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## Communion, purpose of cultural-missionary communication in the media

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**Abstract.** Communion deeply defines the cultural-spiritual values of the Church; therefore, it is an essential goal of cultural-missionary communication. When it is carried out through the media, communication generates the appearance of a relationship between three components: broadcast-mission-communion, which has a double role in society: on the one hand it affirms the cultural-spiritual values of the Church, on the other hand it is a counterweight to contemporary cultural-spiritual degradation through media pollution. This study aims to analyze the relationship between the three mentioned components as well as the double role they have in society.

**Keywords.** communication, communion, broadcast, culture, spirituality, Church

Communion is one of the essential characteristics of spirituality. It is one of the defining behaviors of the religious feeling, therefore a structural element of the human being. Moreover, communion is not only an ideational theory, but is a universal existential reality, because the God of the Church has revealed himself to be Trinity, to be love, a communion of persons who communicate their love to each other. This reality represents the eternal archetype of communion, which also extends to Creation, especially to man, who is capable of love and communion. In this way, man is ontologically configured as a communicative and communal being.

Starting from the statement of St. Paul, who tells the Ephesians that: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope of your calling; It is a Lord, a faith, a baptism." (Eph. 4, 4-5) we note that the Christian life is a life of communion (κοινωνία). The unity of faith is a communion based on the communal love of God in the Trinity and the icon of the Trinity is the icon of the unity of the Church: That it may be one as we are (Jn. 17, 11). Unity is the Christian's participation in the communion of love of the Holy Trinity.

The Church opens itself to all those who desire communion with Christ, who says: "the one who comes to me I will not cast out" (John 6, 37). But, to the same extent, those who want to follow Christ must open themselves to communion. "If God has given us in the Church all the objective conditions, all the means to achieve this goal, we must realize, on our part, the necessary subjective conditions, because the union is perfected in synergy, in a collaboration of man with God. This subjective side of union with God constitutes the way of union which is

eternal life"<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, however, the Church is from its beginnings "at once community and communion, because its life springs directly from the Gospel, the real presence of Christ in the Holy Spirit. *They persisted in the teaching of the apostles and in communion, in the breaking of bread and in prayers*" (Acts 2, 42)"<sup>2</sup>.

That is precisely why the Church is par excellence a space of communication and communion, and theology, as an act of cultural-spiritual communication, is nothing more than the expression of the experience of man's communication with God (vertically) and, by virtue of this experience, of man with fellow men its (horizontally). Theology becomes a real communication between God, man, and society.

Media communication can achieve the communion of believers, on the broadcast-mission-communion line, if we consider the fact that, in the Church, Scripture and Tradition are authentic expressions of Revelation. Thus, a show with a cultural-spiritual character is, in fact, made up of spoken words, which must be based on the Word of God. These broadcast words lead to an update of the cultural-spiritual message among the listener, who will live a spiritual experience of living the message because we know all the words of Scripture are addressed to each of us, to each generation. In this way "the words of Christ, or about Christ, fixed or not in Scripture, are the external means of expressing, transmitting and refreshing the faith within the Church, or from the Church to those outside it, simultaneously with the transmission and refreshing them through the Holy Spirit"<sup>3</sup>.

In this way, we move into the plan of the Tradition of the Church, whose purpose is precisely to explain and update Scripture. That is why the show, a sum of words and cultural-spiritual values based on the message of Scripture, becomes an element of dynamic Tradition. "The Church does not oppose Scripture to Tradition, nor does it consider that the principle of a strict juxtaposition must operate between the two. There is an interpenetration of meanings and a complementarity, so that Tradition explains Scripture, and Scripture constitutes a concentrated form of the whole of Revelation. Scripture does not represent the norm of faith except in close connection with the Church and its Tradition"<sup>4</sup>.

For his part, Father Stăniloae stated that "Scripture is kept alive and effective through Tradition, and Tradition exists through its practice by the Church. The Church is the medium in which the content of Scripture or Revelation is printed through Tradition. Scripture or Revelation needs Tradition, as a means of activating its content, and of the Church, as a practicing subject of Tradition and a medium in which the content of Scripture or Revelation is imprinted. But the Church also needs Scripture, to be refreshed by it, to increase in knowledge and in living in Christ, to make its application, in his life, through Tradition, ever richer. The Church, Scripture and Tradition are inextricably united"<sup>5</sup>.

Therefore, the purpose of media communication through broadcasting becomes practically an act of the Church's mission, which aims at the communion of believers in the Spirit of communion, "progressive incorporation through faith and knowledge in the risen Christ, a spiritualization of the meaning of our life"<sup>6</sup>: "being rooted and established in love, that you may understand together with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and

<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, trans. Fr. Vasile Răducă, Ed. Anastasia, Bucharest 1994, p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> Fr. Nicolae Dascălu, *Communication for communion.*, Ed. Trinitas, Iasi, 2000, p.26

<sup>3</sup> Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., Bucharest, 1996, p. 56.

<sup>4</sup> Fr. Nicolae Dascălu, *Communication for...*, p. 32

<sup>5</sup> Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic...*, p. 66

<sup>6</sup> Fr. Nicolae Dascălu, *Communication for...*, p. 33

depth, and that you may know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3, 17-19).

There is also a danger to be avoided here, namely, the intensive and individual exploitation of the communication phenomenon for self-interest. "One of the many paradoxes of the post-totalitarian Romanian public space resides in the abundance of means of communication and the simultaneous poverty of forms of dialogue (...) the participants in the act of communication seem to have as their sole purpose the sending, but less or even not at all, of receiving messages<sup>7</sup>. Or, in this situation, we very quickly reach a lack of communion, because there is practically no communication and sharing of values. Because "not knowing how to communicate, we fail to build sustainably, to simply be trustworthy to each other, long-term partners"<sup>8</sup>. In the same sense, we note that the technological advance has not increased the quality of the act of communication "although great progress has been made in technique and in sociology, the communication between oneself and the other does not register spectacular leaps, sometimes it even tends towards non-communication"<sup>9</sup>.

That is why the missionary communication of the Church must not be one-way. The Church must know the philosophies, ideologies, cultural-spiritual currents of the recipients of its message, in other words, to maintain a permanent dialogue with the recipients of its mission. "The Church must dialogue with the people of today. She has this holy, divine task. The pastors and leaders of the Church would take upon themselves a serious fault before God, if they do not try with all their efforts to preach the Gospel in the world, to those who listen and understand it"<sup>10</sup>.

The spiritual tradition of the Church affirms communion as an essential cultural-spiritual value. For example, St. Clement of Alexandria affirms that, in the fighting Church, communion has as its model the communion of the triumphant, heavenly Church, the connection between the two being achieved through prayer<sup>11</sup>. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus says that at Pentecost a harmony was achieved, because by the same unique spirit, they are all gathered in one harmony<sup>12</sup>. Saint Basil the Great says that nothing is more proper to our nature than to be in communion with one another, to need one another and to love one another<sup>13</sup>. Saint John Chrysostom describes communion as a force, an energy, which holds together the unity between all the members of the Church<sup>14</sup>. St. Gregory Palamas sees in the Church a community of deification in which people have the task of strengthening the foundation of communion between themselves and with God. Marko Ivan Rupnik stated that "evangelization cannot begin (...) except with a confession of love; therefore, by having healthy connections with specific people (...) to share in the other's culture, precisely to be able to understand and communicate,

<sup>7</sup> Radu Preda, *Culture of dialogue*, Eikon, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Radu Preda, *Culture of dialogue...*, p. 13

<sup>9</sup> Fr. Nicoale Dascălu, *The Church and mass media or about the metamorphoses of communication*, in "Theology and Life" new series, year VIII (LXXIV), no. 5-12, May-December 1998, p.119.

<sup>10</sup> Gian Franco Poli, Marco Cardinali, *La Comunicazione in theological perspective. Reflections sugli aspetti comunicativi della fede*, Editrice Elle Di Ci, 1998, Turin p. 41.

<sup>11</sup> Clement Alexandrinus, *Stromate, I-IV*, *Patrologia Graeca*, XII, 487 in Henri Leclercq, Fernand Cabrol, "Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie", Letouzey et Ané, Paris, 1907-1953, col. 2459.

<sup>12</sup> In Pentecostem, *Oratio XVI*, *Patrologia Graeca*, XXXVI, 448 apud Prof. D. Stăniloae, *The Holy Spirit and the Sobornicity of the Church*, in "Orthodoxia", year XIX, no. 1, 1967, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> St. Basil the Great, *Great Rules*, III, 1. *Patrologia Graeca*, XXXI, 917 A apud, Rev. Prof. I. G. Coman, *Biblical and patristic foundations for the common use of means of living by people*, in S. T., year V, no. 9-10, 1953, p. 589.

<sup>14</sup> *De sancta Pentecoste*, Homily II, *Patrologia Graeca*, L, 467, apud. Rev. Prof. D. Stăniloae, *The Holy Spirit and Sobornicity*. . . , p. 39.

following the parable of the incarnation, in which God is the one who comes first to meet man, taking the first step of communication"<sup>15</sup>.

Individualism, understood as the priority of each one for himself, but also society, seen as the dependence of each one on a whole, find their substitution in the spiritual communion of the Church, in the love of each one for the other in which all the barriers fall one by one, those between people and those between people and God. Human beings are freed from the slavery of slavery, whether to self, to other people, groups, or ideas.

The church thus becomes an institution of cultural-spiritual bi-directional human-God communication, but also of inter-human communication, which aims at communion. "The Church bears in our world, until the end of the ages, the testimony of this boundless love. That is why its message will always be the Good News, communication having communion as its source and goal."<sup>16</sup>.

When the media aims to transmit these cultural-spiritual values to believers, there is a profound affirmation of human existence to the exclusion of everything else: nation, state, party, class, ideology. Instead, people are called together, creating a relationship of communion.

In summary, according to the *Communio et Progresio* document of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications of the Roman Catholic Church, the purpose of media communication is to promote human progress so that people can come closer and communicate honestly with each other and "the human person and the human community are the goal and the extent of the use of social media. Communication should be done by individuals for the benefit of the integral development of other individuals.... Individuals have inalienable dignity and importance and cannot be sacrificed in the name of collective interests. Even if social communications themselves are concerned with the demands and interests of specific groups, they must not pit one group against another in the name of class conflict, exaggerated nationalism, racial supremacy, ethnic purity, and the like"<sup>17</sup>.

Media communication can serve the mission of the Church in 2 important directions:

1. Affirmation of cultural-spiritual values, in an increasingly diverse world, where "many of the Church's doctrines, traditions and institutions are today ignored by believers living in a society where religious pluralism and the secular state have value of principles"<sup>18</sup>. Thus, the Church enters dialogue with society, for a better affirmation of cultural-spiritual values.

In this sense, the Blessed Father Patriarch Daniel emphasized that the main features that define the cultural-spiritual values of the Church in general are the following:<sup>19</sup>

A - Patristic and philological renewal, understood as the translation of the works of the Holy Fathers and great spiritual men, as well as studies and commentaries on these works, in order to better highlight the actuality and depth of Christian thought and experience lived throughout centuries, in very different historical conditions, by great theologians and spiritual men, these martyrs, shepherds, teachers, ascetics, servants, fathers and sons, witnesses and saints of the Church of Christ.

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<sup>15</sup> Thomáš Špidlik, Marko Ivan Rupnik, *Pastoral theology. Starting from beauty*, Galaxia Gutenberg Publishing House, Târgu-Lăpuș, 2007, p. 46.

<sup>16</sup> Rev. Nicolae Dascălu, *Communication for communion.*, Trinitas Publishing House, Iasi, 2000, p.11.

<sup>17</sup> Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Ethics in social communications*, <https://www.magisteriu.ro/etica-in-comunicatiile-sociale-2000/>, cited on 15 Oct 2022, point 22

<sup>18</sup> Rev. Prof. Dr. Ion Bria, *Orthodoxy in Europe. The Place of Romanian Spirituality*, The Metropolitanate of Moldavia and Bucovina Publishing House, Iasi, 1995, p. 145.

<sup>19</sup> † Daniel, Patriarch of the BOR, *Theology and Spirituality*, Basilica Publishing House of the Romanian Patriarchate, Bucharest, 2010, p. 290-297.

B - Fidelity to Tradition and efforts to deepen the great themes of the Christian faith according to the demands of our time.

C - Sensitivity to the problems of the contemporary world; in conditions where some of them are unprecedented in human history: human solidarity, peace, service, family, ecological issues, technological and social evolution, etc.

D - Ecumenical dialogue, understood as an effort to restore visible Christian unity, which is characterized by exchange of visits and mutual knowledge between representatives of the Churches, exchanges between denominations, the organization of common events, collaboration in the field of social diakonia, efforts for an attitude common to the problems facing the world today.

Synthesized, these four directions show that the main task of Christian theology and spirituality, and therefore of the mission of the Church, is to help the human person to rediscover the holy meaning of life and peace, the spiritual dimension of knowledge and the necessary place of celebration in obsessed societies of activism and consumerism.

## **2. Counterweight to cultural-spiritual degradation through media pollution.**

The Church's media communication also fulfills the function of guardian of the communion and community of believers, like the watchman in the vision of Ezekiel (Eze 33, 2-6). This function is even more important since it can be observed that the phenomenon of the degradation of cultural-spiritual values is a parasitic one, which disrupts the authentic spiritual life, imitates it, condemns it, speculates on the grievances of some or the vulnerabilities of others and builds in parallel other pseudo-values dominated by egocentrism and individualism.

It goes without saying that the cultural-spiritual degradation has not missed the media industry either, at the present time we can already talk about a media pollution of cultural-spiritual values. This causes man to be oversaturated with information so that he is no longer able to discern, to think, which constitutes a degradation of man's axiological space. There is even talk of a dependence of man on information, by which cultural-spiritual pseudo-values are accepted not for the quality, but for the quantity and persistence of their propagation.

Thus, the Church is called to help contemporary man to distinguish what is false from what is true, through her media mission "she must say "yes" to everything that is in accordance with the Kingdom of God, as it was revealed in the life of Christ and to say "no" to everything that degrades human dignity and freedom"<sup>20</sup>.

Speaking about this call of the Church, Radu Preda believes that it would mean "a more careful reading of the signs of the times and a deep recovery of one's own spiritual identity, strongly affected by the period of confusion after 1989. It is not enough to establish radio stations and television (...) not the resources of technology are the signs of modernization, but the way in which the mentality of the ecclesiastical leaders makes possible the dialogue between Tradition and modernity, between the Gospel and today's man"<sup>21</sup>.

Precisely because of this, it is obvious that the greatest threat to cultural-spiritual values remains the loss of communication, in the sense that even if we talk to each other, we still do not communicate. And further, the loss of authentic communication leads to the loss of communion.

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<sup>20</sup> Rev. Prof. Dr. Valer Bel, *Mission, parish, pastorate, Renaissance*, Cluj-Napoca, 2006, p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Radu Preda, *Culture of dialogue...*, p. 231

Contemporary man lives in a world flooded with means of communication, therefore exposed to an informational explosion, because the mission of the Church must also consider the wise use of these forms of communication. In this endeavor, the Church must consider two major directions: access to secular mass media (public or private) and, at the same time, the creation and use of its own media channels. However, both directions presuppose a professional approach to the theories of communication through mass media, to obtain a good missionary result, according to the words of the Savior who told Simon-Peter that: "you will be a fisher of men" (Lk. 5, 10). Or, if no skilled fisherman will accept to return from the sea with an empty net, in the same way, no media missionary must accept poor results, whether they are also reflected in the audience figures of the respective means.

### **Conclusions**

Summing up, the trinity "mission, broadcast, communion" works in the act of media communication in the following form: broadcasts are entities that contain Christian missionary messages, conceived on the basis of Revelation, which are transmitted to the audience (the transmission itself being also a missionary act), with the aim of realizing the ideal of Christianity: the communion of man with God (on the vertical of spirituality) and of people with each other (on the horizontal of spirituality). This equation is based on another third of cultural-spiritual concepts, which define the life of the Church: Kerygma (mission), Koinonia (communion) and Diakonia (pastorance). We note that, in its essence, communion is identical with reaching a special state of communication: communication beyond words, a communication-communion. Thus, the community becomes a communion of the joy of authentic living of cultural-spiritual values.

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