force, no to falsehood, no to theft, yes to structures of justice that are effective, just and transparent.
• Each person should practice good faith and veracity.
• Each person should practice mercy.
• Each person should practice generosity.

As professional communicators we also recalled that WACC has given us useful benchmarks we can apply to our discourse and practice. We call these benchmarks the Christian Principles of Communication. They were first drafted 20 years ago by Michael Traber, who passed away in 2006:

• Communication affirms transcendence: when we communicate with other people we affirm that God is present in our world and God desires abundant life for all of Creation.
• Communication builds participation.
• Communication builds community.
• Communication promotes freedom.
• Communication promotes human culture, celebrating diversity and defending the right to be different.
• Communication is prophetic; it should proclaim justice and speak truth to power.

This summary is drawn from the following papers: Las raíces del fundamentalismo by Arturo Chacón; Fundamentalismos, comunicación y cultura by Violeta Rocha; Fundamentalismos, comunicación y globalización: Desafíos pastorales by Dennis Smith; and Fundamentalismo e identidades no campo evangélico brasileiro by Saulo Baptista.

Bibliography

From the pulpit to the studio: Islam’s internal battle

Nabil Echchaibi

In February 2006, when Wafa Sultan, a Syrian-American activist in Southern California who advocates secularism in Muslim countries, defiantly told an Islamic sheikh on a widely popular Al-Jazeera news show ‘to shut up and listen, it’s my turn’, she knew she was making history on Arab television. Never before has the authority of Islam represented on this show by a conservative sheikh from Cairo’s famed Al-Azhar University been challenged in a similarly brazen way by another Muslim, and much less so by a woman.

Sultan’s caustic comments on Al-Jazeera, in which she describes the difference between radical Islam and modernity as ‘a clash between a mentality that belongs to the Middle Ages and another that belongs to the 21st century’, may be an extreme example of dissent, but her defiance mirrors a rising disenchantment in the Muslim world with the official gatekeepers of Islam. The Internet and satellite television are full of emerging Muslim voices who are seeking to redefine their faith away from the ghastly headlines of Islamic radicalism.

Today, decisions whether to wear the veil, grow a beard, eat halal meat, date before marriage, or get a mortgage loan with interest, can be influenced more by cyber discussions and popular shows on 24-hour Islamic channels conducted by charismatic hosts than by the eru-
dite religious authorities of Al-Azhar in Egypt or the Wahhabi clerics of Saudi Arabia.

Internet websites like Islamicity.com allow visitors not only to conduct sophisticated searches within the Quran, but also search for marriage partners in an extensive database that returns glossy pictures and lavish descriptions of ‘marriage-minded Muslim singles’. You can also find elaborate recipes using halal ingredients, shop for an iPod that comes with the entire Quran and its English translation, buy alcohol-free perfume, or listen to R&B and hip-hop songs with Islamic lyrics.

On satellite Islamic television the staid, bearded and turbaned sheikh has been replaced by young, stylish beardless men and colorfully-veiled women, most of whom were formerly unveiled Egyptian film stars. The boring half-hour advice show by the government-ordained sheikh is ceding way to a sophisticated line of value-laden entertainment programming that ranges from engaging talk shows, cooking shows inspired by the prophet Muhammad’s culinary habits, sleek game shows, intricate soap operas, to reality television contests where young entrepreneurs devise plans without a budget to help charitable causes from Darfur to Kosovo.

New Age Islam
Welcome to New Age Islam. Here the feeling and experience of religiosity are more important than critical spirituality. Here the formulation of the religious message; more than its content, creates meaning. Here the Quran is performed; not only recited. New Age Islam is a generally peaceful face of Islam deliberately designed to fend off the lure of Al Qaeda’s indiscriminate radicalism and fight the old guard’s futile intellectualism.

Since 9/11 a heightened scrutiny of Islam by the West has compelled ordinary Muslims everywhere to define what falls within and outside of ‘pure’ Islam. More than ever before, Muslims are called to task to explain and justify topical concepts like Jihad, halal, fatwa, and cultural traditions in Islamic countries and among Muslim immigrants in western countries like female circumcision, arranged marriages, or honor crimes.

This individual input on what Islam means has leveled the playing fields of religious authority as Islamic theologians compete poorly with superstar television preachers and Internet bloggers with minimal or no theological background. This erosion of authority is also creating an unprecedented environment whereby the Islamic laity, boosted by improved literacy, is no longer content with the role of the passive quiet audience. Some have responded to this call for participation by joining Bin Laden’s camps of terror, but scores of Muslims are peacefully learning how to liberate their faith from extremist ideologies and seam its teachings with modernity.

Much like the Internet, satellite Islamic television channels like Iqra’ (Read) and Al-Resalah (The Message) have been the laboratory in which the new Islam has emerged and evolved. The fact that satellite television is bound, by virtue of its audience of millions of viewers, to compete for market share, forces channels, even the overwhelmingly religious ones to provide a space for alternative voices to emerge and widen the range of social and cultural topics on which Islam is brought to bear. As a result, the direction and style of Islamic discourse is undoubtedly changing because it is increasingly pressured to account for what is said in alternative venues and engage the mutating socio-cultural universe of the Arab world.

Modeled after American televangelism and religious entertainment, Islamic broadcasting seeks a simpler, more moderate message that rebukes radicalism and makes religion cool. This is a far cry from the customary calls of divine retribution Muslims have grown to hear from fulminating sheikhs at the mosque and on television.

New ideas, new programmes
The architects of the new Islam are younger preachers with more business skills than religious knowledge. Some of Iqra’s hit shows were produced by Ahmed Abu Haiba, a 38-year-old who believes Islam could benefit greatly from the ways in which American evangelists have embraced modern media and mass culture to popularize religion.
A similar belief is shared by the general manager of the latest Islamic channel Al-Resalah, Tareq Al-Suwaydan, a 46-year-old Kuwaiti television celebrity and a motivational speaker who teaches young Muslims how to become effective business leaders. During his 17 years in the United States as a student, Al-Suwaydan was heavily influenced by Western entrepreneurial literature on self-improvement such as Steven Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and religious literature such as Norman Peale's work on the power of positive thinking and faith. Upon his return to Kuwait, he adapted this literature by making Islam a success formula for spiritual self-fulfillment and material achievement.

Through Al-Resalah, a private channel dubbed as the first Islamic entertainment television, Al-Suwaydan hopes to make the medium the message. Islam, he says, is not supposed to be dull and irrelevant. Islamic values of self-piety, hard work, filial piety, helping the poor can be embedded more effectively in reality TV shows, soap operas, game shows, cartoons, and even music videos. It is a marriage of tradition and modernity.

Since its launch in March 2006, Al-Resalah has generated both praise and criticism in the Muslim world. Some see its thin line between religion and secular content bordering on heresy; others believe it is the only way to derail mounting forces of extremism in the region. Just like its on-screen graphics and studio sets, Al-Resalah’s programs are innovative and edgier. Its shows expose some delicate realities like children and women abuse, drug and alcohol addiction, divorce, corruption, and romance. Some shows feature veiled women as hosts, and although they are stereotypically assigned to discuss topics related to the family, some of these women issue fatwas, a function long reserved for male Islamic sheikhs.

More than the other dozen 24-hour religious channels, Al-Resalah hopes to compete with popular secular channels like Saudi-owned MBC and Rotana which feature expensive film and soap opera productions as well as music videos from some of the most well-known artists in the Arab world. Al-Resalah’s owner, Saudi billionaire Walid bin Talal, is presumably eager to spend millions of dollars to make Islamic programming look as appealing and catchy as the sleek and racy Arab Superstar or Arab Star Academy, two music talent contests similar to American Idol that drew millions of votes every week from across the Arab world.

**Revolutionizing Islamic broadcasting**

Al-Resalah’s first day broadcast featured a song by Sami Yusuf, perhaps Islam’s first superstar. Yusuf, a 26-year-old British singer of Azeri origins, had been a sensation before the launch of Al-Resalah, but the channel used his upbeat western-influenced rhythms and enthralling Islamic lyrics as an indicator of its intention to revolutionize Islamic broadcasting. Yusuf’s songs range from joyful praise of the Prophet Mohammed to riveting pleas to revive the Ummah, the global community of Muslims, in the face of humiliating failures in Lebanon, Palestine, Kosovo, Bosnia, and Iraq.

His lyrics can be equally biting when he chastises Islamic extremists for committing ‘atrocities in the name of the divine’. Much like the New Age Muslims, Yusuf, who sold more than 1.5 million copies of his first two albums, is comfortable with his religious identity and eager to embrace modernity, even when that means interacting with and adopting Western culture. His sophisticated use of music videos and his moderate Islamic message represent a new balance for Muslim youth who feel equally estranged by the moral bankruptcy of pop culture and the excessive austerity of religious extremism.

Yusuf owes much of his fame to Amr Khaled, the pioneering figure of New Age Islam on television. Khaled, a 39-year-old former accountant from Egypt, has become through his show, *Sunaa al-Hayat (LifeMakers)*, a veritable sensation, a media phenomenon both in the Middle East and among the Muslim diaspora in the West. His sermons, which can be found on television, on DVD and video tapes in libraries and outside mosques, and on his popular website, sound more like motivational speeches than religious advice sessions.

His use of colloquial Egyptian Arabic – most Islamic sheikhs use classical Arabic – his age, and his modern look (jeans and polo shirts, or
stylish open-collar suits, clean shaven with a carefully-trimmed mustache) make him accessible to a disillusioned young Muslim audience. His Islam sounds exceedingly fresh as he tells them change becomes reality, not by controlling thought, but by accepting individual accountability and ‘breaking the chain of negativity’.

Khaled’s show LifeMakers is an elaborate 12-step project with three phases that combine a series of devotional speeches with the realization of social reform projects helping with poverty, unemployment, health, and small businesses. When he told his viewers in one of the early episodes to submit practical reform ideas to his website, he received more than 350,000 ideas from 35 countries including the UK, France, Italy, and the US.

His faith-based social initiative is working too. A number of LifeMakers clubs have been created by loyal fans around the world as grassroots organizations dedicated to local individual and social reform. His calls to raise money for the poor are met with generous donations and dedicated volunteers who collect clothes, food, medicines, and offer computer literacy courses for free. Positive faith that translates in effective action, he says, is a viable alternative to radicalism and government inaction.

Khaled’s detractors on the religious side accuse him of reducing a serious religious message to a soundbite. The old guard of Islam’s authority refers to his preaching style as superficial, air-conditioned, and self serving, but Khaled insists young Muslims need concrete reformers who would guide them; not simply tradition relayers who would flood them with Quranic recitations. So far, the audience seems to favor his style and he has plenty of evidence to support it: his website is one of the most visited on the Internet with millions of hits monthly; his shows compete with the most popular entertainment programs; and his lectures around the world are quickly sold out.

Other critics of Khaled are afraid his televangelism and this entire trend of New Age Islam is nothing but a form of religious populism that will produce no tangible reforms in Islam. Yet, some emerging scholars, like Reza Aslan, see in the erosion of Islamic authority by common Muslims the first traces of an Islamic reformation, a grassroots clash between the voices of moderation and those of dogmatic extremism.

The Internet and television to Islam may as well be, as Aslan says, what the printing press was to the Christian Reformation. The fact that individual bloggers, television personalities, and artists with minimal theological background also get to shape their faith is an indication the fight to define Islam will be long and brutal. Bin Laden’s radicalism and other forms of Islamic puritanism may have obscured the more silent and less spectacular march of moderate Islam, but not for long.

But as the gates of interpretation open up in the Islamic world, it is still unclear what kind of Islam will emerge in the future. Some of New Age Islam is still conservative, and for those hoping for genuine reforms, it remains rather timid. But in the face of extremist barbarism, conservative reform seems more and more appealing to Muslims across the globe.

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