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News is an Act of Faith: Failure and Religiosity in Final Issues of Failed Newspapers

Abstract:

This article reconceives news as a faith-based ontology, and journalism as a faith-based practice. The culture of news and journalism, it contends, is faith culture. A logical extension of scholarship surrounding communication rituals, this article takes a neo-Durkheimian approach following from Rappaport's assessment of the role of text in ritual and religion to assess the content of the last editions of four newspapers. Journalists at these newspapers attributed souls to the institutions, reasserted foundational news values through hagiography, constructed the daily ritual of news production as expressions of those values, used explicitly religious language to express that ritual, and construct a social memory of the newspaper for the minds of readers. These editions are the death ritual of newspaper journalism; a close reading reveals that ritual production of the world, based on foundational myths and values, undergirds news production, and that news is an act of faith.