TWILIGHT OF CHRISTIANITY IN TELE-VIEW OF THE WORLD

FROM HOMO RELIGIOSUS TO HOMO VIDENS

Slavomír Gálik and Radoslava Cenká[*]

University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Faculty of Mass Media Communication, Nám. J. Herdu 2, 91701 Trnava, Slovak Republic

Abstract

The authors find a basis of this study in a mediacentric attitude toward culture, in which the media of communication (written documents, press, television and others) change our way of thinking, imagination, recognition and in fact culture, as a whole. Christian religion was, first of all, formed orally – by God and people's words - and secondly by writing. The structure of speech supports religious thinking – reality of word, wholeness and depth of thinking, introducing past to present. Writing externalises thinking, creates subject-object dichotomy, distance, and enables scientific approach. Thus Christian religion stands upon two pillars that can support each other, but also contradict: speech and writing. Speech formed man - Homo religiosus and writing formed Homo sapiens. In the scholastic culture of Middle Ages, the disagreement was very strong between sense and vision, Philosophy and Theology. In the second half of the 20th century, new types of 'image' media emerged, television first and later on, the Internet. Sartori believes these media create new anthropogenesis, a new type of human, whom he calls Homo videns. Homo videns contrasts sharply with Homo religiosus. Image-based thinking does not support abstract thinking based on writing and disables time dimension, in which values, including Christian religion, can spread over time. Homo videns thinks only in combinations of images in space of boundless connections. Yet, the impact of media on humans is not absolute one, since there is always a possibility of counteraction. Such counteraction can be seen in setting a critical distance with the help of media education, which could lead to ability concentrate, think and meditate.

Keywords: Christianity, Homo videns, image media, speech, writing

1. Introduction

Since the second half of 20th century, we have been subjects to the 'boom' of electronic media. Television had by far the biggest influence on us, but since the 90s, this position has been taken by media 'par excellence'– the Internet. The fundamental feature of the most modern and most powerful electronic media (the Internet, television) is images, which change the way of thinking,

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[*]Corresponding author, e-mail: radoslava.cenka@gmail.com

imagination and recognition. G. Sartori states that a new anthropogenesis with a new kind of human - Homo videns – is being formed. Such human loses sense of abstract thinking, linearity of time, sense of reality, sanctity and seriousness of life. So far, three generations have grown up with television and one with the Internet. It seems that this time is long enough for the Western culture to completely change.

Along with the change in culture, there is also a change in Christianity, especially Catholic Church. The highest representative of Catholic Church realised the great impact of new types of media. John Paul II, in his message to the 36th World Communications Day (24 Jan 2002), called "A New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel" saw a great opportunity for spreading gospel through the Internet, but also warned about the risks. In the conclusion of his speech, he worried whether the Face of Christ can indeed emerge on the Internet: "The Internet causes billions of images to appear on millions of computer monitors around the planet. From this galaxy of sight and sound will the face of Christ emerge and will the voice of Christ be heard?... For if there is no room for Christ, there is no room for man". Pope Benedict XVI, in his Encyclical 'Caritas in veritate' (2009, p. 53) encourages us to investigate media that bring changes in "perception and recognition of reality and human being as such". In other branches of Christianity, similar ideas are proposed. For example, one representative of the Romanian Orthodox Church, archbishop Laurentiu, brought attention to undesirable content in media, media addiction and media socialisation [2].

We can generally say that it is the negative information, rather than the nature of the new media, that is reflected and criticised. In our study, we want to focus on the second mentioned influence. To what extent can Christianity, which has always relied on media such as speech and writing, be compatible with new image media? Or is it a preclusive relationship? Is a kind of symbiosis possible? If yes, what are the conditions? To be able to solve this case, we need to clarify relationship of speech and writing with the formation of Christianity and the nature and influence of electronic media television and the Internet on human being and the culture as a whole.

2. The influence of speech and writing on Christianity

Throughout its 2000-year-long history, Christianity has been closely bound with two media: speech and writing. Jesus Christ, the former of Christianity, did not write anything, but announced His message. New Testament mentions once Jesus "writing into sand" (John 8.1-11), which may imply that written words could possibly lose their living and spiritual message. Christianity differed from the Antic World especially by pneumatic communication, which started after the death of Jesus and his resurrection via the Holy Ghost. For example, Apostles started speaking foreign languages through the Holy Ghost (Acts 2.1-13). In this case, we can argue it was speech that was not performed by humans, but by the Holly Ghost. A different type of

communication can be seen in the declaration that Jesus is the Word through which God created the universe: "In the beginning there was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1.1). The Christian's attitude to life lies in realization and identification with the Word of God [3], this is the intermediary between God and human and through this dialogue between God and human is realised. Christians got to know each other in a Christian community in which they declared their faith in Jesus.

Until the half of 2nd century, Christianity was mostly pneumatic, led by the Holly Ghost, who favoured them with gifts of command of words, teaching, message, apostleship and others [4]. Pneumatic leading of the first Christians cannot be cut away from the human verbal communication. Both of the forms of communication gave Christianity a characteristic feature, sense of sanctity, deepness, tradition, authority and community. Verbal expression is, in this context, a privileged form of media, 'mother' of all the media, because no other form (written, printed and so on) is connected with man as strongly as speech. Our knowledge of world is based on language and has a social nature. One of the basic features of verbal expression is its directness and dialogical nature. Speech introduces those who communicate to wholeness, to mutual 'mental dimension' in which past content becomes present in the shared and actual semantic space. In the period before written word, or in the case of some of the tribe societies that exist now, we can see what world looks like with the use of purely verbal communication, only. J. Lohisse [5] says that language is natural, magical and global in the pure epoch of verbal communication. With the help of verbal communication, ideas of community consciousness and cyclic time emerge in the community mentality. Organisation of such society is of a global and non-hierarchial nature. These structures get gradually disrupted with written word.

From the second half of the first century, Christian's teaching started to be transcribed gradually in Evangelies, Deeds and Apostolic Letters. Later, a need of Greek education in the Classics arose, and this teaching was used to protect and intensify Christianity, as well as bring arguments. The stronger this demand was, the more emphasis was given to written texts and Greek education, especially philosophy.

After the Edict of Milan in 313, when Constantine I gave Christians freedom of worship, the situation started to change more rapidly. An important move from Christian apologetics to unique definition of Christian teaching needed to be done. The first Ecumenical Councils showed the great importance of precise expressing and definition of Christian teaching, which was something that written word could do. After the final dissolution of the Western Roman Empire (476 AD), written word was even more important for preserving Christian culture. Monks in Benedictine monasteries copied manuscripts and studied sacred texts – *lectio divina*. They started to distinguish between those who could read and those who could not read at all, or only a little in monasteries. The ability to read and write gradually gained importance and was a guaranty for ascending of individual on the social ladder [5, p. 68-71].

Writing gradually changed the structure of thinking in the West. Although these changes had started much sooner, it was the time of Middle Ages when the era of writing really began. Writing brought many important influences on thinking of human: it enabled archiving, preserved information that brought the idea of separated and distant past. By this, the circle of time was cut off and terms such as 'before that' and 'later' were introduced and writing gave time a linear feature. In the epoch of verbal communication, the image and object were not properly distinguished, which implied continuity between subject and object. In linear, alphabet-based writing, we can see a sequence, logical distinguishing subject and object. A move towards science was started, with shift from magical, sacral to rational and profane. Thanks to writing the sacred separated from profane and institutionalised religion started its existence. Writing was a tool of power because it supported authority of the important and educated people. It separated the subject and gradually started to enhance it, thus individualism came into life together with writing.

Writing in the Middle Ages Europe became a dominant media. Its domination can be seen in priority of, for example, juridical, religious and political documents over spoken word. In the Middle Ages, the era of writing was also supported by several more factors, such as production of paper, simplification of written word and especially foundation of universities. According to Lohisse [5, p. 88], writing became a universal method of expressing ideas and the most important means of communication in the Western society. Even thought literacy was not widespread and the majority of people could not read and write, it was important that writing penetrated all the spheres of life. Psychologically, writing enabled and accelerated individualisation of humans.

The base of Christianity was formed in the Middle Ages. On the first hand, we see the influence of spoken word that brought it into sacred depth of holiness and community, and on the second, we see emphasis on individuality, the idea of linear time and hierarchy-based organisation. This dichotomy revealed itself in the scholastics of the Middle Ages in the shape of problematic relationship between intellect and faith, philosophy and theology. This argument, characteristic for Christianity and especially Catholicism is present even today. This question is, for example, spoken about by John Paul II in his Encyclical 'Fides et ratio'.

Christianity in the Europe's New Ages went through various changes. In the aspect of media, it was especially the invention of printing press, which meant copies of books could be made in large numbers, but it was also possible to print leaflets and later press that would be published periodically. Fast spreading of homogeneous information was especially important for reformation. Luther's Reform spread through printing press. Printed documents also influenced general opinion and the phenomenon of mass spreading. This all influenced Christianity considerably, yet it never had to face such a challenge as it was brought by mass media in the second half of the twentieth century.

3. The nature and influence of new media on human and culture

The Western society has been massively influenced by scientific and technical development since the second half of the twentieth century. Among others, electronic media can undisputedly be put in the group of rapidly developing areas of Science and technology, with image media, such as television and later the Internet, having probably the biggest impact on man.

Along with television, as N. Postman mentions [6], came a new epistemology and axiology. We may add new ontology too, because watching television takes us into new worlds that can either be broadcast live, simulated or purely virtual. It is probably not a coincidence that with development of television, also new thoughts of virtual, or simulated reality come [7]. It seams that many philosophers, out of who we see especially J. Baudrillard, realised in the context of media that reality is expressed and consequently virtualised by media. Baudrillard spoke about simulations and in the context of television it was simulation of the third stage. Image simulation refers to a reality that is richer than the original and thus gradually becomes hyper-reality, in which the real things disappear.

With the 'unstable' reality, the basic existential categories of human also change – time and space. The linear time loses its importance because instant images direct our senses and consciousness to present time. The nature of television simply does not give us a chance to think about the past, or future. Television marketing concentrates on constant fight for the viewer's attention, so the viewer cannot find the time to contemplate the past or future. In the postmodern time, people are not interested in the past, history and do not wan to think about the future too much either, they want to live for the present day. The category of space is, similarly to time, marginalized, worthless because we travel in space very fast and can watch live broadcasting from anywhere on the globe.

Postman also says that the formal feature of the influence of television also incorporates fast changes of images that are incommensurable in the sense of content. Human thinking then adapts to television, moves from one idea to the second without gradual development.

Postman believes that the main function of television is to entertain. He says: "entertainment is the common ideology of the whole communication television brings" [6, p. 105]. Postman does not find it problematic that television offers programs that bring entertainment, but that all the topics are converted into entertainment. These programs are meant to be for all the humankind in mass, similarly to modern printed media content, and do not differentiate between degrees of culture or entertainment. Everything is determined by demand, which ruins the original system of value ladder, based on hierarchy.

All that applies to television is even more suitable for the Internet. The Internet has intensified the tendencies introduced by television in its attitude to virtual reality and simultaneousness of time and cyberspace. Moreover, the Internet is interactive and enables various forms of communication, starting with

e-mails and ending with sharing pictures and videos on various social networks. In the case of the Internet, we can see more clearly that human communication, along with existential experiencing, is virtualised in the cyberspace, in which coordinates of time and space are excluded, new identities are created and the world is experienced in a game-like way. Similarly to television, the Internet is an image medium, but offers many more possibilities for combinations and surfing. The language of the Internet is technical and digital, and humans – if they want to communicate through it – have to use it. This type of communication is a combination of technical and human language – techno language. Similarly to this, the way humans think needs to take in account the information flow, as in communication the information appear and change without any connections, when we browse the Internet.

4. Twilight of Christianity in tele-view of the world

In the modern philosophical and sociological discourse on media, one idea dominates – media do not influence us only through the content, but also through their technical form. One of the most important media theoretician McLuhan agrees with this [8] and says that media are in fact extensions of human that bring messages and influence us not purely by the content, but also by form of the media, which may be for example, audio or visual. J. Lohisse [6, p. 12] even believes that media, such as spoken and written words, print and also electronic media (the Internet) have their particular semiotics, upon which the whole cultural epochs were created – epoch of speech, writing, masses and shapelessness.

W. Welsch, one of the contemporary postmodern philosophers, claims that our knowledge is brought by the media and is basically of a constructive character: "in our relation to media and in the way we use them, we now more that ever before notice the constructive character of our understanding of reality. We understand that reality, as such, does not exist at all, that reality has always been a construction, man-made product – but we did not want to accept it before. Each one of the conservative criticisms of media in the sense of pre-media and inevitably valid and absolute understanding of reality is fundamentally wrong. It is based on a mistake that we have been freed of by our modern experience with media - on the idea that reality is present and not dependent on media and therefore it differs from a construction." [9]

G. Sartori, a notable contemporary sociologist and political scientist believes that image media such as television and the Internet change our thinking, imagination and knowledge. He claims that a new kind of human being is being created – Homo videns, whose perception and knowledge is considerably influenced by media images. According to him, abstract thinking vanishes in the turn away from term language, or texts, to media images. Thinking is not crucial when we are given a picture. Sartori states: "Television brings metamorphosis that interferes with the very nature of Homo Sapiens. It is not just a means of communication, but also anthropogenic instrument that

creates a new kind of human being." [1, p. 40] Something similar applies also to the Internet, which, unlike television, is interactive. If culturally illiterate people use it, they will only respect what interests them – entertainment.

Homo videns communicating in cyberspace of the Internet looses his sense of linear time. P. Rankov [10] warns that: "in the net, culture only spreads horizontally, simultaneously, purely dimensionally and the term of time loses its meaning. Spreading culture in time develops tradition, its cessation then means that the cultural heritage is liquidated". Along with the loss of the sense of linear time – past-present-future – comes also loss of sense of tradition and similar values, for example religion.

Nowadays' culture is generated by image media that are in a direct conflict with the old Christian culture, based on speech and writing. Christianity was, first of all, fed on the word, either God's word, or human's word. Word was understood in the way of Plato's ideas. Word – Logos – was a prototype of all the things and all the things came into the world through it. The first religious communication was realized through the Word in the community of believers. Speech gave the common mentality a profound structure. In the depth of dialogues people experienced also something transcendent and God-like. It seems that speech, as the dominant form of media in the time of birth of Christianity, was considerably supporting religious thinking. In the period of 'speech' media, either before writing or in the archaic tribe societies that exist now, the influence of speech on religious thinking is clearly seen. Speech, in the nowadays' tribe societies, has a magical power and imposes reality in a direct way. Moreover, it retrieves the past, so the dead ancestors are among those who live. Nothing is irretrievably lost, because time is understood to have a cyclic feature. Religious thinking is thus naturally shaped by speech. Speech is present in the time of birth of Homo religious. Christianity is a religion of the Book, so its nature was also shaped by the second type of media – writing. Writing, especially phonetic writing, externalized human's thinking and supported the subject-object idea, the process of abstracting, which is also comprehended in Linne's definition of human – Homo sapiens. Thus it seems that Christian religion stands on two pillars – speech and writing - that partially penetrate each other, but also have two individual spheres of influence. However, Homo videns strongly disrupts both of these spheres - first of all by removing the linear code – the time line on which traditions, philosophy of life and the whole value ladder lie. Now we witness, especially in the case of the young people, a decline of interest in history of the nation and, even more, religion. A research in religiosity in secondary-school youth in Slovakia, done in 2011, revealed that 75% of the youth are religious, but only 15% of them believe that Church is a trustable institution. In the most important question concerning happiness, almost nobody stated that the primary source of happiness for him or her is God. The secondary-school youth identified themselves as searching and open to spirituality [http://www.tckompas.sk/PrieskumTCK_Religiozita_Mladeze_SR.pdf].

Not only the youth, but also adults, do not understand the profound meaning of words such as mercy, sin or salvation, which are the key ideas of the Christian religion. Along with the image media comes the aversion to abstract thinking, or inability to concentrate on one idea and develop it. M. Bauerlein [11] showed and proved in his researches how young people lose interest and knowledge of especially whatever is connected with the past – such as history, civic education and religion and so on.

With destruction of linear code comes also destruction of human's identity. In the Western culture, Christian religion helped to create human's identity. In the present time, also with electronic media's contribution, the spiritual identity breaks apart and people get more individualised. The Internet intensifies physical isolation in human beings and communication through the Internet becomes even more indirect and reduced. J. Lohisse [5, p. 179] even says that a 'cellular' society is being created, in which people are physically isolated, but connected through the net at the same time. However, a cellular man wants to create his own identity and usually takes the mass media as a model of such identity. This kind of identity is extremely vulnerable, unstable and frequently changes, having no solid foundation.

Though Christian religion was fed upon speech and writing, it is able to co-exist in the electronic image media in a way. This co-existence however, is never able to replace a living interpersonal communication. Christianity can take two forms in the cyberspace and these are religion online and online religion [12]:

1. The first group, religion online provides a complex set of information about religious groups that are here and are recognised by the society.
2. The second group, online religion, provides a space for virtual, interactive participation, for example in Liturgy, prayers, rituals meditations and so on. Visitors can enter and organise the spiritual ritual – light up candles, bring flowers, worship and so on. They are tele-present worshipers.

In the case of the online religion, the ritual is reduced to a mechanical type of intensification the relationships of the members of religious group, that cannot offer the user the experience of authentic 'being present'. It is not a unique ritual and sharing any more. Online religion only brings mechanical clicking the mouse or other binary operations, rather than a living, interpersonal communication using speech or written words. For this reason, online religion will never be able to replace a living religious society.

In the Internet's cyberspace, also sects or other unregistered denominations that might be bound with negative activities, or even occultism, get a chance to speak to people. We can see a constant rise in number of eschatological, pseudo scientific, cybernetic or pseudo-technological sects and movements. Some of them are very keen to cross the boundaries of life and try the after life (for example, the movement called Near Death experience). It is certain that the present society is now, more than in the history, attacked by this kind of spiritual experience and takes it as an inevitable side of democracy in the monotonous religious life [13]. A great warning in this context is the

controversial cyber-sect Heaven's Gate. Its members believed that human body is purely a temporary ship flying into the untouchable virtual universe. They reached their final destination on 25 March 1997, paradoxically by a collective 'astro-physical' suicide.

Image media bring a new type of culture that has nothing in common with the original Christian culture, based on speech and writing. The new type of culture seems to be more as a new cultural paradigm, incompatible with the previous one. If the new cultural paradigm is not compatible with the old one, then also the new digital generation, or three television generations will not be culturally continuous and compatible with the previous generations. The youngest generation is the Internet generation, with new way of thinking, imagination, knowledge and habits. Can this type of generation be a Christian generation?

5. Two challenges for Christian religion: media education and spirituality

The question is if the young generation can be Christian, or whether it would be willing to perceive and recognize also the world outside the electronic world of media. If not, Christianity might become just an electronic religion, visual, vague and pseudo-spiritual. If yes, then it is questionable to what extent this religion can be freed from the influence of electronic media. Is it possible for a man who lives in a certain paradigm to cross this paradigm? We set this question upon the assumption that our consciousness is not defined by media, because one of the essential features is the 'awareness', ability to stand aside and take a meta-position in relation to the content. We can still realize the positive and negative features of electronic media and compare them with other kinds of media. Even those who lived their lives solely in the pure epoch of speech in a tribe society can gradually accept modern media and the whole culture. The nature of our mind also includes transitivity, ability to penetrate various media worlds and understand their influence. If human mind has this feature, then media education is possible and the search of the nature of consciousness, as something transcendent, through several spiritual techniques, too.

First of all, it is about understanding the influence of media, upon which media education is based. The present, developing media education teaches critical thinking, increases social awareness of media, media image of the world and supports the ability to solve problems in a creative manner.

Petranová [14] speaks mainly about three targets of media education: acquisition of media competence, media literacy and critical thinking. She understands the term media competence as a collection of knowledge and skills brought by media education, ability to reflectively and critically use all the kinds of media and their products that help people not to get lost in the great amount of information, keep the distance and have an opinion. Media competence and media literacy can be understood as synonyms, but also as two independent issues, because media literacy speaks mostly about the ability to de-code media content that flows in various information channels. The most important

competence is in critical thinking [15]. Petranová [16] characterises it as "independent thinking, in the process of which man gains some knowledge through observation, comparison or verification the correctness of his own, or somebody else's ideas… This kind of thinking enables us to see the world in the pure, not just media-carried reality". This is the way in which personal freedom and ability to apply theoretical knowledge in practice is promoted.

Secondly, it is about a rich spiritual tradition in Christian religion, quintessence of which being mysticism. Mysticism and its greatest phase – unification with the Consciousness-Existence outside human imagination – images and sounds, has a trans-media character. The great Western mystic, Saint Theresa of Avilla [17] explains unification with God this way: "In our case, however, it is like with water that falls from the skies to a river or a water source, where it gets perfectly mixed so it is impossible to say which is the original river water and which came from the skies … it falls separately but becomes one and the only light within". Though this formulation is in the language of metaphors, it mentions experience that is not brought by the media. In the mysticism of various religions, it is this pure existence, consciousness or emptiness that is spoken about, which indicates the trans-media feature of this great mystical experience. Mysticism is therefore a unique phenomenon and sets us free from all the boundaries, including the media ones and Christian religion, which has a rich mystical tradition, could be fed upon these sources.

A great Christian theologian, Karl Rahner, once said: "A Christian of the third millennium will either be a mystic, or will not exist" [18]. Mysticism can, according to many authors, be understood as unused spiritual potential of a man, and it only needs to be helped to grow. M.M. Davy [19] claims that "The roots of mystics lie in the human's nature, in the space within". In the depth of a human being, there is a mysterious place where he meets God. M.M. Davy [19, p. 12] says: "When a man realises the depth of his own soul, he becomes sensible to everything that does not come from himself, yet he finds it there. He touches his own well that he supposed to be cut from. In this depth of his soul, where everything is One, there is the place where mystic lives. When there is no pneuma, there is no duality or contrast." M. Gavenda [20] suggests something similar: "There is a mysterious place in a man, through which God comes with all His fortune. Mystics call this place 'the depth of the soul', 'the core of the soul', 'the spark of the soul', 'the centre' or 'the root of life', where all the possibilities concentrate".

However, to reach the spiritual, of even mystical experience, a counter-strike against the trends of the modern is needed. The first and maybe the most difficult one is in step away from the fast pace of the modern time, because as Eriksen says [21], 'fast-time' may be addictive. Christian spirituality finds as very important this standstill and orientation towards non-sensual objective, God. Along with this, it comes the work with mind, imagination and body. However, we need to state that in the past Catholic, but also Protestant religion often highlighted cognitive approach to spirituality. In Catholic religion, the so-called spiritual exercises are popular even now, these originate in spirituality of

Saint Ignatius, who emphasised prayer, contemplation and partially also visualisation. In this aspect, inspiration can be found in the spiritual tradition of Hesychast monks in the Orthodox Church. D. Chițoiu [22] speaks of using the body, various positioning and breathing techniques to reach mystical state by the Hesychast monks. Similarly, M. Eliade [23] describes prayers of Saint Nikephoros the Hesychast, who added body positioning and controlled breathing to Jesus' prayer. This approach expresses better the spiritual and physical unity of human than the Western one, which stands on dualistic and hierarchy-based model of the soul and body. The spiritual practice with mystical experience that is well documented in Christian religion is a supreme and permanent value that can well oppose modern 'electronic ecstasies' in the cyberspace.

6. Conclusions

Two media shaped Christian religion: speech and writing. Speech, whether in the sense of God's or human word, influenced considerably shaping of the religious human - Homo religiosus. Phonetic writing externalised human thinking, strengthened abstract thinking, subject – object dualism, linearization of time, it created intelligent human – Homo sapiens. Thus Christian religion stands upon two pillars – speech and writing, with constant tension between them. This was, for example, a cause of disagreement between sense and religion, philosophy and theology in the Middle Ages. In the second half of the twentieth century we can see 'image' media, such as television and the Internet, coming. According to Sartori, through their nature and effect these media form a new kind of man, Homo videns. The new 'image' media support image-like, 'flat' and vague thinking, on the second hand, they weaken abstract thinking and the sense of linear time with tradition, values and religion. The new image media are thus incompatible with Christian religion, which is based upon speech and writing. In our work, we assume that media do not determine our consciousness in a absolute manner, because its nature comprises also transitiveness and ability to understand the various dimensions of cultural and media life. With this, media education and spiritual practice is possible. Media education and Christian spiritual practice in the form of mysticism could well be a powerful 'counter-strike' against the influence of 'electronic visual ecstasy' of the modern culture.

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