DISEASES OF MEDIA CIVILIZATION AND POSSIBILITIES OF SPIRITUAL WAY OF INTEGRAL HEALING

Marián Gavenda[*]

Comenius University, Faculty of Roman Catholic Theology of Cyril and Methodius, Kapitulská 26, 814 58 Bratislava, Slovak Republic

Abstract

Violated interpersonal communication caused by an unilateral use of communication tools leads to a loss of interpersonal relations ability to live in 'true reality', a loss of balance between knowledge and capacities of the will. The proposed ways of 'integral healing' are based on intrinsic, integral connection of various dimensions of human being, where personal religious dimension plays an important role. The Prayer as the deepest personal and existential dialog between God and the Human being; the Way of 'Heart' Purification, understood as a nucleus of the Human being; the 'Way of Beauty' which develops visual perception, to the Admiration as an integral human act in the unity with the Truth and the Good.

Keywords: visual culture, media addictions, spirituality, integral healing, interpersonality

1. Introduction

Schematically speaking, it is the Mind, the Will and the Emotions that makes a man a Human being. All these three dimensions are significantly influenced by the rapidly developing media culture. We speak about culture, where its various manifestations (ideology, religion, attitudes, beliefs, value orientation, taste, lifestyle and decision-making processes) are most significantly affected by the action of media. Likewise schematically, we can say that humans make an integral unity of somatic and psychic structures and spiritual soul. These two axioms will support arguments of the following reflection.

The theory and practice of Media communication is inherently interdisciplinary. It most frequently pays attention to and draws from the wide experience of Psychology. Its outermost auxiliary sciences for now include Theology. More precisely - the theology of spiritual life, i.e. the Spirituality, which is at best taken into account if there is an issue of religious experience

[*]E-mail: gavenda@rcc.sk

media mediation or of communication of information on religious and ecclesial life or of new virtual religions emerging in the network. We would like to proceed from deeper and at the same time broader understanding, i.e. from the very spiritual dimension of every human being. Human beings as integral unities of somatic, psychic and transcendent dimensions necessarily enter each of their own actions and attitudes also with their spiritual dimension and their relationship to God, more or less, consciously or unconsciously formed and implicitly or explicitly expressed and experienced.

2. New challenges of media culture

The mass media impact on human personality is usually divided as follows: a) *immediate*, which includes the whole sphere of intellectual and emotional experience resulting from the immediate action of the media's message to the recipient; b) *cumulative,* rather unnoticed, it is the result of a long-term process in which one inner frame of mind paves the way for another one and forms the overall perception of individual contents, most usually by dulling the perception of these impulses; c) *subconscious* – it is a process that subtly penetrates the human psyche (e.g. *backward masking*) [1]. Apart from the impact itself, what is most restricted here is the freedom of decision-making and thus the gradual loss of freedom, manipulability and emergence of dependencies. The influence of the media is thus simultaneously multi-level and satisfying the individual and psychological needs associated with each media through habituation. Subsequently, we will at least briefly identify individual areas of the influence of media culture and the human personality as a whole.

2.1. Iconic perception and its pitfalls

The change of perception results in a growing difficulty and even inability to concentrate and an inability to develop a long-term mind-brain activity. But the rapid expansion of modern means of social communication directly affects the human anthropological dimension itself, especially in terms of its logical structure and ability and method to form relationships. In this process, the abstract concepts become immediately sensorially perceptible, and this facilitates their assimilation by the audience. The use of conceptual or iconic language is not an optional alternative, but "an expression of the reality in which humans live, it is a manifestation of their most intimate requirements, an expression of the way of their being. On the other hand, used vocabulary determines a human." [2]

Lee Siegel paraphrases the famous Wittgenstein's dictum, "The world is everything that is the case", to the world transformed by the Internet into a great illusion that the physical and social world of the interaction between minds and hearts does not exist anymore, and thus 'monitoring is all that is going on'. This new world transforms the most important things in human life – the others - fully influenced and totally available to our imagination. It is a world created

and controlled by a single finger of our hand. Therefore, we ask the question how to live in a world that is no longer the world [3].

Visual and conceptual perceptions are not only about two different forms of perceptions of the same reality, but also about *the way of perception as such*, with implications for personal development and social life. It is not only about a different way of expression, but also about a different relationship to the reality and its interpretations. "A new human type is being born; a new race, a new way of life and thinking. And there is even more of it: a new mental structure, different availability to activities and engagement in life," said R. Zagnoli some 25 years ago [4]. This *homo novus* is more iconic than logical, more emotional than rational, more intuitive than discursive, *homo novus* cares more about the present moment rather than life relationships, *homo novus* is more informed than communicative. As the above changes indicate, today 'person' means rather a bunch of crumbled unassimilated fragments, *fragmented man*, which are accepted without relations and not as their own. 'Browse and mix!' Humans lose confidence, focus only on the present, and the volatility of the moment makes them unable to make decisions and take on permanent commitments. "They do not live on a solid basis of their own beliefs, but in a perfect adaptation to their surrounding environment. Fragmented, broken humans who feel comfortable in those anonymous supermarkets and crowded beaches." [2, p. 39] Lee Siegel uses journalistic language to express some more characteristics: "We only live in our minds, more than any society so far, and for some of us, the only reality is that which exists in their minds. We purchase online, play online, work online, love online, search for information online, and communicate with others and the entire world online, and this is just the reason why we are now getting much lonelier and less and less human. The Internet is the first 'social environment' in history that satisfies the requirements of the isolated, closed and antisocial individuals. The internet becomes the thief of identity. However, also the opinions on the impact of cyberspace and the Internet spread through the same medium, which is not losing its ground. The financial pressure from the part of editors and the techno-enthusiasm of *mainstream* journalism will exclude any critical opinions. Those who avoid joining the celebratory chorus are outdated and reactionary: you criticize the Internet, you criticize the democracy. The triumphalistic and narcissistic rhetoric, forming a halo around the net, makes it impenetrable to any contestation." [3, p. 24-25]

2.2. Media addictions

The forms of impact and types of threats or addictions of media civilization, for which the spiritual way of integral healing seems to be the solution, are clearly and adequately enough addressed in a comprehensive manner by Michał Drożdż in his *Spiritual Resources of Media Formation in the Information Civilization*, published in the journal Problems of Journalism [1]. Among the negative consequences of impacts of media (in particular television and the Internet), the author includes the following: a) change of perception

type, causing difficulty in concentration and inability to develop a long-term brain activity; b) relativisation of the system of values; c) creation of undesired context for the formative and educational activities, pollution of imagination and mind as a result of receiving the media content in a consumer way; d) subjection to transformations of personality; e) popularization of moral relativism, semantic and axiological confusion, promotion of hedonism and anarchist conception of freedom, passive subjection to influences, passivity in discovering the world, withdrawal from social contacts, negative consequences for physical and mental health. Michal Drożdż briefly lists the following media addictions [1]:

- Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD): tendency to the Internet addiction, inner urge 'to be on the network'.
- Net-mania, internet-mania, tele-mania: tendency to find TV or the Internet satisfying means, watching programmes without any selection or criticism, inability to limit the time to watch TV, discomfort and desire to return to the media contents, need for constant internet and network contacts, dependence on the network contacts, need for constant network connection.
- Anti-Information Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) – syndrome of lack of resistance to information; humans in the world of mass media, deprived of external control mechanisms formed through family, school, and religion, are not themselves able to develop internal defence mechanisms against the inflow of information, and therefore they accept the authority of technology and its capability to set the essential objectives of their own development and of the society development.
- Borderline personality disorder (BPD): deep disorder of one's own identity, manifested by uncertainty of goals to be achieved, by uncertainty of shared values, inability to make one's own preferences and choices, lasting judgments and convictions; it also characterized a feeling of inner emptiness or boredom, which reappears and is hard to control, accompanied by depressive conditions; inability to establish and develop lasting interpersonal relationships; poor control of one's own impulsiveness, frequently experiencing feelings of anger and hostility in relation to the others.

Within the Slovak professional environment, the issue of integral healing, particularly healing the 'mass media civilisation diseases', appears relatively rarely and its spiritual, religious dimension and possibilities of the healing influence are rather marginal for now. The following reflection aims at least to briefly raise the topic and offer it to discussion and as creative development idea in the Slovak professional environment, as well as in practical rehabilitation efforts. Within the limits of our paper, we will only speak about *the Christian spiritual experience*, which does not exclude many other ways [5]. The authors we refer to are deliberately selected from among those with live participation in some spiritual experience, in addition to their theoretical scientific education and skills [6]. In our environment, it is in particular 'the school of Tomáš Špidlík', which is a kind of synthesis of both the Christian East and West heritage into our current complex situation.

3. Integral healing

Each individual is ontologically constituted as dialogical being and thus carries the assumption and, to some extent, always maintains the most original and absolute dialogue between the human 'I' and the Divine 'You'. However, this ability, which inseparably belongs to human nature, can be consciously developed by humans through the gift of freedom and responsibility for their own development, but it may also remain undeveloped or suppressed inside of them. We want to examine what the practical ways of developing this basic human disposition are. "It is a fact that the mature attitude to and balance of life, including the correct understanding of human conditions, powerfully contribute to the growth of spiritually oriented people. Nevertheless, the spiritual development is based on God's grace." [7] Experience of the healing action of grace to all dimensions of human life is possible on the basis of the human person's internal unity. "The most authentic heritage of Christian theology lies right in how it sees the person composed of body, soul and sanctifying grace or supernatural life, which we again get through baptism. Humans, created in God's image and likeness, are incorporated by baptism into their true nature." [8]

The option of integral healing is based on the experience of deep inner interconnection of somatic, psychological and spiritual components of the individual human being. The experience of spirituality confirms that the action of God's grace in souls brings healing and harmony into all dimensions of human life. Michael Scanlan, summarizing specific experience of charismatic service of inner healing, highlights the following fundamental pillars: a) Healing has to be seen in the context of *healing the whole person*. This means we must discern God's will for human and his relationship to the whole Body of Jesus Christ. Finally, we have learned to deeply appreciate the right time - the time of the Lord, in which the power of his love heals; b) *Healing is something else than growth* or improvement. Healing is a process whereby what was wounded and sick is becoming complete and healthy. Healing is meaningful in a direct relation to the negative situation of specific injury; c) *Inner healing refers to the whole person.* The concept of inner man is understood as intellectual, volitional and emotional areas, which are commonly referred to as the Mind, Will and Heart. It includes all the areas that relate to emotions, soul and spirit. Inner healing is different from the outer one, which is commonly referred as physical healing [9].

The possibility of healing various physical or mental and spiritual functions of human life from within by healing the 'heart', the central point of person, is interesting in the context of the 'media diseases' of contemporary media culture, which include inner emptying, inability to create personal relationships, inability to take on responsibility and perform permanent decisions, loss of conceptual perception and of ability to think rationally, and so on. To get out of these current 'civilization diseases', paralyzing humans at the core of their being, one of the available solutions is the way of 'healing the heart'. Such solutions may become a new challenge for churches and their

religious activities as their valuable contribution to the common good. In the following sections of our paper, we would like to offer an outline of the therapy, its starting points and specific forms.

4. Dialogue with God (prayer) and personal development

In the context of our search for ways of integral healing, it is sufficient to point out at least the fundamental facts related to prayer. One of the briefest definitions of prayer reads 'Dialogue between the soul and God', which is a much deeper reality than just saying prayers. However, a more precise expression for this reality is '*encounter* between human and God'. Spiritual father Isaac of Nineveh (7th century) expressed this challenge as follows: "Strive to enter the cell with the treasure that is inside of you and you will see the heavenly cell and its treasures: both the cells make a single cell and you will see them both through the single door. Stairs that lead to the Kingdom are hidden inside of you, in your soul. Dive into yourself, away from sin, and there you will find the steps you can use to ascend." [10]

"A characteristic feature of the Old Testament is listening. The Old Testament is the way it is the education of word and listening. God is the Word, *Logos*. In the beginning was the Word, the dialogue. In the beginning was the communication. God created human by giving the word. The result is the person, the spoken word. Thus, the dialogue has been there from the outset, with human in the centre. (...) The world was created in the dialogue and human was created in the world. Therefore, the base for creation is the dialogue, and the completion of creation will be dialogical, too. (...) However, since the word is creative, to communicate means to mutually penetrate each other, speak out. To turn to another person means to see yourself in the eyes of the other one." [11] In human relationships and in the relationship between human and God, this inner attitude is most fully expressed by the concept of 'friendship', either in its practical manifestations or its deep essence. It is actually dialogism projected to the practice, understanding the human based on the relationship 'I' and 'you', but also 'I' and the absolute Divine 'You'. Here we touch our key topic, therefore it calls for a more descriptive definition of the conception of prayer as dialogue [12].

To begin, we can mention at least some of the starting postulates. According to Martin Buber, the key words are the inseparable pair I – You: "The key words do not refer to things, but relationships. (...) The key words are spoken through our whole being. If we say 'you', we also pronounce 'I' from the pair of words I-You. The key I-You can only be spoken through our whole being. (...) To be and to say 'I' is one. (...) Those who say 'you' have no 'something', they have nothing. But they find themselves in a relationship. (...) We come across 'you' from grace – 'you' cannot be found when we search for it. But the fact I address him with the key word is an act of my being - my utter act. (...) We become ourselves only due to the relationship with 'You', when I become myself, I will say 'you'. All the real life is an encounter." [13]

Thus the prayer as dialogue with God itself is the deification of human person, developing the substantial identity of being, created in God's image and likeness. "The absolute value, accepting and requiring the unconditional devotion, is only the other person. In that person, I can forget about myself, and that person is able to reveal to me who I am and who I have to be. In this way, my self-confidence is ultimately defined by the other one and my self-determination is to lose myself in the other one. Nevertheless, this is a loss that will allow me to accept myself from the other one as a gift and to stop adhering so much to my ungrounded confidence." [14] Dialogism in absolute fulfilment is the dialogism as understood biblically. It is based on the religious fact that "human is made in the Word and live in it. Therefore they cannot understand themselves until they are open to this dialogue. The word of God reveals that our life is of filial nature and like a relationship." [15] If humans do not experience the fulfilment of this transcendent relationship, they absolutize relative relationships that bring new dissatisfaction to them instead of reasonable satisfaction. 'By penetrating, entering and incarnation in human words God's word, humanizes and accepts the borders and fragility, the vulnerability of human existence. On the other hand, it illuminates, purifies and heals the wounds and illnesses, lies and weakness of human words. Christianity enters and modifies all human cultures and thus it converts, transforms and enhances them [16]. "The substance of the Christian religion is a relationship, an encounter. Religion internalizes when a person is learning to say 'You' to the one whose presence is felt in the person's heart." [17] In the monastic tradition, prayer is conceived as a life-giving breath, in which the "prayer becomes an authentic place of life according to the Spirit and takes the form that allows making the constant life-giving act. Prayer is the heart of life according to the Spirit, because it manifests the quality of relationship with God. This clearly shows how for the Desert Fathers the prayer and life are the only reality: prayer can also enter the most hidden wounds and transform them." [18]

In this line, the integrally developed life is understood as an anchor of our being in the eternal dialogue of God, and our person as a word spoken by the Word. "Human is created as God's image and thus human will never be human until achieving a close connection with God. This is done through Christ, the God-man. It is therefore not possible to solve our problem without Christ." [19] The religious dimension and openness to the transcendent is the constitutive dimension of every human being, it is not their optional choice. Those who deny or reject it do not remain atheists, but need to create their idols. Love, which is the origin of relationships, is involved in the creation of human person. Humans are not masters of their own persons, but inside of them they actively improve God's image and bring it to the similarity with God. For healing through prayer it is important how the praying person can capture the love with which God loves the sick human, and then also manifest such love to God [9, p. 30]. "The critical point is that in prayer I have to encounter God and to get converted in this encounter. Humans can find their own 'I' only in the encounter, and only in the encounter they become alive and touch their substance. Encountering the

divine 'You', we can experience that all real life is an encounter and we do not become 'I' until we encounter the divine 'You' and we do not realize who we really are until we find ourselves in front of God and in God." [20]

5. 'Pure heart' – healing the deepest core of human person

In the context of the search for ways to spiritual health, a prerequisite for proper knowledge and understanding is what is known in the spiritual theology as *cordis bonitas,* the goodness of the heart [21]. However, the heart needs to be shaped, spiritual authors speak about 'guarding the heart', purification of the heart, about thoughts, desires and decisions of the heart. Just this deepest personal core is the most radical counterpart of the media culture where everything is perceived and received from outside by senses and the voice of the heart is suppressed. "Real mystique is everywhere the prayer combines common sense and pure heart." [22] The 'purity in heart' condition needs to be consciously and continuously formed and maintained through the way of spiritual discernment. If you cleanse yourself of evil thoughts and affections, you will hear the voice of the heart - it is where the Holy Spirit resides and always inspires to the good. Paying constant attention to these inner inspirations is known as 'praying with the heart'.

'Cleansing of the heart' is one of the essential stages of every spiritual way, either classic or contemporary; it is characteristic not only for the Eastern spirituality, although the Western spirituality rather understands it as *examination and discernment of the motives of the heart*. The Eastern understanding is more biblical and holistic. The heart in the encounter is being filled with the presence of God to cleanse it whole. "In the Christian tradition, the ability to love and to establish relations returns to the heart in particular through baptism and reconciliation. This is about something more than affectivity, because the heart, capable of accepting God (*capax Dei*) to whose image human was created, is open to the divine." [23]

The heart as a space or body of contemplation is also *the unifying element across all dimensions of human life*. "The Bible attributes all the functions of consciousness to the heart: thinking, decision-making of will, feelings, expressions of love, expression of conscience; and the heart becomes the centre of life in general – physical, spiritual and intellectual. It is in particular the centre, the centre in every sense." [24] In this context, T. Špidlík cites P. Ivanov: "To search food for the heart is to turn to God: God himself is the all-embracing heart. Only the heart can capture the mystery of the Universe. Thus those who have the heart understand the meaning of God, people, animals, and nature. Only the heart can provide the spirit with peace and quiet." [25] The human religious dimension and the resulting religious practice are thus included in the fundamental dimensions of human person. Achieving harmony, integrity, and letting all the other dimensions of existence penetrate the integrating influence is not possible without *religious practice*. Luigi Giussani refers to the religious sense that "is nothing else than the original human nature through which humans

exhaustively ask about 'the last things' and look for the ultimate meaning of existence in any breakthrough situations" [26]. Therefore, according to them, the religious and rational dimensions overlap each other and the religious sense corresponds to the reason in its final and deepest level. "Humans, the grains of the spirit, the sparkles of the mind, are blended into this dough, which is their body, or more precisely the body, the concentration of matter able to think and to love. (...) And I, a person wandering in this forest of symbols, moved and dazed observe in myself the primeval noise of matter and life." [27] Even in the contemporary Western spirituality, the emphasis on harmony of internal experience and external action resonates. "For those who try to cleanse their heart, the need for objective moral order becomes essential." [7, p. 156]

In the current situation of Western civilization, we can rather speak about 'the loss of the heart', but alternatively also about 'looking for the heart' or 'searching with the heart'. Since the heart is the core of every human being, it cannot be lost completely, but it can rather be obscured by superficiality, below which or behind which we need to get again. Everything is objectified, included in the system, counted, measured and described; however, this denies what is immeasurable and invisible. "We paid for the world domination with the loss of contact with our own depth. Western people are characterized by living more 'without' rather than 'within'). We cannot bear not finding explanation for anything or not finding the culprit." [23, p. 59] The power of desire in the form of sense of need is the wind for the sails of this shallowing. Yet "there is a huge difference between desire and need. The need may be satisfied, but the desire always includes expectation. The desire is the enthusiasm that arises in us because we are infinite beings. There is always an opportunity, an expectation that drives us forward and leads us to explore, as we are still beings with intelligence, spirituality and sensitivity. This opens us for the transcendent, and we expect an encounter, enrichment." [23, p. 60]

6. Conclusions

As much as possible our paper wanted to point out only the theological, philosophical and psychological preconditions of the way of 'integral healing' of the most diverse wounds. Wounds as direct or indirect results of the disrupted interpersonal communication, caused by incorrect or unilateral use of means of communication, loss of the ability to form real interpersonal relationships, to live in the 'first-hand' reality instead of the primarily virtual one, the loss of balance between knowledge and volitional qualities. In theory and in fact, the proposed way is based on the internal, integral interconnection of various dimensions of the human person, which include among the most important the religious dimension and the need and openness to the absolute relationship of absolute love with absolute being. Churches and religion have to offer the means to discover and develop this relationship as part of their mission. Together with it, there comes the integral healing of the other dimensions of human being, wounded by missing or incorrect communication. This situation with an

increasing number of negative effects that characterizes our media culture is an on-going challenge for the Churches and an opportunity to bring their original and irreplaceable contribution. At the same time, many suggestions contained in the paper allow to deepen the view of the communication itself and its deepest essence and laws.

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