

AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA IN THE CONTEXT OF COMMUNICATIVE AND ETHICAL COMPETENCES - MEDIA THEOLOGY APPROACH

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ABSTRACT:

The following case study presents the most important references to the transmission of auditive and visual information in the context of communicative and ethical competences that can be found both in the Bible and in the Magisterium of the Church. The authors apply the media theology approach and will show that media theology discipline has its origins in the Bible. The conducted research analyses the Bible-theological sources of using audiovisual media to communicate messages. The goal of the research is an attempt to answer the following questions: How does the Bible refer to the transmission of a word, image, sound and silence? To what extent does the Catholic Church contemporarily carry out the scientific reflection on the audiovisual media and also communicative and ethics competences? How does it fulfil the most important demands of the Second Vatican Council related to this issue? What kind of challenges, regarding the media research, awaits the contemporary theology? Where are the foundations of media theology discipline? The whole article is divided into six sections: the introduction, biblical basis of the visual and auditive transmission, audiovisuality in the teaching of the Church, communicative and ethical competences, media theology – theology of communication, and conclusions.

KEY WORDS:

audiovisual media, Church teaching, communicative competence, communication, ethical competence, media theology, Second Vatican Council

1 Introduction

Audiovisual media are explored and reflected on by various scholars coming from numerous different scientific disciplines. Since these types of media production are highly influential, they have been analysed by sociologists, psychologists, pedagogues and media scholars. In the context of the audiovisual broadcasting,

they concentrate, above all, on the audio and visual elements and the correlation between them.¹ Also, social media offer different technical possibilities of using audiovisual forms of communicating messages. Theologians have also had a tendency to study the notion of audiovisuality; the source and justification of their interest is found in the Bible. Moreover, the teaching of the Catholic Church is rich in afterthoughts concerning the use of audiovisual broadcasting. Inside and outside of the Church context, communicative and ethical competence is also a great concern in these documents.

The set research objectives in the conducted studies are outlined in the following questions: How does the Bible refer to the transmission of a word, image, sound, and silence? To what extent does the Church implement scientific reflection on audiovisual media and on the communicative and ethical competences? In which way does it meet the most important requirements concerning this subject and formed by the Church teaching? How is knowledge about audiovisual communication being transformed into audiovisual communicative competence? What are the contemporary challenges that the theologians must deal with related to the modern audiovisual media and communicative and ethical competence?

To achieve these research objectives we must first analyse in detail the biblical foundations of auditivity and visuality, focusing at the same time on the main elements of auditory and visual communication that comes from an image, sound, word and/or silence. This analysis will allow us to determine what the characteristics of biblical iconosphere, sonosphere, logosphere and galenosphere are. The next stage of research will be to determine theological foundations of auditivity and visuality based on the teaching of the Church. This will be done on the basis of performance analysis and will place emphasis on the synthesis of the Church reflections on audiovisual communication. This reflection outlines and marks an important field of research in media theology and theology of communication, and that is why this area of interest needs to be given more attention. This new discipline also includes practical dimensions, which refer specifically to communicative and ethical competences that can be found in both the Bible and in the Magisterium of the Church.

2 Biblical Basis of the Visual and Auditive Transmission

Audiovisual broadcasting stimulates two senses, both hearing and sight, giving it the ability to be watched and listened to. Of course, no one shall find any information about the radio, TV or film in the Bible, however it does contain a very detailed message related to the main elements of the visual and auditive transmission, for example the picture or image, sound, word, and silence. Therefore, it seems logical to define the biblical interpretation of these notions, which is of great importance for the contemporary theological discussion on modern media.

2.1 Iconosphere – Image in the Bible

The word ‘picture’ appears in the Bible on numerous occasions, hence its differentiated interpretation. Above all, it is used in the context of God – “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness”.² Similarly, this word is used for expressing the resemblance of one man to another – “And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image”.³

However, the function of the image in the biblical context is sometimes perceived in a more modern way, for example, as an attempt of presenting or copying something that already exists. Such interpretation may be found in the following passage: “You shall not make an engraved image for yourself, nor any likeness of anything

that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”⁴ This statement shows an extremely important characteristic of the image – which is always just an image.⁵ Although it resembles the original or it is an attempt to show something new, but it is and shall always be just a likeness.⁶ On the one hand one might argue that the word ‘just’ used in the context of the man resembling God might arouse objection. However, usage of this word is justified here because it presents the fact of creating the man in a proper hierarchy. For this act is always derived from and dependent on God – never above Him. On the other hand, however, the man was created to resemble God Himself. Therefore, the word ‘image’ (image of God) in the biblical sense expresses greatness, importance, and superiority of the man over animals, plants and the rest of the universe.

Yet, the biblical texts often present a negative influence of the image. A long-lasting contact with it may lead to idolatry,⁷ assigning the divine qualities to the image, for example the miraculous features: “A father made an idol to look like his child who had suddenly died, and the dead child then became an object of worship by later generations, who followed mysterious and secret ceremonies.”⁸ Excessive reception of an image, which might also be described as pathological, leads to enslavement⁹ and to darkness.¹⁰

Even the short biblical interpretation mentioned above proves that the image might be used for manipulation and there are numerous examples of that in the Bible. For instance the image was used in order to influence its receiver in a particular way, which can be illustrated by the scene described by the prophet Ezekiel: “But she carried her prostitution still further. She saw men portrayed on a wall, figures of Chaldeans portrayed in red, with belts around their waists and flowing turbans on their heads; all of them looked like Babylonian chariot officers, natives of Chaldea. As soon as she saw them, she lusted after them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea.”¹¹ These words perfectly illustrate the destructive impact of an image, but it also gives them symbolic meaning. The result of being enslaved by an image is also presented in the Revelation of St. John.¹²

This analysis of understanding the image and the way in which it is presented proves the immensely important function of the image. It may be a message of goodness, truth and beauty. The man, bearing the image of God in heaven, is a conformation of it.¹³ However, each attempt to measure up to God shall result in banishment from paradise. As a result this situation teaches how to understand an image properly.

It is also worth mentioning that in the context of the Eastern philosophy and religion the image can also acquire positive meaning. The icon was “a guide for the eye from the object of perception to experience which exceeds the human sensuality. Hence, the icon performed a function of visual stimulating of a Christian by using the sense of sight, in a similar way in which the singing appealed to the sense of hearing or the aroma of the smoke coming from the thurible to the sense of smell.”¹⁴ The positive characteristics of these icons might refer to the contemporary iconography or film message, which might lead to some development of its receiver.

2.2 Sonosphere – Sound in the Bible

A very important element of the biblical message is the sound as well. God Himself emphasises its role, when he creates the world by means of the sound. The words He declaims have causative power.¹⁵ Such types of messages transform the recipient, changing his or her attitude, views and way of thinking. They simply give

1 POPLAWSKI, M., FRANCUZ, P.: Poziom redundancji i rodzaj ekspozycji materiału audiowizualnego. In FRANCUZ, F. (ed.): *Psychologiczne aspekty odbiór telewizji*, 2004, Vol. 2, p. 245-275; FRANCUZ, P.: *Rozumienie przekazu telewizyjnego*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2002.

2 Gen. 1. 26; Gen. 1. 27; 9.6; Ws. 2.23, 7. 26.

3 Gen. 5.3.

4 Ex. 20.4; Deut. 5.8.

5 Ws. 13.16.

6 ZASĘPA, T., WOŹNIAK, J.: *Człowiek, o którym pamięta Bóg*. In *Kultura-Media-Teologia*, 2011, Vol. 7, p. 8-15.

7 Ws. 14.21; Rom. 1.23.

8 Ws. 14.15.

9 Ws. 15.4-5.

10 Ws. 17.20.

11 Ezek. 23.14-16.

12 Rev. 14.9-11.

13 1 Cor 15.49; 2 Cor 3.18.

14 NYSSSEN, W.: *Dominiacja obrazu w chrześcijaństwie*. In *Communio*, 1990, No. 2, p. 5. See also: MARCYŃSKI, K.: *Głoszenie i rozpowszechnianie słowa Bożego*. In KOWALCZYK, M. (ed.): *Apostolat Słowa Bożego*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo UKSW, 2010, p. 336-347. Here it is also worth referring to the research done by prof. Karol Klauza (KUL – John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin) and concerning the theological hermeneutics of the icon.

15 See: LASKOWSKA, M.: *Sprawcza rola przekazu w encyklice „Spe salvi”*. In PARZYCH-BLAKIEWICZ, K. (ed.): *Zbawienie w nadziei. Wokół encykliki „Spe salvi” Benedykta XVI*. Olsztyn: Studio Poligrafii Komputerowej „SQL”, 2010, p. 143-158.

hope. A perfect example of such a message is – above all – the Gospel, which – as Benedict XVI emphasises – “is not merely a communication of things that can be known – it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing”.¹⁶ The word of God soothes the distracted human soul, protects the man as a shield;¹⁷ it is just eternal (“the word of our God will stand forever”),¹⁸ it needs to be stopped for a while in order to get to know it,¹⁹ it is a source of wisdom,²⁰ it is alive, active and “it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow,”²¹ it creates.²²

Human verbal space in the Bible appears to be incomplete and limited: “Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue”²³; “Alas, Sovereign Lord,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.”²⁴ God rushes to help him, but He demands some involvement from the man: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”²⁵

Apart from spoken words,²⁶ the Bible is full of other sounds produced by the instruments as well: trumpets,²⁷ drums,²⁸ castanets, harps, lyres, timbrels, sistrums and cymbals,²⁹ flutes.³⁰ Such sounds accompanied the Israelites during numerous important moments, e.g. whilst dancing meant to praise Yahweh,³¹ or while announcing an important information,³² or during taking an oath to the Lord.³³

Sounds of music also expressed joy.³⁴ The sound of an instrument was also a kind of message for the people.³⁵ However, it may also be a message, which is empty and even destructive when it is aimed at introducing chaos, havoc and prevailing over goodness. It may also be a carrier of lies and hypocrisy.³⁶

2.3 Galenosphere – Silence in the Bible

Silence is also an element of the audiovisual message. The very word ‘silence’ does not appear in the Bible often, but this phenomenon – lack of sound – is present during the most important events, e.g. during the creation of the world or while talking to God, after every storm, war, disaster, during the Annunciation and the birth of Jesus. Silence accompanied Jesus during His whole life and activity, as well as during His passion and death etc.

In the Bible, silence also brings joy: “Then they were glad because they were quiet, so He guided them to their desired haven.”³⁷ Silence is often described as “deep”.³⁸ It appears on God’s order in the moment when He is present and intervenes: “Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.”³⁹ The apostles had similar power enabling them to silence the other by the Word: “After receiving the commander’s permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent,

16 BENEDICT XVI: *Spe salvi*. No. 2.
 17 Prov. 30.5.
 18 Isa. 40.18.
 19 1 Sam. 9.27.
 20 Sir. 1.5.
 21 Heb. 4.12.
 22 2 Pet. 3.5.
 23 Exod. 4.10.
 24 Jer. 1.6.
 25 2 Tim. 2.15.
 26 Deut. 9.12.
 27 Josh. 6.13, 6. 20.
 28 Judg. 11.34.
 29 2 Sam. 6.5.
 30 1 Kings 1.40.
 31 1 Kings 25.1-3.
 32 2 Sam. 15.10.
 33 2 Chron. 15.14.
 34 1 Kings 1.40.
 35 1 Kings 1.41.
 36 Job 16.3-4.
 37 Ps. 107.30.
 38 Ws. 18.14.
 39 Mt. 8.26; Mk. 4.39; Lk. 8.24.

he said to them in Aramaic.”⁴⁰ Equally emphatic silence appears in the Apocalypse, e.g. after the opening of the seventh seal: “When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.”⁴¹

This interpretation of the biblical galenosphere pertains to the contemporary messages and in this context appears a notion of the galenosphere of a modern recipient.

The biblical ‘audiovisuality’ described above leads one to a conclusion that the word, picture, sound and silence provide the basis for spiritual and moral development of the man. They are also the elements for building communicative and ethical competence. Therefore, the Church – following the Bible – opens up to the theological reflection concerning these spheres.

In the Bible, God is presented as the one who encouraged us to communicate: “So I say, Listen to me; I also will give you my opinion and my knowledge,”⁴² “But now, Job, listen to my words; pay attention to everything I say. I am about to open my mouth my words are on the tip of my tongue. My words come from an upright heart; my lips sincerely speak what I know”,⁴³ “Listen to my words”,⁴⁴ “Hear Israel!”,⁴⁵ “Listen!”,⁴⁶ “Answer me then, if you can”.⁴⁷ These statements generate the source and justification of communication theology, which shall be discussed in further detail. In addition, the analysis of the audio and visual message accounts for valuable source for the reflection within the Church on contemporary means of communication. Hence, the authors shall go on to evaluate the most important fragments of the Church’s teaching related to the audiovisual message.

3 Audiovisuality in the Teaching of the Church

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Church was confronted with the necessity of reacting to new technologies in the field of communication and information. It was the time when the technological audiovisualisation had begun. On 28th December 1895 the first film was produced by August and Louis Lumière. It was only two minutes long, but it clearly expressed human interest in receiving the picture. The first viewers were deeply impressed, which was a sign of the upcoming audiovisual revolution. The Pope of that time, Benedict XV, ordered the cardinals to examine the possibilities of using the ‘moving pictures’ (this was the name people used referring to films at that time) in the field of evangelizing activity.⁴⁸ During the pontificate of Benedict’s successor, Pius XI, another invention appeared – the radio invented by Guglielmo Marconi. In consequence, on 12th February 1931 the Pope inaugurated the launch and operation of the Vatican Radio.⁴⁹ Also, around that time the first Church document referring to the new inventions was composed. On 29th June 1936, Pius XI issued a pontifical encyclical entitled *Vigilanti Cura* dedicated to “The Motion Picture”.

This Encyclical Letter is mainly concerned with the morality of the films that are shown throughout the world, its objective being the promotion of the Kingdom of God on earth through patronising clean films, preferably on religious subjects, which are not offensive to good morals or dangerous to Christian virtue.⁵⁰ Six years before, Pope Pius XI also referred to the audiovisual media in the context of young people’s education. In this Encyclical Letter, entitled *Divini illius magistri* (1929) he emphasises frequently that these forms

40 Acts 21.40.
 41 Rev. 8.1.
 42 Job 32.10.
 43 Job 33.1-3.
 44 Num. 12.6.
 45 Deut. 5.1; 6. 3.4; 9.1.
 46 Deut. 32.1; Josh. 3.9.
 47 Job 33.5.
 48 See: PAMUŁKA, P.: *Środki społecznego przekazu a dzieło ewangelizacji*. In *Homo Dei*, 1992, No. 2-3, p. 22; MARCYŃSKI, K.: *Środki masowego przekazu w służbie apostołstwa*. In DYR, A., FORYCKI, R., KOWALCZYK, M. (ed.): *100-lecie Stowarzyszenia Apostołów Katolickiego w Polsce*. Warszawa: Apostolicum, 2009, p. 359-363.
 49 Also Polish catholic publicists reacted to the new invention, for example young Rev. Stefan Wyszyński. He clearly stated that “undoubtedly the radio is a power was given to us by the Providence, and as such it must not be neglected”. More on this subject in: LASKOWSKA, M.: *Ks. Stefan Wyszyński jako dziennikarz i redaktor: 1924-1946*. Toruń: Adam Marszałek, 2011, p. 262-269.
 50 See: LEWEK, A.: *Podstawy edukacji medialnej i dziennikarskiej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo UKSW, 2003, p. 68.

of media “are only too often used as an incentive to evil passions and greed for gain”.⁵¹ Because of the immense influence they have on the recipients, the Pope described the media as “most powerful means of publicity”.⁵² According to the Pope, this phrase has a positive tenor, since the media “can be of great utility for instruction and education when directed by sound principles”.⁵³ A year later, i.e. on 31st December 1930, another Encyclical Letter was issued – *Casti connubii*. It was dedicated to the matter of Christian marriage, which is endangered by the film-makers and the producers: “by cinematographs portraying in vivid scene, in addresses broadcast by radio telephony, in short by all the inventions of modern science, the sanctity of marriage is trampled upon and derided; divorce, adultery, all the basest vices either are extolled or at least are depicted in such colours as to appear to be free of all reproach and infamy.”⁵⁴

For the field of audiovisuality, it is vitally important that the Encyclical of Pius XII *Miranda prorsus* issued in 1957, concerning cinematography, radio, and television is considered.⁵⁵ At the beginning the Pope emphasised the significance of the Encyclical promulgated by his predecessor, referring to his words, which are worth analysing also in the context of the theology of media: “It is, in fact, urgently necessary to make provision that in this field also the progress of the arts, of the sciences, and of human technique and industry, since they are all true gifts of God, may be ordained to His glory and to the salvation of souls and may be made to serve in a practical way to promote the extension of the Kingdom of God upon earth.”⁵⁶ This statement marks the beginning of the theology of media, since it points out the need to introduce God’s teaching into “arts, sciences, and human technique and industry”, which is completely justified.

Nowadays, the notion of ‘technique’ refers also to the modern media, while the attempt to be made assumes efforts aiming at theological interpretation of the modern inventions in a practical way, e.g. preparing people to evangelization mission of modern media, as well as in a theoretical way, i.e. doing scientific researches concerning the ideas related to the theology of media. Therefore, keeping in mind human involvement in the mass media, Pius XII wrote: “From the art and letters of antiquity down to the technology of our day all the means by which men are united with one another have tended to this high end, that in this task men might in some way be ministers of God.”⁵⁷ These words prove the intention of the Church is to help the man cooperate with God using the modern media. This is extremely important especially for the professional journalists, who are able to use modern inventions in order to work with God.

In the Encyclical *Miranda prorsus* Pius XII focused on three types of audiovisual media – film, radio, and television. According to him, “in artistic, technical, and economic matters each has its own peculiar problems.”⁵⁸ The most important elements of the exhaustive analysis of the audiovisual message, which Pius XII presented in this document, should be discussed at this point.

3.1 “Aural and Visual Techniques” – The Possibilities

According to Pius XII, “aural and visual techniques” allow for the transfer of large-scale information. Additionally, this process becomes strengthened by having an influence on the senses. The Pope refers at this point to the important words of St. Thomas, who stressed that mental recognition has sources in the senses, just like spiritual recognition. In the opinion of Pius XII, this correlation accounts for a sufficient argument in favour of the idea that the “aural and visual technical means” should not be used just for fun, but they “are not only means of recreation and relaxation, though many listeners and viewers ask nothing more; they are also capable of furthering man’s intellectual development and growth in virtue and can make a major contribution

51 PIUS XII: *Divini illius magistri*. No. 90.

52 PIUS XII: *Divini illius magistri*. No. 90.

53 PIUS XII: *Divini illius magistri*. No. 90.

54 CHUDY, K.: Zainteresowanie Kościoła środkami audiowizualnymi. In ADAMSKI, F. (ed): *Kościół a kultura masowa*. Kraków: WAM, 1984, p. 85.

55 See: URE, M.: Chiesa e media nella società dell’informazione: sfide e tensioni. In VIGANÒ, D. E. (ed): *Dizionario della comunicazione*. Roma, 2009, p. 869-888.

56 PIUS XII: *Miranda prorsus*. No 9. (MP).

57 MP, 27.

58 MP, 24.

to the proper education and development of civil society in our times.”⁵⁹ Since these technologies influence human sight and hearing, they can be much more effective in reaching the recipient than the press.⁶⁰

3.2 Media as the Transmitters of Values and Anti-values

Pius XII devotes a lot of attention also to the subject of morality in the context of audiovisual media and he asks the basic question: “Why is it that they occasionally become the instruments of evil, or the paths which lead to it?”⁶¹ He explains that evil cannot come from God, who is “perfect and absolute Good”, or “from those means of communication which are His precious gifts”. Evil is just a result of abusing these gifts by the man “endowed with free will”.⁶²

As for spreading values by means of aural and visual techniques, Pius XII points out their servient nature in reference to truth and goodness. He also explains at this point, which is enormously significant for the contemporary audiovisual media, that “To serve truth means more than simply to refrain entirely from falsehood, lies, and deceit; it means shunning everything that can encourage a way of life and action that is false, imperfect, or harmful to others.”⁶³ Serving truth and goodness may be done above all through spreading information, educating (by means of didactic films, TV and radio programmes) and shows, the last two being the most important. Pius XII indicates that the educational role of the aural and visual media is often exploited for purposes that are incongruous with the teaching of the Church, e.g. for “propaganda against religion”,⁶⁴ while they should mainly serve “the cultural and professional education and – above all – the Christian sophistication”.⁶⁵ Afterwards, the Pope expresses his appreciation of the teachers and educators who use the aural and visual technologies for a noble cause.

Pius XII also emphasises the role of shows, i.e. the dramatic action: “They can be called schools in this sense, that dramatic action is presented in scenes in which vivid pictures created by moving light are synchronised with voices and music in a fascinating way, so that they reach not simply the intelligence and other faculties, but the whole man, unite him to themselves, and almost force him to take part in the plot.”⁶⁶ This quality of the audiovisual message is a subject of interest for numerous researchers; especially for contemporary sociologists, psychologists and pedagogues.

3.3 Freedom to Spread Messages

Furthermore, in the Encyclical, the Pope states that the Church has every right “to communicate that which has been entrusted to her by divine command”.⁶⁷ Therefore, nobody is allowed to limit the usage of aural and visual means by the Church, particularly the state authorities. From the perspective of the Church, the most important thing here is the spreading of Christian values via mass media.

3.4 Education for Receiving the Aural and Visual Messages

Next, the Pope concentrates on the education or formation of properly receiving the aural and visual messages. This type of teaching he describes as an “enormous effort”.⁶⁸ However, he continues to say that the teaching itself is not sufficient. The importance of endorsing shows is producing “a different sort of show that is not directed to a few select spectators, but to vast numbers of men who differ in age, in walk of life, and in degree of culture”.⁶⁹

59 MP, 47.

60 MP, 49.

61 MP, 29.

62 See: MP, 30.

63 MP, 35.

64 MP, 58.

65 Radio message to the faithful in Columbia (11th April, 1953).

66 MP, 62.

67 MP, 32.

68 MP, 64.

69 MP, 64.

Another document issued by the Church that concentrates on the issue of audiovisual messages is the Decree on the media of social communications called *Inter mirifica* made by the Council at Vatican two and was promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 4th December, 1963.

At the beginning it was written that “among the wonderful technological discoveries which men of talent, especially in the present era, have made with God’s help, the Church welcomes and promotes with special interest those which have a most direct relation to men’s minds and which have uncovered new avenues of communicating most readily news, views and teachings of every sort”. The whole document is characterised by a positive attitude towards audiovisual media.⁷⁰

This decree also gave birth to the post-conciliar preoccupation with the audiovisual education, which refers to the lay people (both recipients and senders of the information), and to clergymen as well, especially for the seminarians. There is an increasing tendency of treating the mass media in this context: “Nowadays, a seminary without access to the mass media is an anachronism. One cannot visualise an education centre cut off from the world, i.e. deprived of the access to the press, radio, films, television, and theatre. These are not, in fact, priority objectives in the seminary formation, but rather marginal, but as the elements which take a lot of place and time in the life of the contemporary man.”⁷¹ ‘*Inter mirifica*’ should be analysed together with pastoral instruction *Communio et progressio* issued by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications in 1971. It is worth adding here that “its undoubtedly valuable advantage is elaborating the theology of the social communication means, as well as opening up to a dialogue on this subject, both within the Church and between her and the outer world”.⁷²

Audiovisuality is also the topic of the pastoral instruction *Communio et progressio*. It is a compilation characterised by a positive attitude toward the means of social communication: “The Church sees these media as ‘gifts of God’ which, in accordance with His providential design, unite men in brotherhood and so help them to cooperate with His plan for their salvation.”⁷³ These words encourage the undertaking of theological research by using radio, television and film as transmitters of the information. The first part of this document might be an excellent basis for such studies. It is entitled “The Christian View of the Means of Social Communication: Basic Points of Doctrine” and it presents the following aspects concerning the audiovisual message:

- by using social communication it is possible to indicate the problems and finding ways of solving them together, with the intention of creating a sense of hope. As the Pontifical Council for Social Communications emphasises, “A Christian estimate of the contribution that the media make to the well-being of mankind is rooted in this fundamental principle”;⁷⁴
- media is an element of human activity, which – in turn – is “an act of cooperation in the divine work of creation and conservation”;⁷⁵
- media play an important role in shaping the community: “In the Christian faith, the unity and brotherhood of man are the chief aims of all communication and these find their source and model in the central mystery of the eternal communion between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who live a single divine life.”⁷⁶ So, the Church notices that media, especially the audiovisual ones might “contribute a great deal to human unity”;⁷⁷ since the mass media provide people with the ability to “serve, to build new relationships and to fashion a new language which permits men to know themselves better and to understand one another more easily”.⁷⁸

70 More on this subject in: BARAGLI, E.: *Inter mirifica vent'anni dopo*. In *Ecclesia Mater*, 1983, No. 1, p. 51-55; ROLFES, H.: *Gibt es eine kirchenamtliche Lehre der Sozialen Kommunikation? Ein Rueckblick 40 Jahre nach 'Inter Mirifica'*. In *Communicatio Socialis*, 2004, No. 37, p. 219-244; PILERS, F., J.: *Church and Social Communication, 40 Years of 'Inter mirifica' and Beyond*. In *Verbum SVD*, 2005, No. 3, p. 261-269.

71 ZIMON, D.: *Środki społecznego przekazu myśli w seminarium duchownym*. In *Śląskie Studia Historyczno-Teologiczne*, 1971, No. 4, p. 337.

72 PAMUŁKA, P.: *Środki społecznego przekazu a dzieło ewangelizacji*. In *Homo Dei*, 1992, No. 2-3, p. 24.

73 *Pontifical Council for Social Communication: Communio et progressio*. In ADAMSKI, F. (ed): *Kościół a kultura masowa*. Kraków: WAM, 1984, No. 2 (CP).

74 CP, 6.

75 CP, 7.

76 CP, 8.

77 CP, 9, 12.

78 CP, 12.

The characteristics of social communication means described above prove that the first part of this document is an extremely important piece of research material for the theology of media, and the foundation of this branch of science. However, it must be emphasised that a study involving both these elements – modern media and theology (in doctrinal terms) – is not a simple or popular task. One of the dangers might be misinterpretation of the theology and more frequently there are case studies concerning the second and third part of this pastoral instruction. The second one is entitled “The Contribution of The Communications Media to Human Progress”. It involves “The Work of the Media in Human Society” and “The Best Conditions for Their Proper Working”. Influence of the modern media is the subject of numerous works. According to *Communio et progressio*, the social communication means:

- “are able to participate in a world-wide exchange in search of brotherhood and cooperation”;⁷⁹
- “lay their part in eliminating illiteracy and in providing both basic and further education”;⁸⁰
- “can, very effectively, help people in developing countries to achieve progress and freedom”;⁸¹
- “establish a measure of universal equality in all men, whatever their place in society”;⁸²
- “enrich men’s minds, [...] help them to keep in touch with reality by providing the sights and sounds which are the very stuff of life. They bring far away times and places within their grasp”;⁸³
- influence the development of communicative and ethical competence.⁸⁴

In addition, the media is an important element of human development, mainly due to how it shapes public opinion, spreading information, teaching and advertising⁸⁵ (second part of the document). In the context of audiovisual media, it is worth discussing the right to be informed and to inform,⁸⁶ since it is due to the phenomenon of audiovisuality that information has changed its meaning. Modern aural and visual possibilities enhance human perception concerning the reception of messages. There is a remark in this document stating that “communicators must give news that is quick, complete and comprehensible.”⁸⁷ and it is the audiovisual media that make it possible.

However, *Communio et progressio* contains some statements that let the reader believe that even if the transfer of audiovisual messages lack something, it is enough to fill the gaps in order to make the communication complete. First of all, information distributed by the mass media needs to be based on “competent men for comments, background briefing and discussion.”⁸⁸ In this document the Church says that the precondition of complete and proper communication is that “communicators must hold the wandering attention of a harried and hurried public by vivid reporting. And yet they must not give way to the temptation of making the news sensational in such a way that they risk distorting it by taking it out of context or by exaggerating it out of all proportion”.⁸⁹ In addition, while preparing information the senders are supposed to make use of different sources.

Audiovisual media are also mentioned in such documents as: an apostolic exhortation by Pope Paul VI *Ewangelii nuntiandi* (1975), a post-synodal apostolic exhortation of Pope John Paul II (1988), a Papal encyclical by Pope John Paul II *Redemptoris missio* (1990). These documents refer only in brief to the role

79 CP, 19.

80 CP, 20, 95.

81 CP, 20.

82 CP, 20.

83 CP, 20.

84 CP, 38.

85 Positive influence of advertising on the economic development and politics is presented in the document issued by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications entitled *Ethics in the Social Communication Means*.

86 An interesting afterthought appears here – concerning the subject of the information within the Church and the notion of the religious information, which was often referred to by John Paul II: “I venture to call upon you also to an effort of comprehension, as to a loyal pact: when you report on the life and activity of the Church, try even more to grasp the authentic, deep and spiritual motivations of the Church’s thought and action. The Church, on her side, listens to the objective testimony of journalists on the expectations and demands of this world. (...) it is the Gospel that must always inspire her attitude. See JOHN PAUL II: *Information Serving the Truth*. Address of his holiness John Paul II to representatives of the international press. Vatican, October 21, 1978. It is also worth to be researched. In this context, a valuable writing is PRZYBYSZ, M., MARCYŃSKI, K. (eds.): *Media i Kościół. Polityka informacyjna Kościoła*. Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2011; MARCYŃSKI, K.: *Gli ultimi giorni di Giovanni Paolo II e i media polacchi*. In MAZZA, G. (ed.): *Karol Wojtyła, un pontefice in diretta. Sfida e incanto nel rapporto tra Giovanni Paolo II e la tv*. Rome: RAI-ERI 2006, p. 263-276.

87 CP, 38.

88 CP, 38.

89 CP, 40.

of mass media in the context of evangelization. However, it is worth it to briefly contemplate No. 42 of *Evangeliū nuntiandi*. Paul VI states that “modern man has passed beyond the civilisation of the word, which is now ineffective and useless, and that today he lives in the civilisation of the image.”⁹⁰ Thus he implies that the Church should come to terms with the perceptive condition of the contemporary man and try to use audiovisual media to preach God’s Word more bravely, since they shall certainly improve the evangelization process.

Also Pope Benedict XVI referred to audiovisual media (mostly to the Internet), sometimes even in documents concerning other subjects. For example, in his Papal encyclical entitled *Caritas in veritate*, the Pope points out that the media “can have a civilising effect not only when, thanks to technological development, they increase the possibilities of communicating information, but above all when they are geared towards a vision of the person and the common good that reflects truly universal values.”⁹¹ This statement again represents a positive attitude towards the power of the media as well as an appeal to make them serve the civilising purposes understood as such “a development of the man which is harmonious, balanced, purposeful, which reflects the supernatural order and concerning all the spheres of life, aiming thus at achieving the state of full humanity.”⁹²

4 Media Theology – Theology of Communication

From the above analysis it is quite evident that the reflection on the Church concerning audiovisual communication is very rich. K. Chudy puts it extremely well saying “nowadays the Church keeps a close watch on the modern life, demonstrating kindness, admiration, and support at the same time as relating to contemporary technological development. It is also apparent that the Church has started to express strong fascination with modern technological solutions, especially in the context of film, which is a very interesting expression of contemporary cultural development.”⁹³ Therefore, a natural implication of this Church’s reflection on the media (especially of the Vatican Council) became establishing a new branch of science, defined as the means of socially communicating theology or theology of media. This process was inspired mostly by the words of the decree on the media of social communications *Inter mirifica* (1963): “This sacred Synod (...) judges it to be its duty to treat of the principal questions linked with the media of social communication.”⁹⁴ This emerged from the contemporary need of modern man, for whom the technological development is very characteristic, thus resulting in the expansion of media. The Church has to become involved in working with the media not only in a practical way, but also in relation theory. Theology is obliged to react to all modern challenges. It is apparent that in contemporary human life mass media permeate our spirituality and psyche. Hence, it is necessary to conduct scientific research concerning all the aspects of audiovisual communication.

However, there are just a few definitions of media theology. Some efforts were made after the Second Vatican Council, the example being the *Inter mirifica* decree. Although one shall not find that there is a definition of the media theology, but still it is a valuable source of information on the Church’s opinion regarding the media. It indicates the guidelines concerning the formation of senders and receivers who are the subject of research in the field of media theology.

It is worth discussing the definition created by K. Klauza, who understands that “mass media theology, or the theological mass mediology” as “a branch of science which deals with various aspects of the social communication means functioning within the Church’s reality.”⁹⁵ This definition also refers to the pastoral theology⁹⁶ because nowadays man explores the world through the prism of the media. R. Hajduk observed justly,

that “before religion was characterised only by the culture-creating power, allowing for communicating the same message to any community and all its members. When the era of the cinema started, the public social life broke free from the Church’s wings.”⁹⁷ Therefore, today the Church cannot step aside and leave the stage for modern communication means, but makes use of them in the process of reaching the people. Hence the subject of mass media’s role in the theological context is so important.

The research concerning theology of social communication means dealing with the notion of communication, and also the communicative and ethical competences with this new media communication technology environment. Therefore K. Klauza stresses the need for discussing the theology of communication – “where the communication results in shaping the human community based on receiving and making use of the same information concentrated on common worries, and evaluation systems, there is basis for practical implementation of the anthropological rooted in the Gospel.”⁹⁸ Communication is a process closely connected to theology. It is characterised by the power of creating communities, it also has an ecclesiastic dimension. Theology of communication is based on the Trinitarian connection among the three consubstantial holy persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is a perfect exemplar of communication leading to unity, which is the goal that the Church wants to achieve.

The role model of communicating in such a way is Jesus Christ, who – while addressing someone – would change this person. And here it is worth mentioning the performative message, described by Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical letter on Christian Hope entitled “*Spe Salvi*”. Such messages change their recipient – his attitude, views and way of thinking, because they bring hope. An example of such a message is the Gospel, which is “not only ‘informative’ but ‘performative’ (...) it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing.”⁹⁹

A message aimed at changing the receiver in some way is thus a research subject of media theology, and next is translated into real action. As says R. Hajduk, “who preaches the word of God, stimulates the imagination of the listeners, who create in their minds pictures composed of the information received from the mass media, especially TV. Therefore, it is very important for the preachers of God’s word to go to the cinema from time to time and to be at home in the subject of most popular TV programmes.”¹⁰⁰ These words prove that audiovisuality in theology is justified as a subject of pastoral reflection and scientific research.

However, theological research on the media is not an easy task. One should not hastily connect theology to every aspect of the media since it might bring negative results and not serve the people well. And theology, which does not serve well, loses its *raison d’être*. Misinterpretation of the media in a theological context might resemble a post-modern interpretation of the surrounding reality. Lack of any regulations and limits of the reflection and methodology might do a lot of harm to this new branch of science – media theology. Sometimes one has an impression that the more strange combinations of theology and other fields we create, the better and more bravely we proceed. Is that really so? What is the theology of the social communication means about, in fact?

Usually, the attempts to define theology of social communication means that we must assume the description of what theology is about, what are its priorities, tasks and what is communication.¹⁰¹ According to P. Henrici, the first director of the Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Communication at the Pontifical

90 PAUL VI: *Evangeliū nuntiandi*. No. 42.

91 BENEDYKT XVI: *Caritas in veritate*. No. 73.

92 ADAMSKI, A.: Media narzędziem humanizacji w świetle 73. numeru encykliki Benedykta XVI „Caritas in veritate”. In GUZEK, K., LASKOWSKA, M. (eds.): *Człowiek w medialnym labiryncie*. Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2011, p. 172.

93 CHUDY, K.: Zainteresowanie Kościoła środkami audiowizualnymi. In ADAMSKI, F. (ed): *Kościół a kultura masowa*. Kraków: WAM, 1984, p. 87.

94 Second Vatican Council: *Inter mirifica*, No. 2.

95 LEWEK, A.: *Podstawy edukacji medialnej i dziennikarskiej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo UKSW, 2003, p. 50; KLAUZA, K.: *Eklezjogenetyczna funkcja środków społecznego przekazu*. In CHRAPEK, J. (ed.): *Kościół a środki społecznego przekazu*. Warszawa: Pallottinum, 1990, p. 160.

96 According to H. Seweryniak the theology of the media is part of the theology of culture. See: SEWERYNIAK H.: *Teologia na*

progu domu. In *Kultura – Media – Teologia*, 2010, No. 1, p. 15. The author provides the reader with some useful guidelines concerning the media theology, including its borders and limits in this field. See: SEWERYNIAK, H.: *Teologie na progu domu*. In *Kultura – Media – Teologia*, 2010, No. 1, p. 17-21.

97 HAJDUK, R.: *Apologetyka pastoralna. Duszpasterska odpowiedź Kościoła na wyzwania czasów współczesnych*. Kraków: Homo Dei, 2009, p. 38.

98 KLAUZA, K.: Polska teologia komunikowania społecznego. Wprowadzenie do dyskusji. In GÓZDŹ, K., KLAUZA, K. (eds.): *Teologia polska na XXI wiek*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2005, p. 217.

99 SpS, 2. See: LASKOWSKA, M.: Sprawcza rola przekazu w encyklice „Spe salvi”. In PARZYCH-BLAKIEWICZ, K. (ed.): *Zbawienie w nadziei. Wokół encykliki „Spe salvi” Benedykta XVI*. Olsztyn: Studio Poligrafii Komputerowej „SQL”, 2010, p. 143-158.

100 HAJDUK, R.: *Apologetyka pastoralna. Duszpasterska odpowiedź Kościoła na wyzwania czasów współczesnych*. Kraków: Homo Dei, 2009, p. 41.

101 See: CAPPELLI, P.: Proposta per un itinerario. In JOOS, A. (ed.): *Messaggio cristiano e comunicazione oggi*. Verona: Gabrieli Editori, 1988, p. 12; PASQUALI, A.: *Comprender la comunicazione*. Caracas, 1979; VIGANÒ, D. E.: *La Chiesa nel tempo dei media*. Roma: Edizioni OCD, 2008; GIULIODORI, G., LORIZIO, G.: *Teologia e comunicazione*. Milano-San Paolo: Edizioni San Paolo, 2001.

Gregorian University in Rome, theology of social communication means is not supplementary to theology, but naturally is a part of it, because communication is inseparable from theology.¹⁰²

Very few universities do research on media theology, both in Poland and all over whole world. In the case of Poland, such studies are conducted at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw (Institute of the Media Education and Journalism, Faculty of Theology, established in 2002 by the late Rev. Prof. Antoni Lewek), John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (Institute of Journalism and Social Communication, the Faculty of the Social Sciences) and at the Pontifical University in Kraków (Institute of Journalism and Social Communication, the Faculty of the Social Sciences).

One could enumerate a few objectives of the research on media theology. Founder of the Institute of Media Education and Journalism at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Rev. Prof. A. Lewek has the opinion that the main goal is educating journalists working for the press, radio, television, news organisations, marketing companies, public relation specialists, press spokesmen and teachers of the media education.¹⁰³ It is worth pointing out that such studies on media theology concerning audiovisual messages in the media and the communicative and ethical competences make an important contribution to the teaching of the Church and to the process of permeating biblical and theological messages concerning media and communication. This feature of contemporary theology of social communication is manifested in the analysis of the biblical subjects presented by the audiovisual media, especially in films.

This synthesis was prepared, among others, by the research workers of the Faculty of Theology at the University in Opole, where two academic conferences concerning the role of evangelization in cinema were organised, resulting in publishing two important scientific reports on this subject. As M. Lis says, "it is the cinema of 'hidden religiousness', crossing the boundaries of different faith, often makes the viewers ask themselves questions leading to transcendence. Moreover, the history of the cinema proves that the films dealing with important questions related to the sense of life, spirituality and God were not always made by people for whom faith was something obvious."¹⁰⁴

Such research is a practical implementation of the guidelines created by the Vatican Council and states that the Gospel must be present in social communication means. They are concrete spiritual help for the receivers, since they connect the Gospel to the everyday life and seek religious themes in popular films that are watched often and with pleasure. Such an attitude may make the people get closer to the Church and its teachings as well as enticing them to become involved in similar actions. K. Klauza states, "the program of Polish communication theology includes more and more publications, takes the form of academic lectures and gradually starts to become popularised."¹⁰⁵

4.1 Communicative and Ethical Competences

Media theology aside from theoretical reflections on media and their nature put a lot emphasis on practical aspects of communication. Two of them are communicative and ethical competences of those who work in media institutions. These aspects are topics of great concern in the writing and teaching of the Church. In the document *Communio et progressio* the Church teaches about the need to train communicators in different aspects of their work: "It is obvious that the communicators in the media who wish to excel, need a serious and specialised training in every aspect of their work (...). For if communicators are to meet their professional obligations, they must have sound knowledge as well as experience."¹⁰⁶

102 See: VIGANÒ, D. E.: *Teologia della comunicazione*. In VIGANÒ, D. E.: *Dizionario della comunicazione*. Rome : Carocci, 2009, p. 859-869.

103 See: LEWEK, A.: *Podstawy edukacji medialnej i dziennikarskiej*. Warszawa : Wydawnictwo UKSW, 2003, p. 30.

104 LIS, M.: *Figury Chrystusa w „Dekalogu” Krzysztofa Kiesłowskiego*. Opole : Redakcja Wydawnictw Wydziału Teologicznego Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2007, p. 5. Other publication on this subject: LIS, M. (ed.): *Ukryta religijność kina*. Opole : Redakcja Wydawnictw Wydziału Teologicznego Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2002.

105 KLAUZA, K.: *Polska teologia komunikowania społecznego. Wprowadzenie do dyskusji*. In GÓZDŹ, K., KLAUZA, K. (eds.): *Teologia polska na XXI wiek*. Lublin : Wydawnictwo KUL, 2005, p. 222.

106 CP, 71.

The Church stresses both the development of human and professional competences, the knowledge of the audience and most of all serving the people. This quote creates a great summary of what that entails: "In the training of a communicator human qualities as well as professional competence should be developed. Since the media of social communication are for mankind, communicators should be consumed by the desire to serve men. They can only achieve this if they really do know and love their fellow man. The more communicators remember that beyond the lifeless instruments which pass on their words and images are countless men and women alive, the more satisfaction they will get from their work and the better they will help others. The more they get to know their audience, the more they understand it and appreciate it, the more they will suit what they communicate to those who receive it. If they do this, they help to make the process of communication a communion of the spirit."¹⁰⁷

It is important for the Church to be aware of the modern ways of spreading information and to give relevant advice to communicators: e.g. today news are given quickly, completely and comprehensibly therefore there is a need for such workers who can do it but at the same time can be responsible for being well informed and for passing those information with great responsibility; media people must be competent for comments, background briefing and discussion.¹⁰⁸ A very interesting notice is given in the following lines of the analysed Document: "(...) many are the communicators who handle well the tools of their profession, but lack a deep understanding of the art of communicating with all it implies."¹⁰⁹ Listening to people inside and outside of the Church as well as those around the world (being aware of what is going on in the world) is a very important element of communicative competence. The Church "must therefore maintain contacts and lines of communication in order to keep a relationship with the whole human race. This is done both by giving information and by listening carefully to public opinion inside and outside the Church. Finally, by holding a continuous discussion with the contemporary world, she tries to help in solving the problems that men face at the present time."¹¹⁰

According to the Church's teaching, the key ethical competences are as follows: the ability to communicate the truth, share earnestly and honestly the information and to respect the privacy.¹¹¹ The foundation of these ethical competences is the knowledge of the ethical rules: "For the proper use of these media it is most necessary that all who employ them are acquainted with the norms of morality and conscientiously put them into practice in this area."¹¹² Benedict XVI in one of his messages on World Communication Day, said that "there is a need, in this sphere, for 'info-ethics', just as we have bioethics in the field of medicine and in scientific research linked to life."¹¹³

Conclusions

On the basis of the above analysis we are able to draw three specific conclusions. The audiovisual media along with communicative and ethical competences presented in the theological reflection on the social communication means, i.e. the points that have been presented in this article, could help to find the sources of authentic interest in the Church with regards to communication media. This interest is rooted in the Bible, in which the picture, sound and word represent the basis of the interpersonal communication and the relationships between God and people. The teaching of the Church frequently refers to the Bible in order to describe the current situation including media reality. Hence one can make a conclusion that the modern audiovisual media might serve as a bridge between the earthly reality and the spiritual world. This interdependence is increasingly and more bravely exposed by the research on audiovisual media in the context of media theology. Such theoretical deliberations translate into the practice, which means using modern media is important for making the world a better place to live.

107 CP, 72.

108 CP, 38.

109 CP, 71.

110 CP, 114.

111 Pontifical Council for Social Communication: *Ethics in Communication*. No. 23.

112 IM, 4.

113 BENEDYKT XVI: *Środki społecznego przekazu na rozdrożu między gwiazdorstwem a służbą. Szukać prawdy, by się nią dzielić. Orędzie na 42. Światowy Dzień Środków Społecznego Przekazu (2008)*. No. 3. In *L'Osservatore Romano*. R. 3:2008, p. 8.

The Church's reflection on the media brought into light a new branch of science, defined as social communication theology or theology of media. This process was inspired mostly by the words in the decree on the media of social communications *Inter mirifica* (1963). The new field within theology emerged from the contemporary need of modern man, for whom the technological development and using media is very characteristic. The Church has to become involved in working with the media not only in a practical way, but also in the related theory. Theology is obliged to react to all the modern challenges. It is apparent that in contemporary human life mass media permeate our spirituality and psyche. Hence, it is necessary to conduct scientific research concerning all the aspects of audiovisual communication.

Media theology – aside from the theoretical reflections on media and their nature – puts a lot of emphasis on the practical aspects of communication. Two of them are communicative and ethical competences of those who work in the media institutions. The Church teaches about the need to train communicators in different aspects of their work and stresses both the development of human and professional competences as well as the knowledge of the audience while most importantly serving the people. There are many communicators who handle the tools of communication well but lack a deep understanding of the art of communicating, i.e. all that it implies. Listening to people that are involved in the Church community as well as those outside the Church community (being aware of what is going on in the world) is a very important element of communicative competence. According to the Church's teaching, the foundation of ethical competences is the knowledge of the ethical rules. The key ethical competences are: the ability to communicate the truth, share earnestly and honestly the information and to respect the privacy. There is a need in the realm of media, for 'info-ethics', just as we have bioethics in the field of medicine.

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