all he can get, and what his moral responsibilities are in terms of what to do with that money."

What to do with so much money has not always been a problem for the Pujolses. In 2000, when Albert was in the minor leagues in Peoria, Ill., and Memphis, Tenn., he was bringing in \$125 a week.

"We ate a lot of macaroni dinners in those days," Deidre writes on the Pujols Family Foundation website.

In the off-season, the Pujols family lived with Deidre's parents in Kansas City. To make some extra money, Albert worked at a country club helping with catering duties, according to "Pujols: More Than a Game."

It was Deidre who had introduced Albert to evangelical Christianity, and despite the couple's financial struggles, they insisted on tithing to their church in Kansas City.

Many Christians believe tithing — giving at least 10 percent of their income to the church — is a crucial aspect of their faith.

The pastor of Kansas City Baptist Temple, the Rev. Jeff Adams, told the authors that the couple were "very regimented" in their tithing.

"I know how faithful they were before they had anything," Adams said. "That's what gives me confidence in their character. They were like this before anybody knew who they were."

It didn't take long for the Cardinals to recognize what they had in Pujols, and by the following year, money was no longer an issue for him. In 2005, the couple set up their foundation to help children with Down syndrome, and children living in poverty in Albert's native Dominican Republic. In 2010, the foundation spent \$800,000 on its programs, according to Todd Perry, its executive director.

"Albert and Dee Dee are extremely generous, not just to the Pujols Foundation but to other charities in the community," Perry said. "Their foundation is their passion."

Christians point to several instances in the New Testament — notably in Paul's letters to the Corinthians — to back up the notion that giving to the church should be "regular, sacrificial, proportional, and joyful."

For the average middle-class working family, giving away 10 percent of \$75,000 is certainly 'sacrificial.' They feel it, and the Bible says they should.

"For people who are very wealthy, they might think about giving away upwards of half their income," said Patrick. "For the uber-wealthy, 10 percent is not sacrificial."

Pastors say the more important point for Pujols is not how many millions he makes, but how he spends those millions.

"What you do with your money is a factor," said Patrick. Pujols "has a track record of generosity that is without question. God does use money to help people, and I see God doing that with Pujols."

In 2009, Pujols visited The Crossing, a Chesterfield church that also claims professional athletes as members, to help the congregation launch its "Advent Conspiracy" program, which encourages people "to celebrate Christmas in a different way, by serving those in need," according to Tony Biaggne, director of creative communications at The Crossing.

"I've never met anyone with more passion for serving, and serving poor than Albert," Biaggne said.

Ultimately, Christian Cardinals fans and others who benefit from the Pujolses' largesse are praying for a big payday for No. 5, and for his generosity to continue, even grow.

"I reject any idea that a person's Christianity should cause them to step away from what the market would demand for them," said Lamb. "Albert will go down in history as one of the great ones — someone who grabbed the money, and gave it away at the same time."

Text of story from Chicago Tribune, posted Feb. 9, 2011

[Nun gives papers to DePaul, offers praise for former Gov. George Ryan](#)

[Sister Helen Prejean, who opposes capital punishment, believes Gov. Pat Quinn will sign papers to abolish death penalty in Illinois](#)

By Manya A. Brachear, Tribune reporter

The outspoken nun at the center of the film "Dead Man Walking" praised former Gov. George Ryan on Wednesday for paving the way toward Illinois' abolition of the death penalty as she announced that her personal papers will be housed at a Roman Catholic university in his home state.

Seeking to tie her legacy to that of St. Vincent de Paul, patron saint of the poor, Sister Helen Prejean has entrusted to DePaul University the letters, mementos and manuscripts of her 30-year quest to end capital punishment. The Prejean Papers include letters to prisoners, popes and governors and props from the Oscar-winning 1995 film.

Prejean said she has faith that Gov. Pat Quinn will sign legislation to abolish the death penalty in Illinois, a measure that state legislators passed last month.

"Governors actually do have the last divine right of king's power in their hands to save life or to let people die," said Prejean, 71, adding that she wrote to Quinn after the recent legislation landed on his desk. "I have

a quiet kind of confidence that he is not going to go against the wave of moral integrity."

Prejean said she also recently wrote to Ryan, who is serving 6 1/2 years for fraud and racketeering in a federal prison camp in Terre Haute, Ind. In that letter she offered words of comfort regarding his dying wife, Lura Lynn, and thanked him for "being the first one to have the integrity to say this thing is broken."

Ryan imposed a historic moratorium on Illinois executions Jan. 31, 2000, following the release of 13 Death Row inmates who were found to be wrongfully convicted.

She said Ryan should be granted furlough to spend his wife's final days by her bedside.

"When are we going to learn that simply punishing people ... inflicting pain on people doesn't heal anybody?" she said. "That's what they're doing to Ryan. They're keeping him in. ... There's nothing redemptive about that."

mbrachear@tribune.com

APPENDIX VII: IRB approval letter

Dear Investigator:

Your human subject research project entitled Lasting legacies: A framing analysis of religion news published in web verticals and legacy media meets the criteria for EXEMPT APPROVAL and will expire on December 30, 2011. Your approval will be contingent upon your agreement to annually submit the "Annual Exempt Research Certification" form to maintain current IRB approval.

Exempt Category:

45 CFR 46.101b(2)

You must submit the Annual Exempt Research Certification form 30 days prior to the expiration date. Failure to timely submit the certification form by the deadline will result in automatic expiration of IRB approval.

Study Changes: If you wish to revise your exempt project, you must complete the Exempt Amendment Form for review.

Please be aware that all human subject research activities must receive prior approval by the IRB prior to initiation, regardless of the review level status. If you have any questions regarding the IRB process, do not hesitate to contact the Campus IRB office at (573) 882-9585.

Campus Institutional Review Board

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