Dossier

Memetizing and mediatizing: memes as an evangelical discursive strategy

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Abstract: This study addresses a communicational approach to internet memes, understanding them as devices that take place in the process of mediatization of society. It focuses on the discursive aspects involved in the production and reproduction of memes, which are re-signified through operations that involve deframing and reframing and that trigger interdiscursivity. This research analyzes the use of internet memes in the Brazilian Protestant religious field, in web pages that describe themselves as having an evangelical humor. The main objective is to identify the discursive strategies and the effects of meaning constructed through memes. A multiple case study is undertaken, analyzing memes in three web pages chosen from the identification of reading contracts that hold similarities and also singularities, memes that act as enunciation devices by which new interactions of the religious and media fields in the environment of social networks are delineated.

Keywords: mediatization of religion, memes. discursive strategy, discourse analysis, reading contracts

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Mèmetiser et médiatiser: les mèmes en tant que stratégie discursive évangélique

Résumé: Cet article présente une approche communicationnelle des mèmes, en tant que dispositifs dans le processus de médiatisation de la société. Nous nous intéressons aux aspects discursifs impliqués dans la production et la reproduction des mèmes, qui sont ré-signifiés par des opérations impliquant des disqualifications et des re-*frames* et qui déclenchent des interdiscursivités. La recherche analyse l'usage des mèmes dans le domaine religieux protestant brésilien. L'objectif principal est d'identifier les stratégies discursives et les effets créés à travers les mèmes. L'étude est multi-cas et analyse les mèmes de trois pages choisies à partir de l'identification

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des contrats de lecture qui ont des similitudes et aussi des singularités. Des mèmes qui agissent comme des dispositifs d'énonciation, par lesquels se réalisent des nouvelles interactions entre les champs de la religion et de l'environnement des médias sociaux.

Mots-clés : médiatisation religieuse, mème, stratégie discursive, analyse discursive, contrats de lecture

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Introduction

The problematics underlying our research is inserted in the context of the proliferation of technical and discursive devices, that in the process of mediatization of society spread from the productions of agents from different social fields. We have concentrated on the appropriation of memes in the construction of singular strategies in the religious discourse.

In this context, we undertook an analysis of the meme phenomenon, highlighting the ones we characterized as imagetic memes. We investigated the appropriation of this imagetic device, which takes place in a figurative logic typical of contemporaneity, considering in particular its enunciative or discursive dimension. Thus, we understand memes as imagetic-discursive devices that are inserted in the context of mediatization of society.

The production and the circulation of memes in evangelical publications constitute a relevant phenomenon in the context of mediatization of religion (Fausto Neto, 2002), which underlies changes in the religious field in relation to its relationship with the secular world, from its frequent intertwining with the media field (Rodrigues, 1999).

As a research clipping, we have analyzed memes that circulate on social networking platforms, especially on Facebook web pages intended for humor and linked to the Protestant religious field, self-proclaimed evangelical. We have considered the singularities of the Brazilian Protestant field and how memes are produced and reproduced according to certain strategies and effects of meaning.

As we shall see, some of these discursive strategies perform a shadowing of boundaries between the religious and the secular worlds, the sacred and the profane; between the spiritual life of the followers, with their traditions, and contemporary life. At the same time, the appropriation of memes also occurs in situations of enunciation (Verón, 2004), in which internal conflicts of the religious field are evidenced. In these conflicts, agents of this field resort to memes and to their language, strongly linked to humor, as a way of reinforcing their own discourse or to ridicule the discourses and practices of their opponents.

1. Mediatization of religion

Many scholars have pointed to changes in religion in its interfaces with the media. Among them, Hoover (2006), who points out that in the twenty-first century the connection between religion and the media becomes increasingly evident in the global context: many distant religions become known to the media; the issue of terrorism imposes reflections on religious beliefs and their political use; the scandals of the Catholic Church gain space in the great vehicles of communication; public clashes between traditional religious and groups seeking change, such as those of women and homosexuals; religious issues continue to be important in US political campaigns; the emergence of religious issues also impacts European social life, with the issue of immigration. According to the author, all this shows that we are in a world where "media and religion intermingle and collide in the cultural experience of media audiences" (Hoover, 2006, p.13).

With the secularization that characterizes modernity, there has been a change in relation to the traditional relationship with the word and religious knowledge. But this does not mean that religion has ceased to be relevant or that the communication of the sacred is no longer important as an object of scientific study. What happened was that, since modernity, the relationship with the word, once divinely naturalized, legitimized and established, was problematized. Religious issues remain alive and gain visibility as important components of the social fabric, although the authority and legitimacy conferred on religions in society as a whole is no longer the same.

In modernity, the individual finds himself immersed in multi-word environments that vie for power over his consciousness and way of life. Hoover (2006) argues that in the spiritual search undertaken by individuals, the legitimacy of formal religious institutions has often been called into question, with the power of legitimation increasingly being in the hands of the person who seeks for spiritual inspiration. In their personal quest, subjects look at a wide range of sources and contexts - in addition to traditional ones - and the media becomes central to the understanding of trends and changes.

Today, many authors have pointed to a social process that affects, among other spheres of life, religion as well: the mediatization of society. The process of mediatization of religion develops within a constant attempt of religions to remain connected to their followers, an effort also to obtain recognition of their issues and demands in the complex relationship with other fields of a society undergoing the process of mediatization. Nevertheless, this process has important historical roots.

If we look at the three great religions that have influenced the West, we may say that in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the word has always occupied a central position. They are religions whose teachings are materialized in sacred books and they have subsisted for a long time in a markedly literary culture.

These religious traditions, despite differences, claim a revealed divine word as a source. As Armstrong (1995) states, the concept of the divine word is crucial for Jews, Christians and Muslims. This enphasis in the Word of God has shaped the history of our ocidental culture.

With the secularization that marks modernity – although the latter has different rhythms and situations throughout the world – there has been a change in relation to the traditional relationship with the word. The word, once divinely naturalized, legitimized and established, was problematized. This occurs concomitantly with the emergence of communication as a problem of study. As Vera França points out, «modernity has transformed communication into a problem; it has raised issues about a hitherto natural, naturalized practice» (França, 2001, p.46).

Rodrigues (1999) describes this historical movement as a desacralization of the experience of the world, a process of autonomization of the dimensions of experience that is also described as « the time of the autonomization of the media field » (Rodrigues, 1999, p.2). The autonomization of social fields takes place in such a way that the media becomes not only a mediating field among the others, giving them voice and visibility in the face of society as a whole, but also as a mobilizer around issues to which various fields should, in their own way and in their specific domain, respond to.

For Hjavard (2008), although the large presence of religious themes in the media today may seem a denial of secularization, there is still a strong tendency towards secularization of society. The mediatization of religion can be considered part of a gradual secularization, in which the media is concerned with social functions that were performed by religious institutions. Studying how religion intertwines with the media can show how secularization and re-sacralization can occur simultaneously in different interfaces between religion and the media.

Other authors, such as Eliseo Verón (2014), Antonio Fausto Neto (2008) and José Luiz Braga (2006), will take this thinking about mediatization forward. From different, however complementary, theoretical trajectories, the authors deepen the understanding of these transformations until reaching a concept of a mediatized society or a society undergoing the process of mediatization.

For Verón (2014), mediatization is understood as an externalization of mental processes in visual and technical devices, a process that occurs from the invention of stone tools and the rupestral visual representations to writing and contemporary communication technologies. Therefore, this is not something observable only in modern societies, but a process resulting from the human capacity of semiosis.

Historically, this phenomenon was not developed in a linear form, yet according to patterns of acceleration that are shaped in specific contexts and according to the emergence of specific means. The process of mediatization has had different forms in previous periods, however, it has deepened with the acceleration of historical time

that is modernity itself. Verón (2014) cites as example three special periods in which he considers that there has been an acceleration of historical time, recognizing that others could be listed: the stone tools of the Upper Palaeolithic; the invention of the movable type press in the fifteenth century; and, in recent years, the internet.

Looking at this mediatization in the « media processes that unfold in industrial societies », Fausto Neto (2008) calls attention to the « modes of structuring and functioning of the means in social and symbolic dynamics » (Fausto Neto, 2008, p. 90). For this author, it is no longer an issue of recognizing a centrality of the media in social dynamics, but of « realizing that the constitution and the functioning of society – of its practices, logic and codification schemes – are crossed and permeated by presuppositions and logic of what would be called 'media culture' » (Fausto Neto, 2008, p.92).

Braga (2006), in turn, proposes to approach mediatization as a process of interaction in an accelerated pace, in such a way that it becomes a reference for social interactions. Thus, « the social processes of mediatized interaction begin to include, to cover the others, which do not disappear but adjust themselves » (Braga, 2006, p.11). For the author, in the current stage of mediatization, not only modes of organization and transmission of messages are demarcated, nor modes of production of meanings; however, above all, modes through which society is built. « They are patterns for 'seeing things', for 'articulating people' and more, for relating subuniverses in society and - for this very reason - ways of doing things through the interactions they provide » (Braga, 2006, p.17).

From these perspectives, one searches to understand the processes by which religion mediatizes itself, for it seeks legitimacy and visibility in a social context in which it no longer occupies a central position. In other words, one intends to understand the transformations and adaptations in which religions adopt as reference, in their interaction processes, logic, the modes of production of meanings and the characteristic actions of the media field, or to investigate to what extent the modes of production, circulation and reception of the discourses typical of the religious field change from the attempts of insertion of religions in the space of media and of society.

Today, in a context crossed by various technological devices, actors in the religious field seek to adapt their language and produce sacred content in formats for radio, television, and more recently, the internet. This implies not only the transposition of contents and rites to another means, or the instrumental use of the means of communication, but also changes in language and in discourses, produced to generate certain effects of meaning through different media devices (Borelli, 2010).

As Fausto Neto affirms, there is the « construction and advertising of new forms of religiosity », from the moment religious institutions make a « subordination of

their actions and agendas to production processes that are taken as loans to the sphere of the media field » (Fausto Neto, 2002, p.152).

This implies that even when there is no explicit intention, religious productions for the media field - or as a result of adopting it as a reference - begin to be constructed in another logic, according to different strategies that aim at new dynamics of recognition. Hence, the message of a church for television or for the internet is in fact another message, a discourse generated to be consumed by individuals spread in this society which is crossed by multiple mediatizing experiences. From then on, the other religious communication practices follow the same trend.

In the highly differentiated and diffused context of the internet and of social networking platforms, other forms of enunciation also emerge, which constitute various forms for religions and their leaders to relate to the following or prospect public, constructing different reading contracts (Verón, 2004). Similarly, the events, spaces of worship and even the ethical and aesthetic presentation of leaders of the religious field begin to change to adapt to the demands of the media field.

This process does not occur uniformly, but according to historical and social conditions of the religious field and its subfields. In the case of Brazil, this implies the need to consider that the different branches of Christianity - in the specific case of our research, Protestantism - are in different stages, rhythms and dynamics of mediatization, as we shall see below.

2. The Brazilian protestant field

The highlighted Brazilian religious diversity is something that is also evident inside of Protestant Christianity, motivating several scholars to prefer to talk about « protestantisms » in the plural. Nonetheless, the term « evangelical » (and its equivalent *gospel*) was consolidated in common sense and in the media to indicate Protestant churches, often causing a shadowing of bounderies and a concealment of differences.

In order to better understand this diversity, we have chosen Mendonça's (1990) classification of Protestant churches which divides Protestant churches into three main branches: the historical Protestants - of long tradition and linked to the models of the sixteenth-century reformers and of their nearest successors; the Pentecostals - of a more recent history, mainly linked to the movements of spiritual revival from the beginning until the middle of the twentieth century; and the Neo-Pentecostals - a movement that emerged from the 1970s and 1980s, differing from classical Pentecostals, among other characteristics, by their wide presence in the media and by the so-called prosperity theology.

There are, in these three branches, differentiated rhythms of the process of mediatization of Brazilian Protestantism. Some groups have already originated with

media, with churches heavily present on radio and television, while others demonstrate resistance and mistrust regarding the adoption of languages and practices of these media - while also seeking alternative strategies for visibility and connection with their audiences.

Thus, among the three groups, the Neo-Pentecostals are the ones that more rapidly evidence the process of mediatization of religion, however, this also occurs with Pentecostals and historical Protestants. Another component in these transformations is that Neo-Pentecostal investment in the media and the changes in their cult and preaching practices end up impacting the other churches, which attempt to regain lost time and ground.

In this dynamics, attention is drawn to the form in which individuals and groups linked to the way of thinking of historical Protestants have found in social networking platforms the space to counteract Neo-Pentecostalism. For the purposes of this study, it is emphasized the singular way in which internet memes are used in the constitution of dissemination strategies of discourses linked to the different agents involved in these disputes.

Cunha (2007) reflects on the changes and on the clashes in the Brazilian Protestant field, highlighting the formation of the so-called « gospel culture » - a hybrid culture, a new cultural expression that allows a meeting of the traditional with the modern. On the one hand, this culture preserves « aspects that are born of the Protestant tradition and of the demands of religious symbolic goods that are born of the Brazilian religious matrix »; on the other hand, it meets the « manifestations of modernity present in the Pentecostal religious proposals, in the Brazilian urban phenomenon, in the advance of the ideology of the consumer market and in the media culture » (Cunha, 2007, p.31).

For the author, the Protestants, self-proclaimed evangelicals, maintain traditional discourses and practices, yet, at the same time, they desire an integration with society and coat their productions with a cover of modernity. Many of these productions, in the area of music, events and communication, are intended to satisfy the needs of their followers simultaneously in terms of spirituality and leisure.

This understanding helps us visualize the appropriation of memes in a larger context. We notice that the productions linked to humor and to evangelical leisure in digital social networks are welcomed among this social group because they serve a previous desire to integrate to the Christian experience the possible communication and entertainment variations. Therefore, if there are songs, television and radio stations, gospel literature, movies, concerts and even gospel clubs, why not gospel memes?

Cunha (2007) also points out that « gospel culture redraws with modernity the dividing lines between the churches and the world, between the sacred and the profane, established by the Pietist and Puritan tradition » (Cunha, 2007, p.192). We

understand that, also through the activity that is evident in memes, there is a shadowing of the boundaries between the religious and the modern, between the sacred and the secular, as well as to enunciate an image of the updated evangelical follower, good-humored and aware of the contemporary forms of expression.

Furthermore, in this gospel culture there is a shadowing of boundaries among the various branches of Protestantism. Behind the gospel phenomenon - this transformed evangelical - there is a reconfiguration of the relationship among the different branches of Protestantism, albeit on the surface of the discourse and in its way of presenting itself to the world, since internal tensions continue to exist.

These are forms of the followers to see themselves, to deal with their differences and to dialogue with the contemporary world, generated from the dynamics of mediatization. It is in this context that internet memes are produced, welcomed and appropriated through different discursive strategies.

3. Internet memes

The word meme is a simplification of mimeme, which links the idea of memory to that of gene. Meme may be defined as a cultural unit that multiplies itself in a copy and imitation process. In the broad sense, the concept includes lines, catchphrases, drawings, behaviors, ideas or fragments of ideas that are repeated and - we do not quite know why - stick to the mind and spread rapidly.

The word was created by Richard Dawkins in the last chapter of his bestseller The Selfish Gene, 1976. The researcher of the theory of evolution understands meme as a cultural equivalent to the biological gene and announces it as a « new kind of replicator », much more recent than the gene and which proliferates in another environment, the « soup of human culture » (Dawkins, 2001, p.214).

Arising from a biological approach, the concept of meme has been a widely used metaphor, especially in the context of spreading content on the internet. As far as the Communication area is concerned, the meme metaphor may be well understood, problematized and applied if it is inserted in the context of another more comprehensive metaphor: the one of Media Ecology (Scolari, 2015). This means reflecting on how memes coexist with other media species, how they copy and adapt characteristics and the process in which they are constantly reformulated by different people and interest groups to circulate in different environments and to ensure their reproducibility.

In this ecological perspective, there is no mere substitution or extinction of species in the evolution of the media, but coexistence, interaction and reformulation. Hence, it is possible to consider internet memes as devices that gather, retrieve and reconfigure elements of other sociotechnological apparatuses that preceded them. They do this in a simple but highly efficient way, so that they get closer to the pro-

cesses of extension, obsolescence, retrieval and reversal, which describes McLuhan's (1998) tetrad.

Memes offer themselves as new forms of producing and disseminating content and they act on the communicational environment, modifying it by giving subjects and groups new ways of appropriating devices in communication. They coexist with other technologies, make use of them and insert themselves into them. They retrieve images, content and traces of more traditional technologies at the same time as they add elements of another language to them, offering ways for them to adapt to the media environment of the internet.

By their own way of production and of circulation in the internet-sharing environments, memes may bring about changes in other media devices with which they relate. Thus, as Shifman (2014, p.12) states, « it is not necessary to think of biology when analyzing memes. The ideas of replication, adaptation, and fitness to a certain environment can be analyzed from a purely sociocultural perspective ». According to the author, memes spread on the internet in such a way that they form and reflect socially widespread ways of thinking, and the practice of copy and imitation attached to them has become essential in contemporary digital culture.

The context in which memes emerge is the one in which the barriers between the sending and receiving poles of communication are diluted. A changing environment with an accelerated process of mediatization, in which, as Fausto Neto (2008, p.92) points out, « there is a spreading of new technical protocols in all extension of social organization, and intensification of processes that transform technologies into means of production, circulation and reception of discourses ».

Hence, memes give visibility to ways of thinking, behaviors and actions of social groups and may also be understood in a semiotic perspective. To that end, in our study, we highlight a specific type of memetic images: the images superimposed by a verbal text so as to constitute a unified whole, a hybrid text, forming a significant body (Verón, 2004). We have chosen to name these discursive sets as imagetic memes, for they constitute - text and image - a single significant matter.

In the process of discursive circulation and of constant modification of memes, in many cases there is not a great variation in the image itself, since the main change occurs in the verbal discursive construction. The modes of appropriation are mutable, memes circulate to different environments and, according to the intention of the subjects inserted in specific cultural contexts, there are cuts, overlappings and changes in the verbal text.

What follows is an example of how this process of meme modification occurs in the dynamics of circulation in different social contexts. One sees the use of the figure of the bumbling hero Chapolin, of the Mexican TV series with the same name, to compose a meme that enunciates ironic or funny situations in different contexts.



Christmas and New Year on a weekend So typical of this cheeky year

I don't quarrel with anyone But I get a lot of eye rolls

We are excellent drivers But God saves us from a lot of accidents

Figure 1. *Example of an imagetic meme with variations in the verbal text*

Source: Chapolin Sincero (Sincere Chapolin) [1]

In the first version of the meme, the joke happens with the fact that Christmas and New Year are on a weekend that year, which would confirm the year being considered « cheeky » by the enunciator. In the second version, the sentence is « I don't quarrel with anyone, but I get a lot of eye rolls », suggesting that from my face I may show the anger I cannot express with words. In the third selected version, the joke mentions God's protection to a driver who considers him or herself as a good driver, however, is in constant danger (« We are excellent drivers, but God saves us from a lot of accidents »).

In imagetic memes, the image - which may also be considered as text - a fabric, in Verón's (2004) understanding - is united to the verbal discourse so that when one of these components is modified, new effects of meaning are constructed while preserving and using what is important so that the connection with the situation of previous enunciation remains, to which one wants to refer. Memes often operate by retrieving, in the images or in the text, diverse discourses, combining effects of meanings and making them important for the production and recognition of another discourse that one wants to enunciate.

This way that memes are constructed leads the notion of interdiscursivity to the extreme. According to Verón (2004, p.70), « the structuring of discourses is always an interdiscursive phenomenon », whereas, according to Maingueneau (2013, p.62) « the discourse only acquires meaning within a universe of others discourses ». Pe-

[1] Retrieved December 10, 2016, from https://www.facebook.com/ChapolinSincero.

ruzzolo (2015, p.237) understands interdiscursivity as a game in which one discourse acts « supporting and constructing the other ». In memes, an interdiscursive game is effected by the combination of texts and images of diverse origins, which refer, in themselves and in combination, to a set of other discourses.

Thus, in the game that is common in the production, reproduction/modification and circulation of memes, an interdiscursive practice occurs wich includes resignifications. The images evoke memories, are retrieved and reorganized in a process that involves the activity of deframing and reframing (Aumont, 1993), with modifications, cutouts and insertions of verbal texts and other discursive elements. Signs of different contexts, once reframed, allow new meanings in the environments in which memes circulate.

The simpler the imagetic memes resulting from this process (as the case of Figure 1), the greater the easiness and, thus, the possibility of being modified and reappropriated again by the enunciatees, who become co-producers. However, this does not prevent certain memes from assuming increasingly elaborate formats over time.

The context in which this activity occurs is the one of another relationship between subjects and images, different from the one present in antiquity or classical arts. In contemporary times, images, which were previously produced from the point of view of representation of the real or as an invitation to contemplation, are inserted in a figurative logic, that of simulation (Couchot, 1993). In this logic, memes invite the enunciatee to participate in the game of modification and reconfiguration of what he or she have received.

This dynamics meets specific discursive strategies with the pretension to generate certain effects of meaning. The analysis of these strategies and effects may be elucidatory both regarding memes as imagetic and discursive devices and regarding important aspects of the process of mediatization of Brazilian Protestantism.

4. Reading contracts and strategies

For the selection and analysis of memes in the religious context, we have chosen three Facebook web pages: « Memes Crentes (Believer Memes) », « Humor Gospel (Gospel Humor) » and « Agostinho de Hipona Depressivo (Depressive Augustine of Hippo) »[2]. These web pages have initially drawn attention due to the number of likes they had, which served as an indication of the relevance of these publication spaces for the religious field, as well as the possible fecundity and reach of the memes that are published in these pages. Another reason for this delimitation is that, in our ob-

[2] Retrieved June 15, 2016, from: www.facebook.com/MemesCrentesOficial, www.facebook.com/pages/Humor-Gospel/342520252427064 and www.facebook.com/ agostinhodehiponadepressivo.

servation, there were discursive marks in them that led us to the identification of different reading contracts (Verón, 2004; Fausto Neto, 2007).

Enunciation devices rely on different media: a newspaper, a magazine, an app on the smartphone, a web page. Because of the way they are constructed they may be coherent with these media or not, in the same way that they develop a relationship of greater or lesser bond with their readers depending on how they may adapt to their characteristics and expectations. This relationship is called a "reading contract" (Verón, 2004; Fausto Neto, 2007).

From the point of view of this contract, which is already enunciated in the titles, headings and descriptions, the three analyzed web pages have in common the fact of enunciating ways of the Protestant religious field to make fun of itself. Each one of these pages claims to have its own style, from the most innocent and focused on the fun and motivation of their followers to the most cynical or acid. Humor is used as a strategy for motivation, for reflection or for protest. They are not antireligious jokes or criticisms, but references belonging to the reality of the churches, either to enhance and highlight what is considered desirable or to emphasize and label what is undesirable.

In the research, a total of 268 postings that used image memes were collected. In these posts, different constituent elements of the memes were identified, as well as recurrent discursive marks, that made possible a categorization. Because of the space constraint, only a small representative sample is shown in this article.

The first web page that we have analyzed, Memes Crentes, positions itself in a less critical manner in relation to the contents and messages of the religious field and maintains a markedly motivational tone. Humor is predominantly used to draw attention to the more joyful aspects of religion, interspersing biblical messages with jokes about the way followers are. The second page of our corpus, Humor Gospel, has an intermediate tone and proposes not only to entertain with the content, but also to reflect on behaviors and practices of the evangelical field. The third web page, Agostinho de Hipona Depressivo, is the one in which humor is used as a strategy of confrontation, more acid and blunt in the criticisms directed at actors and at branches of the field.

These three pages, to a greater or lesser extent, show disputes that exist within the religious field; disputes over ways of being, enunciating more up-to-date and humorous subjects; by means of communicating the gospel, enunciating subjects integrated to the new languages and technologies; and struggles for ways of relating to their identity, with subjects who seek to recover a lost Christianity in the midst of the Protestant diversity.

In the posts of these web pages, we have identified constituent elements and recurrent discursive marks, which ended up confirming and reinforcing the reading contract enunciated in their presentation. In the analysis of these marks, we have

used the theoretical-methodological framework developed by Verón (2004), trying to describe a grammar of memes production.

Firstly, we emphasize that the reproduction of memes resorts to humor and its potential, as Peruzzolo affirms, to take us away from the habitual seriousness of life and become "a stimulus to observation" (Peruzzolo, 2010, p.103). Humor, as we have noticed, is also constructed in memes according to distinct genres that, through their recurrence in our corpus, have helped us to visualize the strategies to which they are linked: the joke, the parody and the satire.

We have also observed that, in the composition of memes in each of these humor genres, there were predominant types of figures. We have grouped these figures into five sets: the so-called rage comics[3]; the characters of pop culture, taken from movies, TV series and other productions; the prominent personalities in society, as political leaders and exponents of other social fields; the agents of the religious field - sometimes satirized, sometimes evoked as figures of charisma and authority to give strength to the discourse; and the figures of aesthetic/emotional appeal such as animals, children or other images that evoke feelings like beauty, compassion and tenderness.

In most cases, these are figures that are appropriated from other contexts, retaining discursive marks of a secular media culture, however, they are displaced to function in another relation of meaning in the religious context. Nevertheless, the opposite sometimes also occurs with the coupling of signs of the sacred context with elements of other discourses, so as to function as surprises and incongruities that are characteristic of humor.

With the use of these different groups of figures and humor genres, strategies are constructed, which are coherent with the previously identified reading contracts. The first of them, the motivational strategy, may be seen in the example below, in which memetic elements are combined to emphasize the power of fasting and prayer in the life of a Christian.

[3] Figures of simplified faces from other drawings, or even photographs, widely used as memes because they easily illustrate diverse emotions and they may be adapted to different contexts (see Figure 2).



Fasting + Prayer = The Devil goes crazy!!

Figure 2. *Fasting + Prayer*

Source: Memes Crentes[4]

In this meme, the idea of a spiritual battle in enunciated - an emphasis characteristic of the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches, but also manifested in some historical churches. A battle that takes place between followers and the temptations of the devil, the world and their own sinful nature. The meme's intention is to motivate the follower, through fasting and prayer, to continue to fight against the devil.

The motivational strategy also converges, through memes, to an update of the evangelical identity, to face contemporary life and to express the yearnings and the struggle of the followers in terms with which anyone may identify. This strategy and way of production remains visible and identifiable in other memes of this type.

A second strategy is of reflection. This strategy explicitly or implicitly enunciates an invitation to an examination of conscience, which may be done in various ways: by confronting the followers with the central principles of their religion, so that they reflect on their particular way of living; by alerting to the fact that religious principles are at stake when churches or followers accept or assume certain secular ways of living or expressing themselves; or, in other cases, by inviting to the practice of reading the Holy Scripture or of Christian authors for the deepening of faith.

In the example below, a sequence of pictures of a child is used, which already enunciates in itself an emotional appeal, to draw attention to the need for prayer. The enunciatee is invited to focus his or her prayers on the request for spiritual blessings, not material ones.

[4] Retrieved April 20, 2016, from : www.facebook.com/MemesCrentesOficial.



Bend your knee, brother. Stop asking for a miracle seize the opportunity to ask of God, for forgiveness!

Figure 3. *Bend your knee, brother*

Source: Humor Gospel[5].

Another strategy identified in the analyzed memes is of protest. This strategy uses jokes, satire or parodies to denounce what is considered deviant in the religious field. The humor and the language of memes are used in a way that may strongly identify the social dimension of humor to which Bergson (2001) refers, trying to strengthen or censor behaviors according to the perceptions common to the people who laugh.

In this case, memes are produced to mark out which would be the false prophets, teachings, or false works that would need to be brought to light and combated by other Christians. This is not a critique aimed at the deconstruction of the Christian discourse as a whole, but is an attack on those theologies and practices that the enunciator considers harmful to the Christian faith.

In this strategy of protest, a frequent clash among evangelical ramifications or « Protestantisms » is evident. Historical Protestants, who are attached to a rationality that distrusts the Pentecostal emotional postures and are defenders of a centrality of the Holy Scripture that does not entail the search for miracles and revelations, are dissatisfied with what Neo-Pentecostals do and say, with their media leaders, their symbolic and liturgical innovations and their appeal to the prosperity theology. This is shown in the following example:

[5] Retrieved June 15, 2016, from : www.facebook.com/pages/Humor-Gospel/342520252427064.

I determine and declare! Jesus shall give you victory today

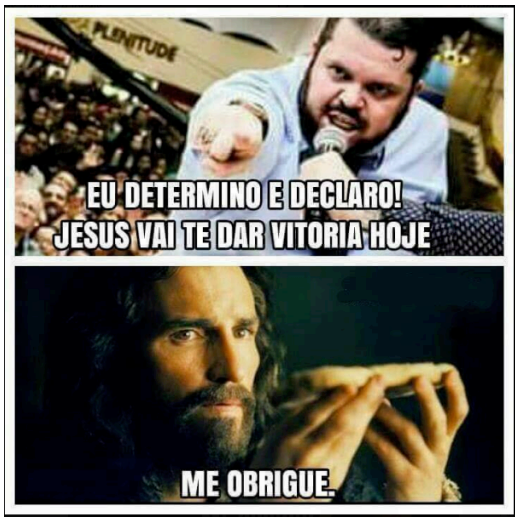


Figure 4. *The pastor vesrus Jesus*

Make me.

Source: Agostinho de Hipona Depressivo[6]

In this meme, a theology of prosperity and victory is counterposed, in which leaders say they determine blessings on the lives of their followers - from Neo-Pentecostal matrix -, to another, which exalts God's sovereignty and the self-denial and perseverance in sufferings and tribulations – typical of historical Protestantism.

Interestingly enough, the attack on Neo-Pentecostal discourse and its leadership, when in the memetic format, often approaches media language to such an extent that it enables circulation even in non-religious contexts. The image may be shared by people who, even though are not part of this social field or unaware of their internal disputes, also repudiate the Neo-Pentecostal form of preaching and appeal.

This dynamics of memetization can be seen in the example we bring below :

[6] Retrieved November 25, 2016, from : www.facebook.com/agostinhodehiponadepressivo.

A prophetic act for you to prosper



Stop spending more money than you receive

Figure 5. *Gandalf prophet*

Source : Agostinho de Hipona Depressivo[7]

This meme uses the character Gandalf, a magician from the Lord of the Rings trilogy played by Ian McKellen (Dir. Peter Jackson, 2001-2003). It is a character that in other memes is also accompanied by phrases of ironic tone that give hard and direct answers. In this situation of enunciation Gandalf personalizes an opposition to the theology of prosperity. It states, sarcastically, that financial prosperity has nothing to do with a spiritual choice, but only with the rational use of the resources available. The effect of meaning is to disqualify the pursuit of prosperity as an objective of Christian faith. That is, religion should be concerned with matters more related to the spirit.

There is an analogy in the image and in the text between the magician Gandalf in his rustic clothes and his magic wand with valley and mountains in the background and the biblical prophets as well as the image of the shepherd and his staff. Interdiscursivity makes the encounter between imagistic memories of discourses of different fields, which converge towards the same effect.

It is interesting to note that in the construction of memes, there is no reservation as to the appropriation of a personage of popular culture to proclaim a Christian message. The boundaries between these fields are shaded or erased. Gandalf functions for speech as effectively as the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah or John the Baptist. Or even better, because in its insertion in the religious discourse is that the desired comedy is given.

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[7] Retrieved November 25, 2016, from : www.facebook.com/agostinhodehiponadepressivo.

Thus, the clashes among historical, Pentecostal, and Neo-Pentecostal Protestants are discursively constructed by media processes which, while aiming at internally affirming a Christian identity assumed to be the truth, extend beyond the boundaries of theologies and of the religious field. The fecundity, reach and longevity of memes (Recuero, 2014), based on the strength of the call to the observeation of a humor that uses jokes, parodies and satire (Peruzzolo, 2010), competes for influences (Fausto Neto, 2012) among fields which show the dynamic complexity of the ongoing mediatization.

5. Effects of meanings

Based on the above-identified strategies - motivation, reflection and protest – which reading contracts of the analyzed pages are also constituted of, we will now detail some effects of meanings arising from this dynamics in the specific context in which we observe it.

We remark that, as Verón (2004, p.216) points out, « every discourse draws [...] a field of effects of meaning and not a single effect ». Therefore, the effects of meaning that we highlight in our analysis are not the only ones, but the ones that, by looking at our corpus from the recurrent discursive marks, we were able to identify.

As a first effect of meaning, we highlight the shadowing of bounderies. We live in a society in which social fields intersect with and affect themselves by the dynamics of the ongoing mediatization. It is a time in which « the practices, logic and codification schemes » of the whole society « are crossed and permeated by presuppositions and logic of what could be called 'media culture' » (Fausto Neto, 2008, p.92).

This process also extends over the religious field and the media modes of production, circulation and reception of discourses that are being appropriated and bring with them a call to the opening of the religious to the world. Hence, in the appropriation of memes, not only is there the use of figures and expressions of the secular context in the religious discourse and vice versa, but there is an interpenetration between these instances, at least at the level of discourses.

In addition, with the intention of adapting themselves to the new media culture or digital culture (Shifman, 2014), religious subjects seek to get closer, both from the point of view of the languages used and from the enunciated image of themselves, to a posture that confers them contemporaneity and diminishes the sense of distance or difference from the social whole. At each expression, figure or imagetic meme re-signified of secular contexts to function in the religious one, or at each image and verbal text of sacred origin memetized to circulate in environments marked by secular media logic, the boundaries between these two instances are being blurred or dimmed, the religious and the secular, the sacred and the profane.

Another side of this shadowing of boundaries is the concealment of differences among the churches or the « Protestantisms ». Operating in a gospel culture (Cunha, 2007) and even using this name, enunciators provide, through memes, the strengthening of common ideas and attitudes in the field, at least when their strategies are directed towards the motivation of the followers for the Christian life or towards the reflection on important aspects of their faith. Even in the act of making fun of oneself and of the characteristics that are present in the different churches, this shadowing of differences is accomplished, enunciating to all as belonging to the same identity. Those who are called to laugh are also invited to recognize something they have in common. As Bergson states, laughter demands a relationship of « complicity, with other laughers, real or imaginary » (Bergson, 2001, p.5).

A second effect of meaning is the attenuation of negative perceptions of the secular world upon Protestants or of Protestants upon themselves as to their integration with contemporaneity and their lifestyle. Making use especially of memes as a strategy of motivation, enunciators try to construct another image of themselves and of their coreligionists, an image detached from tradition, at least in terms of language, of mastery of communicational devices, of humor and of integration into a digital culture in social networks. As stated by Verón (2004), enunciators may construct in the device an image of themselves as speakers, the image of their addressee, produced by the enunciation itself, and the relationship between the enunciator and his or her addressees. These images may differ from real subjects, since they are elaborated according to the aim targeted by the enunciators.

In a society marked by « a growing technology-based mediatization » (Braga, 2006, p.13), the appropriation of memes by the religious is an opportunity for subjects to not only integrate themselves with media and their technologies, but to update their modes of seeing, saying, and doing things, presenting themselves differently to themselves and to the world.

At the same time, subjects who appropriate memes seek, through this insertion in the digital world and in its languages and devices, to strengthen bonds, reinforce self-esteem and emphasize the living, strong and joyful aspect of their faith; a faith that offers itself as still relevant to the world today, which would be able to overcome the barriers of secularizing modernity and still remain as an option to the contemporary individual. This attenuation of negative perceptions or reinforcement of positive image - through discursive processes that are shaped through the media - also has, therefore, an eminently evangelistic or proselytizing character.

In addition to shadowing the boundaries and attenuating negative perceptions through memes, we have observed two other effects of meanings. These effects, linked especially to the strategy of protest, are: the ridicule of behaviors considered deviant and the reinforcement of desirable behaviors in the Protestant field.

Whenever, through a meme, an enunciator satirizes a certain religious leader, or criticizes thoughts and practices through parodies or jokes, he or she is also marking as unacceptable other attitudes and behaviors of the same type. Humor, visually present in memes, simple and powerful, disseminates and amplifies those marks that signal the grotesque or deviant.

Concurrently, memes reinforce attitudes and practices that are opposed to the ones that are being mocked. In the case of the « Protestantisms », we have noticed how relevant and frequent is the use of humor as a strategy of confrontation against Neo-Pentecostalism, which, because of its visibility and characteristics strongly linked to mediatization, challenges other Protestants and motivates them to position themselves. Those who have not adhered to Neo-Pentecostal practices, widely disseminated in the mainstream media, use the spaces on digital social networking platforms as a form of resistance and protest.

It would be possible to say that in this resistance, the groups that object Neo-Pentecostalism and its consequences on the way of being evangelical would actually be resisting the mediatization of religion, entrenched in the midst of a lost battle. When observing the ways in which they enunciate their resistance, through memes and their characteristic discursive appropriations, we see that these groups are also mediatizing themselves, albeit through other means.

If they do not adhere to the molds of television spectacle or to the market logic present in the prosperity, the ones who protest such transformations through memes also modify their language and practices with the appropriation of these devices, and this has consequences on their ways of seeing, doing, and saying things. In other words, those who criticize mediatization in the Protestant milieu insert themselves in this process by adhering to new ways of interaction and enunciation.

Thus, historical Protestants, while criticizing Neo-Pentecostals, in their much accelerated march on mediatization, for having reshaped their theologies and practices, may, on the other hand, be accused by their opponents - and they already are, in the reactions and comments - of profaning sacred images and of playing with the sacred that the leaders of the churches invest.

This is one of the onus of the search for visibility, for integration into the digital culture or, in the language of memes, for adaptation, reach, fecundity and longevity. It should also be observed, in the medium and long term, through this figurative logic of the simulation (Couchot, 1993) that develops in memes, if a less contemplative relationship of the followers with other religious images and texts is also being created, a relationship more focused on the logic of intervention, simulation, coproduction. Likewise, one may investigate what kind of changes this relationship brings about in the conceptions about the sacred itself and in the life practices that surround it.

Final considerations

Memes may at first seem mere toys to the less attentive eyes, or, as Shifman (2014, p. 15) points out, « trivial and mundane artifacts ». However, for us, they are, once strained with the chosen theoretical frameworks and taken in the context in which they are placed to enunciate, discursive devices through which important social transformations occur that act in the media field, in the religious field and particularly in the discursive production in a society undergoing mediatization.

Taking into account the effects of identified meanings and the constructed discursive strategies, we may broaden our reflection and inquire about other pertinent issues. Firstly, we may ask ourselves whether, in conjunction with the process of mediatization, the social fields - in particular the religious and the secular ones - are not witnessing the real relativization of their boundaries. Hence, the shadowings made through the appropriation of memes would be one of the expressions that evidence a major change.

From the point of view of the subjects, to whom the third-generation semiology is directed, as proposed, among other authors, by Verón (2004), we may also highlight how in the context of contemporary changes they seek to enunciate themselves differently than historical determinations that were imposed on them. In the religious field, which in its modes of enunciation has always been permeated by symbolic and very old norms linked to liturgically instituted formalisms, memes are presented as new ways not only of saying but also of making religion. As asserted by Fausto Neto (2002), the appropriation of this device, along with other loans of the media field, is so powerful that it ends up acting in the construction of new forms of religiosity.

In the broader context of the mediatization of social practices, it is noted that there is no longer a linear process among receivers, readers or spectators in its strict sense, for they are coproducers, actors and subjects who propose interactions that develop through the various discursive devices. Through these processes, the panorama in which institutions were the only producers and disseminators of discourses is outdated.

It is also possible to observe regarding the specific case of Protestantism and its relationship with images that - at least in Brazil, where it was historically marked by an iconoclasm that, according to Mendonça (1990), was adopted to give rise to rationality and argumentation - this led to a loss of the mystery and to a symbolic emptying that is evident in temples and in discourse. Pentecostalism has brought back to the Protestant churches the emotional appeal, which was later mediatized in Neo-Pentecostalism. Today, with memes, another possibility comes to light: the re-signification of both the rational and the emotional, through a re-magicization (Flusser, 1993) that relies on new technologies.

To the religious doing and saying, imagetic memes become another process, in which texts and images, once appropriated, are sometimes sacralized, sometimes desacralized, according to discursive objectives and strategies. These processes, in the cases we have studied, are not the responsability of priests, but especially of lay people. At the forefront are not the agents traditionally legitimated in the field, but subjects who build their legitimacy precisely through these new forms of discourse production.

It is interesting to note that, while historical Protestants criticize Neo-Pentecostals for, in their much accelerated march on mediatization, they overturn their theologies and practices, enunciators who use memes as a strategy of contestation may also be accused of profaning the sacred images and play with serious things. This is one of the risks of the search for visibility and integration into the digital culture. Or, in the language of memes, the consequence of the struggle for adaptation, fecundity and longevity.

It would be necessary to observe, in a greater time, if the figurative logic that operates in the memes could lead to a less contemplative relation of the faithful with the religious images and texts. In other words, if in the context of mediatization of religion, the intervention, simulation and coproduction become more important than contemplation and worship. Equally, it would be important to investigate what kind of changes this new relation with the images causes in the conceptions about the sacred itself and the life practices that surround it.

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