

## Unpacking a Media Experience

The video we viewed on Tuesday regarding American evangelicals and the Jewish state of Israel provides us with an opportunity to reflect on a number of things, particularly the relationship between religion and the mass media.

Let's start with some generic statements regarding ourselves and the media:

- We see/experience much of the world largely through the media rather than through our own direct first-hand experience. (This is especially true as we become aware of more and more of the world.)
- We self-select, at least to some extent and out of the choices open to us, the media to which we expose ourselves.
- We tend to choose, at least to a significant extent, media messages which reinforce views we already hold. (Herein lies the true mystery of what changes people's minds.)
- The media presents itself to us with an explicit social facticity (which is, in Durkheim's terms, both material and immaterial)—it is "there" and it is institutionally and massively objectivated (in Berger's terms).
- The media is largely, even overwhelmingly, unidirectional.
- For a variety of reasons (competition for market share with other media, assessment of target audience, competition for audience time, understanding of human psychology, etc.) media discourse tends toward brevity, oversimplification, categorization dichotomization, and a wide variety of those aspects which conspire (or drive the media) toward sensationalism (dramatic action, conflict, sound bites, etc.).

Add to this the cautions provided by Hunter (*Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*):

- Discourse is typically dominated by members of various (economic, political, entertainment) elites, popularized or self-promoting spokespersons who thereby have privileged access to the media.
- Issues, especially in the abstract and where we are not personally involved, don't lend themselves to ambiguity.
- In general, people prefer, or at least have a tendency, not to embrace ambivalence or ambiguity (which is more often encountered and tolerated in the immediate and the real).
- The human appetite for the sensational, the dramatic, the exciting, even the contentious (again, in so far as we are not personally involved).
- A baseline, or perhaps increasing, public suspicion of others or, obversely, defensiveness around our own positions, especially our assumptive commitments. (The phenomenon of )
- An ingrained (innate?) tendency to be alert or at least sensitive to potential threats to our own vested epistemological and ontological anchors, our own world view or version of reality. (In Berger's terms, this might be considered a thoroughly understandable resistance to our own "de-alienation.")