The Church and the Media – Evangelism or Manipulation

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Abstract

Can the media kill faith? What is the relationship between the Church and the media? What should be the relationship between these two subjects that are oriented for large audiences? Should there even be a relationship between them? What is the character of the subjects building this relationship? Should the media have any sort of relationship with the Church, and vice-versa? These are some of the questions that arise when we think about the relationship between the media and churches. Both subjects have a common element in their activities: a relationship with a large number of users. Even more so, both the churches and the media need to build mutual relationships which will contribute to improving and achieving their interests and to developing various groups as well as individuals that they are targeting. On the one hand, the Church is tasked with proclaiming the Good News to the nations, while the media in their work try to communicate various information to as many users. In this way, both the church and the media meet their function of reaching massive audiences. Can churches use some of these media in fulfilling its task, or can some of the media use churches for promoting their products? These are questions which are sometimes burdensome but are primarily meant to enrich the fields of both subjects' activities.

Key words: *Christian churches, media, evangelism, manipulation*

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1   The author is stating his own opinion

A Medium – the Subject or Object of Communication

By medium as an element of communication, we imply any means through which communication is achieved whose presupposition, motives, contents, effects, and consequences are more or less determined by the nature of the medium itself. The media is a complex term which denotes public information systems which are used for spreading the news and audio-visual contents with the purpose of informing, educating, and entertaining the widest audiences. One of the definitions of a medium or media states that is, "any means, mediation, or tool, and especially way of communication which reaches the general public and contains advertisements" (Webster's 1982, 882).

In the *Dictionary of Media Studies,* Abercrombie and Longhurst (2007, 214) equate the terms "media" and "mass-media," though they do emphasize that the phrase, "mass-media" implies a very specific theoretical background which was initially connected with the concepts of a mass society, mass audience, and mass communication.

Zrinjka Peruško (2011, 15) summarizes: "Mass-media are institutions which meet the society's need for public communication in which all members of society can participate. The mass-media are simultaneously communication forms/products, institutions, and cultural formations." All mass-media share the following characteristics:

- Producing and distributing symbolic contents: information, ideas, culture, knowledge
- Channels for relations between people - senders and receivers; members of the mutual audience; in relation to society and its institutions
- The media operate in the public sphere as the communication infrastructure for the general public and for public opinion
- Participation is voluntary, in the spare time
- The media is, formally, without power; they do not have any defined hierarchical relationships between the producers of the message and the audiences
- An organization is professionalized; it is connected to the market and the industry; it relies on paid work, technology, and finances (in case of the Internet we are not usually talking about bureaucratic organizations, but even there the illusion of non-commercial character and freedom is being increasingly dispelled)
- They always have some sort of relationship with the state and the government, depending on the form of political regime (Peruško 2011, 21-22).

The Types of Media

Through the history of media development, we list several types of media, such as electronic media which include film, radio, television, computers (the In-

ternet), and printed media such as books, newspapers, magazines, comic books, posters, and others. As the media developed, so did their functions so we now have several important functions of the media, such as communicating information, the educational function, entertainment, and the communication-interactive function.

Certain authors (Vreg 1991, 51) categorized the functions of the mass-media in respect to:

a) Functions which are immanent to modern mass media (informative, orientation, and action);

b) Functions performed by the mass-media, such as social functions in cooperation with other institutions in the society (functions of socialization, recreation, interaction, and integration), and

c) Functions which stem from people's social activities (political, economic, cultural, scientific, educational, sports-related, religious, and other activities).

As we have stated, communication is an important part of media content and it represents sending and receiving various types informative contents. It is a process of sending information, usually through speech. The word, "communication," literally means: sharing, making a thing communal. Communication is usually written with three main dimensions in mind: contents, form, and purpose. The contents and form of communication create messages which are then sent toward the target, and that can be the person themselves, or another person (in interpersonal communication), or some other entity such as a group, organization, or society.

The basic division of communication refers to personal and public communication. Personal communication is usually two-way, and the sender of the personal message usually expects an answer from the person they directed the message to, while public communication is basically one-way, because the message is directed towards many, but the sender of the message does not expect the numerous audiences to give a direct answer to the message. Public communication is also called mass or social communication because in it the contents are aimed at a "mass" of society (community) members. Business communication is considered partly personal (between business partners) and partly public (memos, advertisements, etc.).

We can group types of communication into: personal communication, which is usually one-on-one; classical public communication which is one-on-many, where one source airs the contents and many receive it; and a new form of social communication, the so-called mass self-communication which is many-on-many, where many sources provide the contents and many others receive it.

The fundamentals of the communication process include the source, the message, the channel, communication noise, the receiver, feedback, and everybody

doing their part in the communication process. The process begins when the source sends the message (thoughts and/or emotions) through the channel (audible, visual, olfactory, tactile, gustatory) to the receiver. During sending and receiving the message, there is a lot of noise which disturbs the sending and receiving of the message, and upon the reception of the message feedback is expected. Every instance of communication has the aspects of content and relations. The content aspect relates to the topic of conversation while the relational aspect has to do with expectation and attitude towards the interlocutor.

The contents of communication can be divided into the verbal and non-verbal components. On one hand, the verbal communication involves words, while non-verbal communication involves gestures, mimicking, accent, speaking style, body posture. Non-verbal communication makes almost 78% of the message, while 13% are voice and enunciation, and only 9% is the content. Non-verbal behavior is used for expressing emotions, showing our attitude, reflecting personality traits, and encouraging or changing the verbal communication.

Noise in communication is anything that disrupts communication or hinders it, anything that twists the message, and everything that is stopping the receiver to receive the full message. Noise can appear when we form our message (i.e., the message is unintelligible, unclear or ambiguous); during its transfer (losing parts of the message, interfering signals and information), and while receiving the message (lack of attention, informational overload of the receiver, misunderstanding, misinterpretation of the message).

Manipulation and the Media

Through their activities, certain media create a reality in the collective psyche, thus contributing to the manipulation of the public or some of its groups. As we observe the Christian media, it is a fact that they have the "primary importance of Parresia, i.e., of being brave to speak boldly and freely" (Prskalo 2015, 42).

According to the opinion of American philosopher and Professor Emeritus of linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Noam Chomsky, there are ten most effective strategies that certain members of the media are using in order to establish manipulation over the general public, i.e., the target groups that such information is intended for.[2]

Chomsky emphasizes that certain ways are more obvious and sophisticated but all are equally effective and, from a certain standpoint, humiliating. Encouraging inferiority, promoting the feeling of guilt, or creating false problems and then solving them are just some of those tactics.

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2   See more at: http://www.portalsvijesti.com/teme/nwo/noam-chomsky-10-nacina-manipula-cije-medija/

1. The distraction strategy. The key element of controlling the society is the distraction - or hindrance - strategy, which has the purpose of distracting the public eye from important issues and the changes which are decided on by the political and economic elites through the technique of a flood of continued interruptions using useless information. This is a way of keeping the public distracted from the real social issues and occupying their minds with non-consequential matters.

2. Creating problems and offering solutions. This method is also called "problem-reaction-solution," which creates a problem - "a situation" - which evokes certain reactions from the public by offering the main measures that the "rulers" want the public to accept but would otherwise be opposed to them.

3. Gradual strategy. In order to force the public to accept the unacceptable, a problem needs to be created gradually whether it takes a year or longer if necessary. This is the way new radical social and economic conditions were introduced during the 1980's and 1990's: privatization, instabilities, flexibility, mass unemployment – just so many changes which would have caused a revolution had they been introduced all at once.

4. The deferment strategy. Another way of making the public accept unpopular decisions is to call them "painful but necessary" in order to gain the public's acceptance for future changes because, according to psychology, it is easier to accept a future sacrifice than a present one. First, because the efforts won't be used immediately. Second, because the public, i.e., the masses, have a tendency to expect that everything will be "better tomorrow," and that their sacrifice will probably be avoided.

5. Talking down to the public. Most commercials are aimed toward the general public and they utilize the discourse, arguments, and characters, especially childish intonations, which seems to imply that the viewers are very immature and incapable of making their own decision.

6. Using the emotional side. Attempts are made to cause a shortcut in the rational analysis and ideas, desires, fears, and compulsions are caused, or reactions are caused, which then have to be accepted.

7. Keeping the public in ignorance and mediocrity. Attempts are made to make the public incompetent in understanding technology, achieving a means of their control.

8. Encouraging the public to be content with mediocrity. This promotes a stance that the public thinks that it is quite normal not to strive for development and education, and to be happy with mediocrity.

9. The individual needs to blame himself. A stance is developed where the individual must believe that they are the only culprit of their misfortune, due to their lack of intelligence, ability, or not trying hard enough. This causes individuals to become inactive because it turns out they are the ones at fault, which

leads to depressive conditions whose only purpose is to stop the individuals from acting.

10. Getting to know the individual better than they know themselves. It is a fact that, during the past 50 years, the advances in science have led to the emergence of the accelerated growth of "holes" in the knowledge between the public and those who are owned by the ruling elites. In this way, a certain system is imposed as the one possessing advanced knowledge about human beings, whether physically or psychologically. This allows the system to have increased control and greater power over individuals than individuals themselves.

The Relationship Between the Church and the Media

Christian churches have always tried to utilize the means which helped them in communicating the Good News message to believers, as well as all other people.

When we observe the influence of the media on certain churches and their believers, including the influence of certain church media on the public and the society, we need to point out that all media, in their various forms and levels of power, have an impact on believers and on their behavior.

By using the phrase, "ethics of social communication," Hrvoje Lončarević (2016, 55-70) applies ethical assessment in four areas: the social political community which uses laws and other means to regulate and help (or hinder) social communication; publishers or media systems which more or less define the ideological and political orientation of their media, as well as their inter-relations which are marked with mutual competition; on journalists and editors as people and groups who have their codes of honor; and finally, the public which is called to have a say in the human society discourse which is constantly taking place in the media. On the other hand, D. B. Winter (2007, 250) groups the ethical issues encouraged by the media into three areas: the questions of power of a society that is saturated with media and the question of truth.

It is a fact that at the basis of any religion and any church there is communication which is essentially two-way: communication with the transcendent and communication with the members or potential members of a religious group. Founders of all religions were excellent communicators – they were basically excellent speakers who used the media of their time and communicated with the members or potential members of the religious group.

Communication in church today must be bidirectional - towards the outside and towards the inside. The church must accept the fact that communication with the society implies developing communication within the church, because only when both modes of communication are good can the church make its voice be

heard outside its walls. That is why church operations will not only be focused on reacting *post factum* ("after the event" - which is also valuable and needed); instead, the emphasis is placed on opening discussions and questions ("pre-emptive operations"), on opening topics for which it believes that it is good or necessary if they were present in the public discourse and the society in general.

Evangelism and the Media

The process of evangelism as one of the most important tasks of the church does not mean simply utilizing the media because there are differences between the actions and language of the media and the language of evangelism. Evangelism prefers a personal relationship and direct contact between people, and it emphasizes faithfulness to the Gospel message, which is always experienced as a gift. On the other hand, the message of the media is not so "direct" because communication usually does not happen through the direct contact with other people, since it is long-distance. That is why this type of communication is vulnerable to manipulation.

There are two important questions here: first, how does a person face with religious topics and the question of faith in the world of new media and second, what are the characteristics of communities which are forged within social networks?

When it comes to the life of the church, the 21st century media will be mostly interested in any conflict, especially inside church hierarchy. Besides, religious themes are on the fringe of media interest, and all of attention is focused on other areas such as politics, sports, leisure time, and entertainment.

Sometimes a religious event will make it into the public eye but will be portrayed, like most other events, in a sensationalist manner, and sometimes church is discussed in the media as an ornamental and sentimental framework in the context of ceremonies, presenting it as an institution which guards and "continues" tradition.

Most media is not interested in the everyday life of faith with an argued discussion regarding religious themes. Media reports and reporting about religious themes in general reveals ideological influences, i.e., prejudice towards anything that is religious and we can see all of this in the context of spreading relativism.

However, it is not possible to evangelize without communicating. Evangelism is communication words, which is much more than words that just talk about or portray something. This is a proclamation that points to a certain way of life but also, it is the Word that is Life. In this communication arena of our day we see the clash between various ways of thinking, different attitudes, and lifestyles.

How Do We Use the Internet for Evangelism?

Modern media allows for simple and accessible quality communication and we can use to most popular ones for evangelism.

1. Facebook – social networks have become commonplace and are part of communication. By sharing content, we can reach thousands of people in a few minutes if our content is interesting, attractive, "like-worthy," and share-worthy. Through publishing our own personal testimony, Gospel quotes, thoughts by believers, pictures with encouraging thoughts, by sharing good quality articles from Christian web portals and sites, we are performing a form of evangelism which can influence our friends.

2. YouTube – as technology progresses, so do mobile phones and tablet computers. Thus, it is possible to record a testimony or a Christian message with no hassle and just publish it on the Internet. Videos can be shared via social networks. We can also make our own Internet TV channel.

3. Chat – it is a form of direct written communication which is useful in maintaining communication between dislocated participants. The conversation is happening in real time in written form, and each participant needs to be online at the same time.

4. Skype - functions as a P2P (peer to peer) network, so in theory it is impossible to overload it. This method is a really popular tool for communicating through the Internet. It offers the features of a standard chat followed enhanced with audiovisual broadcasting.

5. Writing a blog – creating one's own contents is what today's Web (so-called Web 2.0) is all about. One often wishes to share something with others so they seek for their own blog which gives them a spot on the Internet which is just their own and where one can use their written word.

6. E-mail – there are numerous emails which circulate and which are being forwarded. Sometimes, such emails are loaded with all kinds of garbage, but sometimes there is a good presentation, a story, and links to other contents there.

7. Reading, watching, following – there are places on the Internet where you can find articles by people who have already encountered religious questions that you are encountering, such as how to defend one's faith, how to respond to morally challenging questions, when to talk about faith in a place that is antagonistic towards faith, how to deepen one's relationship with God, and many other things. By reading blogs, watching videos, and following good religious contents and this type of religious education of sorts you will be able to become a great source of information and you will be able to offer a reply to the challenging questions your co-workers ask you. It is a great advantage to be versed in English. With all of these things combined you can become a great cyber evangelist.

The Church in the Media, and the Media in the Church

In today's modern computerized society, there are various forms of broadcasting through which churches establish their presence in media space, whether it is electronic or printed media.

In Croatia, churches have a media presence on public television and private TV networks. The most prominent among them include, "*Ekumena*" – program about interdenominational Christian dialogue; "*Duhovni izazovi*" – program about religious congregations and inter-religious dialogue, "*Mir i dobro,*" and "*Riječ i život.*" These programs, which air on national television, are not church programs in the sense that the church determines and edits the programs contents; instead, those are community-oriented programs whose editors form the public opinion according to their own convictions and religious and political stances. The church is aware that the public opinion is often not the place to meet and exchange opinions for the purpose of searching the truth together, because the process of searching for the truth and of creating public opinion often boils down to simple comparisons of personal opinions and feelings. The church needs to remain critical before the world of media; it must not close its eyes to the negative things, but it also needs to recognize the numerous values that the media bring into the society.

Aside from its presence in the media, which is often unsatisfactory but necessary, churches in Croatia today have different ways of using various forms of media in order to reach the public in communicating their messages. These include printed materials, TV programs and shows, radio programs, and especially the Internet. In starting, maintaining, and using the media, all denominations are met with financial costs, along with the lack of quality human resources and good will. For example, members of Evangelical Christianity in Croatia produce TV programs in several production houses, and they then have them aired, whether for free or commercially, mostly on local TV stations.[3]

As a medium, the Internet[4] forms the opinions and attitudes of members of society and the virtual world offered by the Internet is becoming more attractive and more appealing than everyday reality, thus taking the individual further away from the real world. In this way, the Internet is becoming more and more important in the church's media operations in terms of communicating Biblical and Christian messages to the general public. In Croatia, all denominations are invol-

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3 These include: programs by the 4Hmediji studio; TV program, "*Novi Život*" by producer and editor Oeystein Sandtorv, missionary from Norway; TV program, "KC Riječ Života," and programs, "*Super Knjiga*" by studio Christian Broadcasting Network South East Europe.

4 As the medium which is becoming increasingly important in communicating messages, the Internet was created in 1969 for the needs of the American Defense Ministry. Its name was ARPANET (the first four letters are an abbreviation for Advanced Research Project Agency), while "net" means computer network. The purpose of this network was connecting a certain number of computers in the USA to one another. Arpanet had a factor which was later key for the emergence and popularization of the Internet.

ved in Internet communication in some way, usually through their websites.[5]

By publishing and maintaining Internet pages, Christian churches express their role and their mission in society, from proclaiming the Good News message to expressing their stances regarding certain issues that are present in their society, regardless of whether those stances are constructive or critical towards certain issues.

View Regarding the Relationship Between the Church and the Media

Can the Internet "kill" faith? Using the Internet can destroy your faith - that is the conclusion of a study which reveals that a great decline in the number of believers in the USA from 1990 is in correlation with the increasing number of people using the Internet.

According to the mentioned study, in 1990 around 8% of American population stated that they have no religious belief of any kind, but by 2010 this number more than doubled, reaching 18%. We are talking about 25 million people. This is the reason why this study was conducted, in order to try and find out why are Americans losing faith.

University IT professor Allen Downey (see 2014) offered an answer to this question. He processed the data from a general social survey which followed religious views in the USA since 1972. He concluded that there are several factors which have contributed to fewer and fewer Americans declaring to be religious, but the most controversial among them is the increasingly frequent use of the Internet. He concluded that it was the use of the Internet that led to the decline of the number of believers in the USA in the previous two decades.

Downey attempted to ascertain if elements such as upbringing, social and economic status, and education influence the religiousness in people. Upbringing had the greatest influence, i.e., the circumstances of one's growing up, which means that people who were raised in religious families will most likely also go on to

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5   Among the many Roman Catholic Internet pages I'd like to point out the site of the Croatian Episcopal Conference (www.hbk.hr), the Informative Catholic Agency (www.ika.hr), and Catholics on the Internet (www.katolici.org). When it comes to Evangelical denominations, we have the Evangelical Pentecostal Church (www.epc.hr), The Alliance of Baptist Churches (www.baptist.hr), the Church of God (www.crkvabozja.hr), the Word of Life Church Alliance (www.rijeczivota.hr), the Protestant-Evangelical Council (www.pev.com.hr), as well as other numerous local congregations, institutions, and Christian organizations. As for Orthodox churches in Croatia, we must not forget the web pages of the Serbian Orthodox Church (www.spc.rs), the Montenegrin Orthodox Church (www.cpc.org.me), and the Macedonian Orthodox Church (www.mpc.org.mk).

accept this religion later in life.

Still, the number of people who have been raised in a religious way has been on the decline since 1990. We have seen an increase in the number of people raised with no religious convictions with 3.3% in 1980 to 7.7% during the last decade.

Downey's research revealed that the more educated a person is, the bigger the chances are that they will not have any religious leanings. Since 1980, the percentage of population with university education doubled, so it is no surprise that it also led to the increase in the number of people with no religious convictions.

According to Downey's calculations, the use of Internet is responsible for as many as 25% of people who have "lost faith." During the 1980's, very few Americans used the Internet, while in 2010 as many as 53% of the population used the Internet at least two hours a week, while 25% of them surfed the Web up to seven hours a week (Downey 2014, 7). this increase in the number of Internet users and the frequency of its usage coincides with the decline of number of believers. Downey concludes that using the Internet today has an almost equal influence on a person's religious beliefs as does upbringing. "For people who live in homogeneous communities, the Internet offers possibilities for finding information about other people and other religions, as well as the option of interacting with them," Downey explains (2014, 9).

Based on what we have said, we can draw two possible conclusions. First, if an increasing number starts coming out of the "organized religions," the number of people believing in God has not increased drastically. Second, the group of people who will continue declaring to belong a religion are the conservatives.

The fact is that the Church's communication and its evangelistic efforts in society should be primarily limited only to expecting a word or a dictate "from above," but that we need to constantly point to the importance of the dialogue which starts with the individuals, organizations, and groups at the grass-roots level. It is an important fact that the communication of the church with society also implies developing communication within the church, because only when both ways of communication are good can the voice of the church be heard. For the Church, the mass-media represent an important means of communication, both inside the churches themselves as well as the dialogue with the world.

Conclusion

Can the Church do without the media, or can the media do without the Church? In this modern age of communication, no, they cannot. Each message, whether spoken or written, is intended to be made public in every way possible, reaching the audience it was intended for or which it needs to impact into forming a certain attitude. The fundamental mission of the Church is evangelism, and it is not

possible to evangelize without communicating. Evangelism is communicating the word; it is a proclamation which points to a way of life, but it is also the Word which is Life.

Since the Church is called to accomplish the work of evangelism which the Lord Jesus Christ entrusted it with, it needs to be open to new technologies in which we see the intertwining of information technology, media, and communication technologies. In this process, Christians need to operate in the strength of Christian wisdom, not remaining happy with just communicating religious phrases but instead trying to bring the Evangelical spirit and meaning into this reality. The media are giving the Church a chance of offering the message of faith publicly, to attract attention in various ways which reflect religious lives, thus directly strengthening faith in everyday life. They can also be an adequate means of creating and preparing a direct contact, as well as information exchange and swift communication at the right time.

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Crkva i mediji – evangelizacija ili manipulacija

Sažetak

Mogu li mediji ubiti vjeru? Kakav je međusobni odnos crkve i medija? Kakav treba biti odnos dvaju subjekata koji su usmjereni prema većem broju korisnika. Treba li uopće postojati? Kakvi su ti subjekti koji izgrađuju taj odnos? Trebaju li mediji imati bilo kakav odnos s crkvama te crkve s medijima?

To su neka pitanja koja se nameću kada se promišlja o međusobnim odnosima između medija i crkvi. Oba subjekta sadrže u svom djelovanju zajednički element. Odnos prema većem broju korisnika. Tim više i crkve i mediji trebaju izgrađivati međusobne odnose koji će doprinijeti boljitku i ostvarivanju interesa i razvoju raznih grupa ali i pojedinaca kojima oni namjenjuju svoja djelovanja.

S jedne strane, Crkva ima zadaću naviještati Radosnu vijest Isusa Krista narodima, dok mediji svojim djelovanjima nastoje prenijeti razne informacije što većem broju korisnika.

Na taj način i crkva i mediji ispunjavaju funkciju masovnosti. Mogu li crkve primjenjivati neke medije u toj zadaći ili mogu li neki mediji koristiti crkve za plasiranje svojih proizvoda? Pitanja su koja ponekada i opterećuju, ali prije svega, obogaćuju prostore djelovanja obaju subjekata.