THE CHRISTIAN JOURNALIST AND HIS QUALITIES FOR SECULAR TIMES

Eugen Tănăsescu[*]

Constanta Maritime University, Mircea cel Bătrân street, no. 104, Constanţa, 900663, Romania

Abstract

The present study analyses the secularized context in which a Christian journalist carries out his mission, as well as the qualities necessary to carry it out. The Christian communicator must offer prompt and concrete answers to the actual states of secularization and contribute to diminishing the tendency of the autonomization of cultural and social life, offering him a perspective that allows him to look beyond the utilitarian factor. In addition to the necessary qualities of any journalist, the Christian must possess some qualities specific to missionary requirements, so that the message sent to the public has the impact necessary for the mission of the Church.

Keywords: communicator, communication, mission, secularization, media

1. Introduction

There is a close connection between the media and secularization, as the media often promote secular values, thus becoming instruments of the propagation of secularization. Faced with this situation, a symmetrical counter-response of the Church is needed, through Christian spirituality propagated through the mass media, to remove man from the influence of the secularized and secularizing media culture. In other words, in short, the Church's alternative to global media secularization is Christian media globalism. Although the wording seems provocative or novel, let us not forget that the essence of the mission is the preaching of the Gospel to "all nations" (Mathew 28.19). This cannot be achieved without having communication people with specific qualities.

2. The Christian journalist and his mission

2.1. The context of the media mission today - a secularized society

Since the last century, the consequences of modernism for spirituality were foreshadowed, which consisted in the appearance of the civilized but secularized man. "The civilized man of our century becomes a primitive and a pagan again. It is the natural result of his scientific and technical culture, which sacrifices the

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[*]E-mail: radioeugen@gmail.com

needs of the soul for those of the body and prefers present, earthly satisfactions to future, heavenly happiness. For the modern man... forgets God and the life beyond, forgets his spiritual goal that transcends the limits of this life, creates idols, has the cult of pleasure, interest, force, becomes selfish, harsh, unscrupulous and pursues only gain and satisfying his instincts and appetites. Moderation, mercy, compassion, gentleness, almsgiving, chastity have lost their moral value, being considered minor virtues, which no longer interest the emancipated, bold and strong man of the XX century." [1] Basically, this description constitutes the majority profile of the people who makes up the media receiver today, a person who has systematically overturned his traditional values. The Christian-Orthodox media message will have to go towards this.

Trying a succinct characterization of secularization, we will notice that it is a permanent challenge to the Church, the third temptation of Christ (first was in the wilderness, second was in the Gethsemane garden). At the same time, secularization is also an attempt to eliminate the Church from society. Secularization generates a civilization of utilitarianism in which Christian consciousness is no longer consistent, in the epectatic sense, but only sufficient, and incompatible with love.

Laborious research on secularization has highlighted four main theories [2]:
a) secularization as desacralization of the human;
b) secularization as a loss of the plausibility of institutional religion, through individualization and religious and ideological pluralism;
c) secularization as the periphery of religion in an increasingly rationalized society;
d) secularization as 'subjectivization' of faith.

The characteristics of secularization are real challenges to the Church: influence on the Eucharistic event, through communion that slips towards individualism, the essential functions of the Church take on a bureaucratic character, the unity between Theology and Church life is broken, knowledge is detached from love, so that, in the end, the Church is tempted to become an ideological mechanism. More briefly, secularization is "the conception of life and living without God, as well as the identification with the spirit of the world...which reduces everything to itself" [3]. So, secularization is characterized by a spiritual vacuum caused by the absence of God that becomes the cause for a society in which the human self becomes the centre of existence, through fragmentation, consumerism and deconstruction, called 'post-modern' society. It is characterized, in short, by individualism, secularism, the extraordinary progress of Science and technology, economic, political and cultural globalization, doctrinal chaos, occultism, the imposition of minority rights, compressed time ('the century of speed'), routinization, migration, the exacerbation violence and pornography.

In theological terms, the secularization generated by postmodernism is characterized by: "deconstructivism, neo individualism, post moralism, syncretism, eclecticism, globalism, pragmatism. The common denominator of all these '-isms' seems to be generalized relativism or in the process of

generalization, and the starting point of postmodernism is the 'primacy of the person'." [4] Speaking more philosophically, postmodernism represents, in its essence, the assumption of nihilism as a lack of foundation or, in an ecclesial formulation, 'world heresy' that leads to the exit from Christianity and from the traditional meaning of religion. In this way, globalization favours paganism, not Christianity.

Such a society causes man to think selfishly of himself. The man of this society is a man who is concerned too much with information and too little with faith and facts, so that by his knowledge he comes to master the outer universe, but forgets the inner one, which is, in fact, eternally defining for the human person. "We live in a de-Christianized world that has gradually abandoned Christian values. Better said, we live in a generation of people who have never known and accepted them fully consciously. People are not unchristian because, perhaps, they were never Christians. Today's world must first be re-Christianized, reattached to Christian values, and sensitized to the refined values of Orthodoxy." [5]

However, some specialists claim that we have already entered the era of the "post-secularized society" [6], which is characterized by a new expansion of religiosity, in different directions, a society that removes religion from the 'historicizing' the approach to spirituality, a society that recognizes, in fact, religion as a spiritual form that can support modernization, instead of blocking or limiting it, finally, a society in which religion no longer remains only a private matter of citizens, but is part of the civic culture and the public debate of democracies. In postmodernism, society is permeated by a "culture of individualism, which exasperates man's attention to himself, the emotional weakness and self-vulnerability that mark interpersonal relationships... Postmodern society is characterized by a lack of values that are recognized by all, by a plurality of proposals and through the emphasis on individual freedom, an emphasis that evolves parallel to the practice of indifference to the community." [7]

The theologian Leonid Uspensky observes that today, the nature of the mission of the Church is different from the times of its beginning, from the perspective of the secularized social context in which it is carried out: "it is no longer just about preaching Christianity to unenlightened peoples, but especially to contrasts with the de-Christianized world, together with its culture in full disintegration. To this culture characterized by fragmentation and artifice, Orthodoxy opposes truth, unity, authenticity as its antithesis, because the very patriarchal nature of the Church is the opposite of separatism, discord, division and individualism." [8]

In this context, it is understood that a Christian communicator has a particularly responsible mission, in order to effectively preach the Word of God, because postmodernity and secularization demand a special awareness of the Christian's responsibilities, "from the way they are received to the fulfilment which it is necessary to enjoy, because only the consciousness of responsibility strengthens the person's relationship with the neighbour and with God, removing

the accentuated individualism and the break from the relationship" [9]. This is especially so since the world now has a series of questions about the Church and what is blasphemed the most in a secularized society is the name of God. For modern people God seems to have withdrawn from our speech-speech [10].

In relation to contemporary society, dominated by secularizing post-modernism, the Christian journalist must respond to three major challenges:
a) consumerist and hedonistic materialism, which poses the problem of man;
b) atheism, which questions the existence of God;
c) the search for new religious experiences, which raises the question of relativizing the Christian faith.

For an effective mission through the media, the Church must call on specialists in the field. In this way, it becomes obvious that not everyone can engage in a media preaching mission, but only people who have a good training in the field.

That is why the Second Vatican Council recommended to the Catholic Church, in 1963: "priests, monks and laity must be trained without delay to acquire the necessary skill to use these means for apostolic purposes. To this end, the number of schools, faculties and institutes must be increased in which publicists, creators of films and radio and television broadcasts, as well as other persons interested in these activities, can acquire a complete formation, imbued with the Christian spirit, especially in what concerns the social doctrine of the Church. ... Finally, literary, cinematographic, radio, television, etc. critics must be carefully trained. who know their profession well and are trained and encouraged to always highlight, in their assessments, the moral aspect." [11]

The idea is taken up in the document *Ethics in Social Communications*, where it is stated that "The Church would be better served if all those who hold offices and perform functions in its name were trained in communication. This is not only true for seminarians, for those in formation in monastic communities and for young Catholic lay people, but also for the staff of the Church in general. If the media are neutral, open, and honest, they give well-trained Christians a missionary role on the front line, and it is important that they are supported and well-trained. Even the pastors should give the people a guide regarding the means of social communication and their sometimes discordant and even destructive message." [12]

2.2. The similarities and differences between the 'classical' and the Christian communicator

The Christian communicator does not differ much from the classical communicator or journalist, and yet he has a very special mission towards them. Orthodoxy has to offer prompt and concrete answers in the face of secularization, it must offer the world the testimony of the specific spirit that made it resist alive, active, and dynamic for two thousand years. This is not only an option, but also an obligation of the Christian communicator, as a missionary in the Church of Christ, otherwise there is a risk of not helping the contemporary man. "If the

Orthodox Church will be satisfied with a conventional presence and witness in the world, it will not respond to the contemporary challenge with the universal spirit of Christ and the Apostles, it will leave the contemporary man helpless and will succumb due to the homogenization promoted by globalization." [13]

The social responsibility of the classic journalist is intertwined by the Christian communicator with the ecclesial responsibility. This is because the Christian communicator, in addition to the assumed deontological codes, must reflect on the words of the Saviour who likens the Christian missionary to the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (Mathew 5.13-14). Therefore, the Christian communicator does not perform a trivial journalistic activity in relation to his audience, but, moreover, is aware of his quality as a missionary servant according to Saint Paul, who states that: "I have become all things to all, as, by all means, to save some" (1 Corinthians 9.22). "The public automatically sees those who take part in religious broadcasts - ecclesiastical or lay - as official spokesmen of the Church. They must therefore be aware of this fact and make every effort to avoid possible confusion. They will be aware of the responsibility of their duty in the opinions they express, in the way they express them and, in their attitude, and finally they will seek the advice of the competent ecclesiastical authorities when necessary." [14]

Because of the influence they exercise in society, journalists have a responsibility that can be compared to that of judges who pronounce the sentence of a trial. By the nature of their profession, journalists pass through the filter of personal judgment the ideas they want to share in the public space. In this situation comes responsibility, which has been compared to that of judges.

Communication possesses something of God's creative activity. So, the Christian communicator is a creator in a small way, because he creates and shapes the message he conveys. However, the journalist also has a dilemma of communicating the message. On the one hand, he must explain the facts to an often agitated and distracted audience, adapting to their demands and attracting their attention. On the other hand, the journalist "cannot excessively excite and impress the public, so that it perceives the transmitted message in a distorted way, placing it out of context or increasing it beyond its real dimensions, as if it were a stage action" [14, p. 22].

Therefore, the Christian communicator must have as moral and spiritual benchmarks the light of the Gospel, but, at the same time, he also has the vocation to be "the salt of the earth and the light of the world" (Matthew 5.13-14), a vision that involves three levels of mission of the Christian communicator:

- the level of legislation and professional ethics;
- the level of Christian morality, which must be respected and promoted;
- the level of Christian spirituality, which involves the fulfilment of Christ's call to make us fulfillers of His commandments, so that in the media institutions of the Church, Christian communicators are aware of participating in an apostolic work, like the apostolic mission.

Thus, the values that the Christian communicator must promote, but also defend, are three:

a) The truth of the Orthodox faith in the context of today's reality.
b) The sanctity of life, meaning the sanctity of the human person, of the family, of friendship and peace between people. Today, the mass media cultivate selfish passions and violence, thus contributing to the degradation of the person and human life.
c) The dignity of the person.

Obviously, in his media mission, the Christian communicator will encounter difficulties, even in the media space, which is why, often, the Christian communicator has been identified with the biblical image of sheep among wolves.

They can be identified in four pairs of opposite poles:

a) *Global/local polarity*. A spirituality of communication respects this polarity but supports efforts to overcome it through careful analysis of what each person or community experiences. The main concern is that the global does not take over the local, through the trend of uniformity.
b) *Individual/collective polarity*. Communication must protect the singularity of the person in the face of the tendency to integrate the person into collectivities. The excesses of individualism and the anonymity in which many collectivities live are the two poles that spirituality in communication must bring back into balance.
c) *Imminence/discernment polarity*. Accelerating the pace of life and the onslaught of news implies a quick awareness of what is happening in the world, sometimes without the opportunity to have the necessary time for reflection and discernment. A spirituality of communication will help the Christian communicator to correctly position events in relation to the Gospel.
d) *Idol/icon polarity*. Sometimes the contemporary mentality, influenced by the media, turns people and things in the surrounding world into idols. The Christian communicator must honestly present the distinction between idol and icon, at the same time assuming the task of repositioning the values on the scale of the divine hierarchy, through the messages transmitted.

For an increased efficiency of Christian journalists in a secularized society, which often places too much emphasis on formal, external, and even legal-administrative matters, it is advisable to associate these journalists in professional organizations. "In order to better overcome the difficulties in their profession, communicators should come together in associations, with the aim of promoting cultural deepening, the exchange of ideas, mutual cooperation. Together they will later be able to work on a moral code based on solid doctrinal foundations and recognized experiences. It will present ethical indications regarding the professional performance of communicators, always in view of the global requirements of the communication sector." [14, p. 41].

2.3. The qualities of the missionary journalist

In this section, we aim to analyse what qualities are necessary for one who proposes to use media communication as a modern missionary means.

2.3.1. The Christian communicator must have a missionary and communicator vocation

The development of the journalistic product is closely related to the knowledge of the techniques of writing editorial content. If every job requires the acquisition of certain skills and practices, even more so, in the Church press (which wants to be a "fisher of people" (Luke 5.10)) people who can successfully apply the respective techniques must be found, trained, and used. Moreover, if it is sometimes said that someone cannot become a cleric because he does not have a vocation, we can just as well speak in the case of the Church media, that not every cleric or believer has a vocation as a journalist.

In the documents of the Vatican, concerned earlier with the Church's media communication, a very important clarification is made to identify and encourage those with a media missionary vocation. "Those in leadership positions in all sectors of the Church must understand the means of social communication, to apply this understanding in the development of pastoral plans regarding social communication, alongside concrete policies and programs in this area, as well as to use the mass media appropriately. When necessary, they themselves must receive media education." [15]

Then, the Christian journalist must have the vocation of communicator, i.e. the gift of writing for the print media, of oratory and visual vision for the audio-visual. It is about need for dynamic communication cultivated professionally. There are people who know many things, but they cannot communicate everything they know. It is indeed a great gift to be able to communicate perennial values through speech and writing. This gift is cultivated by constant effort and information and dynamic perseverance.

2.3.2. The Christian communicator must be a good connoisseur and live the Theology, together with the maturity of the faith

Spirituality is, for the Christian journalist, an experience through which he reconciles his profession with his convictions. He must understand that over the world is the loving presence of Christ, whom he serves and witnesses in his media activity. We note that the truth of faith is, in fact, the source and basis of the Christian mission.

The Christian communicator must be very careful about whom he communicates: he must, first, to know that he is communicating the Light, the Gospel and the Spirit of Christ, not an ideology, not a self-sufficient human teaching. Otherwise, his communication no longer becomes a Holy Communion, but risks becoming narcissistic or individualistic communication.

Like the theologian, the Christian communicator must be very careful not to turn the media missionary act into a personal work of founding a new faith. He must proclaim the Word of God, as he received it in the Church, without adding or omitting anything, in order not to fall under the scriptural word: "he who shall break one of these very small commandments, and so teach the people, very little

will be called into the Kingdom of Heaven; and whoever does and teaches, this one will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5.19). Therefore, the Christian communicator must not be guided by the desire to stand out or the temptation to speculate on Christian dogma, in his own interest, but he must remain in continuity with the Fathers of the Church. Therefore, the Christian communicator needs a mature faith, based not only on knowledge, but also on the experience of a life led in communion with the Church. Basically, a true theology is the theology that manages to identify, analyse, and offer authentic Christian responses to the crises prevailing in a society, at a certain time of its existence, like the biblical watchman (Ezekiel 3.17-21).

2.3.3. To the maturity of faith must be added the power of multiple discernment, to distinguish between the value of communion and the gain of commercialization, between ideal and selfish passion

Commercial communication is a major temptation for the media because buying and selling gives very little priority to holiness. Not every selfish passion is a genuine ideal. The distinction between ideal and passion is a necessary one, although very difficult to achieve. The Holy Fathers of the Church say that the temptation to sin is often a veiling in the light and in an artificial beauty of reality, and the fall into sin then produces in man the feeling that he has been deceived.

It is precisely for this reason it is essential that a Christian communicator is not under the sway of inner passions as he probes into those of the world and, without passion or attachment, conveys to his potential readers, listeners, or viewers the essence of what has happened. In this way, the Christian communicator achieves a meeting between the Gospel and the world, that is, he transmits the word of the Gospel to the world through the media, in a culture of dialogue. It is obvious that, within this spiritualization of communication, the Christian communicator must also consider journalistic expression techniques. In this sense, the Decree on the means of social communication - *Inter Mirifica* expressly provides that "the own mode of action of each of the means must also be taken into account" [11, p. 7].

2.3.4. A Christian communicator must possess above average general culture

A journalist must be creative because he cannot afford to be flat, limited, stereotyped. But creativity, as we know, depends a lot on the level of knowledge and general culture. A permanent solid culture in Theology mean a perpetual cultivation of general culture through Christian faith, information and experience.

Moreover, the Vatican, for its part, believes that a Christian communicator needs a culture appropriate to the mission he has, which can be acquired in specialized institutions for the media mission. "We must, therefore, hope that social communication chairs will be established in higher schools for the awarding of academic degrees in this discipline. Before assuming professional responsibilities, communicators must possess a solid theoretical and technical

training...communicators must feel the duty to serve man; this availability can only be born in those who seek to truly understand and love man." [14, p. 37]

In this way, the Christian communicator will avoid falling into ridicule when publicly exposing himself through the media message.

2.3.5. *The aspect of flair is very important, i.e. the ability to raise or propose relevant topics for the public*

Scripturally speaking, the Christian communicator must perfectly understand the words of Saint Apostle Paul: ". . .I have become all things to all, that by all means I may save some" (1 Corinthians 9.22), that is, in other words, the ability to read the signs of his time.

This is also where the knowledge of the receiving public comes in because we cannot do a mission without knowing who we are addressing. The audience needs to be persuaded, fascinated, captivated, claiming that they are looking for the beautiful or the useful. Confrontation, dialogue, premises to feel in relation to others are sought. The objective of any communication is for the other to receive, to remember, to respond. In addition, it gets to intensify communication, not only to potential users, but also among users. "The skill of the moderator is therefore to convince the listener to stay with him, repeating and constantly demonstrating to him the reason why he should do it. Because if boredom sets in, who's out there turns off the machine or changes the station." [16]

2.3.6. *The journalist's freedom of opinion must be used only for the benefit of human dignity and in the search for the truth, with respect for the revealed truth and the doctrine of the Church*

The Christian journalist's freedom of expression must aim for the common good, with respect for individual or group rights, as well as for the rights of one's own nation and of other nations in the world. Of course, freedom of opinion is a fundamental human right. However, it must be channelled in such a way as to avoid provoking social tensions. "We must always be in favour of freedom of expression. However, considered from an ethical point of view, this assumption is not an absolute, imprescriptible norm. There are obvious arguments, for example libel and defamation, messages that seek to promote hatred and conflict between individuals and groups, obscenity and pornography, the morbid depiction of violence where there is no right to communicate. And free expression should observe principles such as truth, fairness, and respect for privacy." [12, p. 23]

2.3.7. *Other qualities necessary for those who work in the Christian missionary media*

Other qualities necessary for those who work in the Christian missionary media are punctuality, resistance to stress as well as availability of time, because the media activity involves wear and tear, intense and long-lasting demand of the

Christian journalist. And, finally, a Christian communicator must constantly reflect on the duty to listen to himself, according to the pastoral principle "the preacher must be the first listener of his sermon" [17].

3. Conclusions

The Christian communicator is called to exercise his professional competence in the service of confessing Christ, through the Gospel, by spreading the knowledge of good and by means of the formation of free and responsible consciences. The challenge that Christian communicators must accept today is to combine professionalism with reading all of life's events through the eyes of faith. Religious topics must be handled with the delicacy and professional caution that comes from being aware of the harm that handling them can cause. Furthermore, they must provide examples of Christianity in a world that is beginning to marginalize Christ.

The journalist is like an artist who has the power and vocation to create and shape according to his ideals and aspirations public opinion - the soul of society. It must be taken into account that a good communicator is not the one who communicates himself, but the one who arouses interest in the communicated subject; it is imperative that Christian media journalists help others read events in the light of the Gospel.

The Christian communicator in particular has a prophetic mission, a vocation: to speak against today's false gods and idols: materialism, hedonism, consumerism, nationalistic pettiness, etc., supporting a body of moral truth based on dignity and human rights, on the preferential option for the poor, on the universal destination of goods, on love for one's enemies and on unconditional respect for human life from the moment of conception to its natural term pursuing the goal of the most perfect realization of the Kingdom of Heaven in this world.

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