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## CULTURALITY IN MASS CULTURE

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### **Abstract**

Cultural diversity, media and models presented by them are a typical feature of the contemporary information and media-oriented society and globalization process. The impact of mass media on contemporary culture therefore appears to be a current issue. Mass media interfere with education, family life, lifestyle and values of people. The goal of this article is to analyse the current situation in media content, and look at the pros and cons of mass culture, and the possibilities for Christian cultural and moral opinion to enter media space, appealing thus on professionalism of Christian media.

*Keywords:* culture, culturality, mass culture, mass media, professionalism

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### **1. Introduction**

Media entered into people's lives in a quite extraordinary way and those, who have the power to impact them from informational, financial, ideological and value perspective, make good use of it. Mass media have always been an industry used at first by propaganda, politicians and later by artists and entertainers, each of them in a way and with content they wanted to present to their audiences. Media created celebrities, great artists, politicians and have served as an information channel for a number of ground-breaking events in the society. They helped to promote culture, and became the source of information and means to spend free time. In a way, they provide elite occupation that required certain skills, competencies and innate dispositions.

With transformation of the society within the process of globalization, the nature and content of media has changed as well. They impact our lifestyle through presented values and attitudes and everyday communication becomes a mirror of what we live by, what we listen to and what we watch.

The modern man is fascinated especially by entertainment offered by mass media. This fascination is interconnected with the intensity of experience, emotional impact and experiences provided by mass media content. This is also connected with the process of commercialization of media production, globalization of mass media conglomerates, production of their media and trend of Americanisation of media entertainment. Mass media reality and stereotypes

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represent an important part of *infotainmentization* of news programs on commercial TV stations [1].

One must respond if quality, positive values and Christian principles are suppressed; but not pathetically and with archaic language, but rather through entering mass media with rich and quality content offer, alternatives and professionalism. Media development interconnected with technological aspects cannot be stopped and it is not needed. It is important to enter the created space in such way to rehabilitate high-quality content and values, not to turn moral dimension into a relic.

## **2. Media culture in mass consumption society**

In Latin culture means nurturing cultivation and refining and, therefore, the issue of culture used to be considered the noblest mission. Hellenic culture emphasized intellect and Hebrew culture – reality. E.B. Taylor referred to culture as a set of formulas and standards. The world culture is used in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia as a synonym for art. In old Europe the phrase ‘culture in media’ would be considered pleonasm, because media is there considered part of culture or a peculiar type of culture. In France and England relationship with culture is set by tradition. Due to a narrowed content of the word culture, we can see media as something special, different and alienated from culture; something that addresses culture only partially. Sort of emptying of the word culture may be the result of the past regimes (Nazi and communist). Content of the word culture has changed over time; all high values had to be separated from culture and culture has become only art. And media became the tool to control crowds, and, therefore, today they can easily serve only as an instrument for making money. In the past, media used to serve (at first to the reformation, then to socialism and nowadays to entertainment), they were not deemed a service for the citizens. It would be good to return the words culture, nation and media their original European meaning. So if we wanted to examine culture in media from the European perspective really responsibly, we would have to examine specific impact of the specific media on social performance, which forms our culture. The fact that all non-mass artistic genres are increasingly disappearing from cultural sections of most media and are replaced by sections about society and lifestyle is a consequence of the original content of the world culture, which leads to a change of symbols with which media work. And, therefore, the main task of the media at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century should be a purposeful effort to return the words their original meaning, through which the world has been formed in our Judeo-Christian civilization. Our media, however, do the opposite and make certain terms emptier and emptier. Culture of language, communication, thinking, figurative expression and political culture is being trivialized and this is a treat to our existence. It seems that even content of the word media, which originally meant environment allowing mediation, is becoming emptier. If the media are inspired by the lowest the society has to offer instead of elites that have always united the world, they tend to create

environment were almost nothing meaningful is actually offered – and so they become anti-media [2].

Mass media have fundamentally changed the world of culture. They became the major creators of cultural values, trustful institutions for many and the main source of information. What is not presented by mass media seems not to exist. People do not form their opinions based on their experience, but based on what is presented by media. Media image of the world has become more credible than the actual critical thinking [3].

Referring to the effect of modern art, V. Šabík uses the term ‘fascination’ that highlights the intensity of experience. The term fascination can be used to describe the effect of mass media and effect induced by them. Emphasize is put on liberating, shocking and relaxing function of media content and messages instead of their aesthetic function. Entertainment presented by mass media is specific in terms of its form and content that is created outside the boundaries of canons and approaches typical for fine art. The principle of fascination is, however, typical for modernist art and mass production of media entertainment. Its primary mission is to catch attention and induce specific emotional state. Recipients have used mass media entertainment to create the system of interpretation of social reality and the daily rituals, which the leisure and working activities are subordinated to. Recipients are fascinated by media entertainment, since it allows them to overcome the burden of everyday frustrating reality more easily [1].

Mass media create a wide field of action and their activity is regulated by their own media culture. Rules of media art are expressed in journalistic codes of conduct and legal regulations of both national and international communities. Code of ethics, however, is often breached or circumvented and this creates culture where everything that leads to the accumulation of economic capital is allowed. Culture of such mass media is imbued with typically postmodern sense, where there is no absolute truth and what brings profit becomes the truth [4].

Top art no longer plays a major role in the public presentation of shared values and myths. A lot of people expect the artists to present their own opinions and visions. At present an artist has a special status, which is comparable with the status of a visionary or prophet. Some people think of career in art as a search for truth, freedom and the meaning of life. This happens in culture controlled by mass media and technology. Art as such is considered to be free and contemplative. Art denies normal routine work required by highly automated and computerized society. Search for something that creates a natural and supernatural order and thus completes the case as a whole ends up in vain. If we want to answer the question why is it so, we have to refer to ideological foundations of modernism, in which we distinguish art and mass and popular culture. Autonomy of art is associated with the cultural progress of the last century [5].

Speaking about mass media culture, it should be noted that mass media represent an important agent of changes in social consciousness. Information disseminated by media means contact with social reality for many. Democratic

nature of mass media culture represents its historical chance. Culture presented by mass media covers almost all social classes. The issue of effect of such communication and quality of presented content remains open, mainly due to the application of the method of the lowest common denominator. This means that content has to be prepared in such way to suit people with the lowest education and taste [6].

## 2.1. Mass culture

If we think about mass culture, this term is usually defined only vaguely in professional literature; its general meaning tends to be perceived rather negatively. Literature usually connects the term mass culture with mass media culture, or *culture from mass media*.

Media (mass media) culture is often equated with mass culture. When writing this paper I got the impression that the term media culture is identical to mass culture. But after I conducted observations and collected some information, I came to a conclusion that mass culture is a broader meaning of the entire experience and presentation of culture by crowds. Generally speaking, we could consider media culture to be part of mass culture. Since mass culture as such does not need to be presented only by media, it constitutes the entire diapason of our behaviour that can be greatly affected by media culture. My observations led me to a conclusion that the main characteristics of mass culture are the following:

- *Phrasality*;
- *Orientation on masses* (psychologists refer to behaviour according to crowds as mass hysteria. Crowd is a formation of people, each individual of which changes with the situation. People in certain space respond to the same stimuli in an identical way);
- *Conformity* (despite of vehement persuasion of freedom and unconventionality of opinions);
- *Uniformity* (as dictated by fashion)

In the history of communication of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we can find three breakpoint periods that are called *thresholds of massification*. The first threshold of massification is associated with massive spreading of radio and movie in 1920s, the second threshold of massification is television broadcasting in 1950s and deployment of electronic communications in 1990s represents the third threshold of massification [6, p. 36].

Italian aesthetic and theorist Umberto Eco defines mass culture as follows: “Mass culture is anti-culture. Since it arises at the time when participation of crowds in life of the society becomes more obvious phenomenon in the historical context, this term does not refer only to a temporary and limited aberration, but becomes proof of the inexpiable and the decline, about which a culturally oriented person cannot testify otherwise than through complete scepticism and apocalypse.” [7]

Eco further says that mass culture occurs at the historical moment; masses in the role of protagonists enter social life and become co-responsible for the fate of public affairs. Masses forced their own language upon the society in form of a message formulated by the code of the ruling class and in conjunction with mass culture we talk about mass civilization. Eco points out in his work that he refers to the civilization, all members of which become to a certain degree consumers of intensively industrially, mass-produced and constantly offered messages distributed through commercial channels and consumed under the laws of supply and demand [7, p. 26-29].

## ***2.2. Artistic and moral value of mass culture today***

Professional and some artistic circles look critically at the production of mass culture. On the other hand, value of mass culture does not need to be absent. Within mass culture and especially in the current media society, one can undoubtedly criticize mass culture particularly over its lack of culturality representing a moral value, artistic and moral dimension of culture and a phenomenon that we start neglecting and omitting in our society, and sometimes even circumventing in our media offer. We do not assess appropriateness or inappropriateness of a programme, quality or non-quality of a programme or art with the measure of culturality, and thus we even do not realize that an extraordinary dimension of culture itself as well as an important personal dimension of an individual is at stake here. We start following the rule that the end justifies the means; without even examining appropriateness of the means itself. And so it can happen, that in contemporary society, in particular in mass offer and mass culture as we often call it in this case, we significantly lose quality and culture itself. Even mass culture depends on an individual creator, broadcaster, producer or artist. And so his or her work reflects their personality, attitude and creativity - culture and culturality, characteristic for him or her.

In this regards, I was extremely affected by a priest, professor, philosopher and aesthete, culture theorist Ladislav Hanus. In his book of 1943 'Debate on Culturality' [8] I found a truly comprehensive view and detailed analysis of culturality as a phenomenon. Despite a rather historical language, this book describes profound truth and comparison of marasmus of contemporary mass culture.

This book is very strongly engraved in the history of the Slovak writings and Professor Hanus thus becomes and icon of the Slovak cultural elite. Professor Jozef Jarab, the rector of the Seminary of Ján Vojtaššák in Spišská Kapitula emphasizes this fact with the following words: "Even today we can find a message that tells us how to guide our life and how to live. Professor Hanus clearly and timelessly named this 'our national virtues and vices' in his book." [9]

### **2.3. *Culturality as fundament of quality media culture***

Culturality is a characteristic of a person. Someone has it, someone does not. According to Hanus, dividing people into cultural and non-cultural ones is very important. Culturality becomes an element characteristic of an individual. It becomes an internal standard of thinking, life opinion, action and decision making. A habit according to which one decides what it is decent, fair and generous. Culturality, however, is not only this subconscious standard that leads an individual to some action as some kind of internal inspiration. Culturality belongs to the conscious realm of spirit and cannot do without the deployment of all moral potentials. It is a command that puts high demands on a person and requests a life decision of whole person.

High culturality is a result of a long tradition. It is presented as a message from one generation to another. Culturality is a formed being and in this sense it never becomes a natural predisposition and can only be achieved through persistent work. Christianity reliably recognizes right and wrong, and value and non-value in the widest contemplation of things, Christian height may only be lifted based on Christian universalism. There only remains a task to adjust a personal form to the width and height of the Christian universe surrounding us. One should not be a Christian and gravitate towards fierce unilateralism, anxiety and narrowness. There cannot be any contradiction between great objective order and subjective mentality. According to Professor Hanus, culturality follows its own laws, formal reason from which it originates and through which it is interpreted. Culturality is an internal process that emerges from one's core and raises their essence. The true culturality is identical with a person. It is a higher form of human being and the sequence of certain qualities described by Professor Hanus as sedulity, family, generosity, piety and goodness [8].

Based on the referred, I consider culturality and return to values to be the fundamental missing dimension of the modern mass culture. It turns out that interconnection of art and moral values is possible under assumption that such combination is provided by an individual who is truly talented, educated, cultural and despite the current trend – a believer whose faith is rooted in moral values given by the God with logical sequence of qualities that one has to possess in order to create a valuable work.

Despite the fact that Professor Hanus separates culture from culturality, in essence he does not rule out their interconnection for the good of the whole. Unfortunately, it is quite possible that future generation will perceive and judge our culture as consumers' culture and not as a basis and information for future generation. These findings allow me to state that culture without culturality has no significant value and spirit that would allow it to survive and show the future generations the reality of society in which it originated.

### **3. Art versus massification**

Despite somehow critical view of the current situation in the programme offer of the commercial media, I still see some room for topics that are typical for their quality content and sophisticated means of expression on the background of adaptation to the current trends – here I refer to temporary nature of a contribution, flexibility, curiosity, need and attractiveness. Commercial broadcasting will always apply its own criteria and will be determined by advertising and profit. The situation in media sector is the same as in any other industry that is privately owned and follows the basic business principle to reduce costs and maximize profit. Despite all these determinants I believe that culture received by crowds can remain at a certain quality level, can be based on artistic values and topped with attractiveness for a viewer or a listener.

In any case it is true that art and commercialism are strictly separated in media culture. I personally consider this to be a mistake. Relationship between the society and culture is unfavourable, and valuable art does not receive adequate financial and social recognition. Valuable culture and art do, of course, exist, but their territory is limited and they are not able to promote themselves more significantly. Pushing culture and art out to the periphery of social life is quite evident. Commercialization is seen as a shift from valuable to commercial art and garbage. Owners are convinced that only commercial art will bring them mass audiences, which is often the only criterion determining the programme composition [10].

According to world-renowned publication from Leurzer's Archive series, Slovak Petra Štefanková is one of 200 best illustrators of the world. Only a narrow circle of people know her in Slovakia; but in London where she lives and works, she is considered to be one of the greatest talents of the present. She is the first Slovak to become a member of the ancient British Royal Society of Arts at the age of thirty.

“Slovakia is a small country with very specific market mechanism and complicated situation in culture without any significant support of private companies and wider public” [11], this is what the well-known artist said in one of her interviews; we assume that she is ‘commercially’ successful within her position. She creates alternately illustrations for magazines, books, commercials and graphic designs in advertising and branding; she also talked about work based on order in her field of art in an interview: “Ironically, start of my career as an illustrator was actually an innocent game played regardless of the customer. Popular type of my 3D illustrations *Yet Another Face* originated from other than commercial impulses. Thanks to the nature of this work – it means intellectual, visually attractive content with the elements of narrative – I managed to remove the border between commercial and free work. These illustrations play a communicative role in an article in a magazine or on the cover of a product, but they also exist as an autonomous picture on the wall and are even accepted as quality digital art by academic and scientific circles standing at the origin of computer graphics as an industry. Here I refer, for

example, to the U.S.-based organization ACM SIGGRAPH, which registers my work in their archives. I only sell what I consider to be characteristic and natural for me. Thanks to the referred features of my work, I am able to apply this approach also in the commercial world. The customers enter this relationship aware that they purchase my own opinion on the matter.” [11, p. 72-73]

We do not have to consider commercialism, it means commercial success and an ability to sell and distribute cultural artefact among crowds to be a negative quality. However, this requires to have educated and creative artists and conscious sponsors, or as one says in connection with culture “philanthropists”, who support art especially due to the personal opinion of an artist, due to their own artistic talent and not for their own financial benefit at the expense of quality.

In today’s world, advertising is often about a compromise often reaching beyond the artist’s or creator’s identity. Words of Petra Štefanková describe how not to lose face or own identity; she expresses herself mainly through the prism of illustration and designer work. Since she has her own individual ‘handwriting’, clients are attracted mainly by its otherness. “Nowadays more and more global brands look for an opportunity to promote uniqueness of their services, and so they often decide to cooperate with clearly profiling artists, whose expressions can be clearly recognized and do not disappear in mass production.” [12] A very important issue of the present is question which border would an artist not cross in his or her work. An artist or creator in advertising bears great responsibility for what they design. This can be a weight-loss pill, of which positive effects he or she is not convinced. And so there are two poles that can arise in the context of art. On the one hand an artist may feel civic and artistic responsibility, but on the other hand he or she may see a challenge to illustrate any topic. Petra Štefanková says that controversy of the product is what matters. She, for example, considers anorexia to be a serious issue and she does not intend to support trend forcing women to wear “size zero as the British media refer to this trend. Any topic can be illustrated, but everything depends on attitude. I would refuse drawing pornography for no particular reason, but drawing provocative pictures with revolting context as a reaction to some issue can be indeed interesting. My signature basically precludes any superficial consumerist strategy up front and is only applied to matters that deal with more than just a simple interpretation or decoration.” [12] These times do not seem to be ideal for culture and one can even hear that we live in non-cultural times that do not appreciate values proven by centuries. Fake culture whose achievements spoil the taste of people living in the present society strives. Petra Štefanková caught my interest with her description of London as a city that lives, and flourishes and boils with culture. People request and visit galleries and concerts, traditional values are deeply engraved and valid, and manifest themselves in little things and everyday behaviour. Talking about culture in the world, even distant Brazil comes to the fore through its work in the cultural field as an experimenter, a country of folk street expression with its own quality. Street artists and graffiti artists from all over the world attract more and more attention



in London. They also include groups from Brazil. The tabloid pages mention names such as Banksy, who have become celebrities and sell their work for tens of thousands of pounds. Even TATE Modern Gallery lent them their premises and facade and what used to be considered garbage and marginal issue is an admired trend right now. Alternative art penetrates everyday life and commercial trends, and becomes mass culture. The present time is eclectic and gives the audience a choice, and does not reject diversity as it used to when shift from academically determined direction was considered audacity and temerity. It is definitely positive trend despite the fact that the lack of transparency of offer results in increasing demands of the consumers and their insight and knowledge to be able to distinguish trash from a masterpiece. Education decides whether the audience will be satisfied with cheap decoration or 'cheesy' picture and to which degree they will be 'manipulated' by bad taste so they do not build any resistance. It is alright if the offer contains intellectually undemanding mass production – it will remain as long as there is interest. If we want to change, we have to start with education [11].

### ***3.1. Professionalism of Christian media***

Presence of the Church in cyberspace is very important and has a deep meaning especially in terms of its values. The Church can have a significant impact in relation to business groups. Professor Zasepa, who acquired managing experience at Lublin Business School, says that they emphasize effectiveness of such conformation when forming and convincing people about the need to spread relationship and contact with their clients through various means of communication. But such communication is effective once it is perceived as an investment in business and part of marketing and public relations, not only as a means to generate profit. Those individuals who are spiritual leaders of entrepreneurs must emphasize that building of a true society has to have firm and permanent foundations. It is necessity of ethics renaissance. Role of the Church in the field of virtual communication is also assistance in forming important questions. This means that the Church must promote existence of a healthy public opinion. Well thought out and well led virtual communities with the participation of people from the Church can play an important role together with the traditional and socially and culturally oriented journalism [5, p. 370-374].

The major requirements and starting points in media field for Christian mass media seem to be the use of understandable language, education as a basic attribute of journalism, laymen in practice as a requirement formed by Pope John Paul II, own media (or entering the existing ones), finance, advertising and owners who are not discouraged by quality or art value at the expense of their invested funds. This is the topic that I have elaborated in my monograph *Online Times, Online Church I*.

Professional preparedness of a Christian media requires today education in communication, journalism, modern media rhetoric, active attitude towards the recipients, theological education, familiarity with both secular and spiritual topics, greater openness in advertising, financial policy and sophisticated marketing.

The problem of professionalism is not only the problem of Christian media. Just the opposite; weaknesses of secular media are often manifested in the opposite sphere. Where we encounter high professionalism in Christian media, secular media often struggle with unprofessional approach (grasping of religious and complicated specialized topics) and on the other hand, Christian media have problem to process the topic in such way to make it attractive for the recipients.

“When intrinsically complex topics become events of the day, we have an opportunity to observe failure of journalists to process such topics adequately, i.e. in an engaging but truthful way.” [13]

Cardinal Dominik Duka in an interview for newspaper ‘*Katolícke noviny*’ said, that the current challenge of the Church to grasp the actual and true openness and contact with a person who is searching for something and needs to feel accepted. This requires renewal of theological studies that are not supposed to be based only on application but also on the assumption that theology will address the actual problems of the time [14].

Professionalism in Christian media also lies in the fact that method of work is adapted to the current trends that bring positives into creative work. Format, advertising and profit, the obvious measure of economic and media practice, is not inconsistent with the Christian teachings if achieved by the right means.

The words of Chief Editor of the official weekly published by the Catholic Church of the Czech Republic Antonín Randa confirm the current state of media in the Church, namely inability to pay and retain quality editors, who tend to leave to other media where their salary is three times higher. Director of the Slovak studio LUX Communication Juraj Drobný shares this opinion; he says that functionality of the Christian media puts them into the position of ‘television school’ because Christian television studios often prepare and train young people for work in other media [15].

### ***3.2. Basis for quality and moral culture***

If the Church, the Christians and generally valuable and moral people wish to bring quality into other people’s lives as often proclaimed by advertising headlines, they have to do so through their own offer:

- Young authors who work and create under pressure of publishers and producers should show that creation of poor quality is not the way for the future.
- Help to engage the Catholics and the Christians in general and in media activities at the society-wide level.

- Promote professional approach to media content in existing religious media institutions.
- Accept clear and understandable opinion on existing media content that diminishes dignity of a man.
- Use the Internet as medium of the future to present media content of high quality.
- Use social networks to collect meaningful feedback and promote media content of high quality.
- The Church should support existing art and media formats in parishes, professionalise active communities using theatrical and other artistic forms to present values and beliefs in a modern way, support young artists and media professionals.
- Create professional media environment for young artists and journalists, who are graduating Christian universities and have hard time to find employment opportunities.
- Create contemporary and popular media formats of quality content.
- Make full use of and apply theoretical media portfolio of the Church in pastoral education of children and young people.
- Use media language in the Church when spreading religious messages.
- Communicate and develop cooperation between the Church and Christian educational institutions with art faculties and departments.
- Use persons from secular media and their talent, personality and skills for the benefit of promoting culture and thus create competition in terms of media content.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Not often is marketing or media language associated with a religious message. This link seems to be a breakthrough and if the Church wants to communicate with its environment efficiently, it has to learn to use media and present its message in a professional manner. It is important not to divide media into the Christian and the other ones, but based on their media content into good and bad, positive and negative, or maybe even more important, into forming and deforming ones. Content prevails today and mission of a Christian is to be open to the world through movies, music, theatre, television or radio broadcasting, and series and maybe even through a positive and valuable reality show. These challenges seem to be difficult and there is a need for certain creativity, invention and energy as well as the willingness and openness from the environment of Christian hierarchy to understand that if we do not seize the opportunities presented to us, we will not be able to fill media content with truth in such way to make it acceptable and interesting for people living in the contemporary society.

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