



REV. MAREK FILIPCZUK*

/MIASTO???????

MEDIA AT THE SERVICE OF MAN – ETHICAL DIMENSION OF COMMUNICATION

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/TiCz.2017.032>

INTRODUCTION

The service of truth to which the media are entrusted is a constant task not only for the legal and social entities which, by law and social mandate, create this reality but also for all for whom truth is the essence of interpersonal communication. The Church, as the depositary and proclaimer of the message of Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life, must in a special way take care of the contemporary media in such a way that they would bear witness to the truth and proclaim it. The task of the Church in bringing up a man to decently use the media is not only a moral challenge, but also a service of the new evangelization, the proclamation of Christ, and His truth that liberates. The means of social communication in fact are influential because they affect the whole of society. They swiftly inform the mass audience about the life of the

* Rev. Marek Filipczuk – a priest of the Diocese of Warsaw-Praga, moral theologian, doctor of moral theology, lecturer in moral theology at the Faculty of Theology at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw (filipczuk17@gmail.com).

modern world. They are indispensable to the increasingly frequent and close relations and to the functioning of the modern society. They also become a task for the modern Church.¹

At the beginning of the third millennium, the scope of the mutual communication between people is expanding, which has a profound effect on the culture throughout the world. Important changes in technology are only one aspect of this phenomenon. There is currently no place where the influence of the media on religious and moral attitudes, as well as on political and social systems, and also on the upbringing of the young generation can not be felt.

The truth is the fundamental value of information exchange whose main goal is to build interpersonal bonds and to develop the human person. From this simple but far-reaching consequence, it is necessary to define truth as an essential and necessary factor shaping the image of the media. Within visible creation, man is the only creature who not only is capable of knowing but who knows that he knows, and is therefore interested in the real truth of what he perceives. No one can be indifferent to the question of whether what they know is true or not. It is worth asking questions in this context: who has the right to inform and to tell the truth and what rights the receivers have. Attention should also be paid to the dangers of incompetent use of the social media. And finally, one should try to answer the following question: what should be done to guarantee the communicated information to be true.²

MEANS OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

The means of social communication, though they are directed by the communicators towards a single receiver, in reality reach and affect the whole of society. They swiftly inform the mass audience about the life of the modern world, opening up the soul and mind for today's times. Thus, they can indeed be considered indispensable to the increasingly

¹ On the subject of the Church & media relation, see more: K. Pokorna-Ignatowicz, *Kościół w świecie mediów. Historia-dokumenty-dylematy*, Kraków, 2002.

² See: M. Drożdż, *Osoba i media. Personalistyczny paradygmat etyki mediów*, Tarnów 2005.

frequent and close relations and to the functioning of the modern society.³ “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 most important of these inventions are those media which, such as the press, movies, radio, television and the like, can, of their very nature, reach and influence, not only individuals, but the very masses and the whole of human society, and thus can rightly be called the media of social communication.”⁴

While term “mass media” can refer to the television, radio, and internet, term “communication”, closely related to the subject discussed in this paper, is much more difficult to define. “Słownik wyrazów obcych” [in English: Dictionary of foreign words] defines it as “the movement which provides a link between distant places, the transfer of information between the system and the environment, or between two systems, interaction, exchange of ideas, giving information.”⁵

Participants of the international debate in Dublin on the right to social communication, stated as follows: “communication is a fundamental social process that enables individuals and communities to exchange information and ideas. This is the basic human need and the foundation of any social organization.”⁶ This is why the distinction of the interpersonal communication has been adopted, taking into account the type of contact between the communicator and the receiver. From this point of view, social communication is divided into individual and collective ones. Each of these can be both direct and indirect, whereas the indirect collective communication can be of a limited (specialized communication) or mass nature. Mass communications may be periodic (press,

³ Papieska Komisja ds. Środków Społecznego Przekazu, *Communio et progressio*. Instrukcja duszpasterska o środkach społecznego przekazu, Vatican City 1971, no. 6 [hereinafter abbreviated: CP].

⁴ Sobór Watykański II, *Inter mirifica*. Dekret o środkach komunikowania myśli, Poznań, 2002, no. 1 [hereinafter abbreviated: IM].

⁵ Cf. *Słownik wyrazów obcych PWN*, ed. H. Szkiłdź, Warszawa 1974, p. 374.

⁶ L. Dyczewski, *Kultura polska w procesie przemian*, Lublin 1995, p. 226.

radio, television, etc.) or non-periodic (mass-produced books, posters, films, records, flyers, etc.). With this division other divisions are crossed, and their criteria include various aspects of communication, such as: the intentions of the communicator – the communication can take form of an agitation, propaganda, advertising or education; types of a code – it may be verbal or pictorial; types of message – artistic or practical; type of receiver – it can be children or adults, etc.; subject – it can be e.g. the economy, politics, religion, education, etc.⁷

The impact of the media is probably the most explosive point of the polemic, referring to the means of social communication. The evaluation of media activities depends to a great extent on the evaluation of their impact on society.⁸ The contemporary social reality undergoes a constant process of thorough changes. These changes take place in all spheres of life, influencing the tactics of behaviour as well as the views and opinions about desirable behaviours. There are a lot of various factors responsible for the process of transformations as well as the hierarchy of the importance of the individual factors. The most noteworthy are the advances in knowledge, technology and invention, the processes of industrialization and urbanization, finally the socio-political changes and the changing conditions of being and the dissemination of specific ideological content that is proposed both in the process of education and propaganda influence through the mass media.⁹

There are a lot of ways of describing and evaluating the activities of the media. Basically, two main trends can be identified: behavioralism which quite broadly identifies the media analysis with a certain type of social knowledge, emphasizing the ability to measure multiple audiences and influence of their behaviour through controlled sociological experiments and studies; and criticism that attempts to analyze the media from a point of view of social and artistic theories, emphasizing the need for freedom in the creativity. It is “culturally focused” in a broad sense,

⁷ Cf. F. Adamski, *Komunikowanie masowe i jego oblicza*, in: *Kościół a kultura masowa*, ed. F. Adamski, Kraków 1984, p. 8.

⁸ Cf. A. Kozłowska, *Oddziaływanie mass mediów*, Warszawa 2006, p. 92.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-124.

taking into account institutions, historical context, aesthetic level, and group effects.¹⁰

When the impact of the media is discussed, one must always remember that they constitute only one element of a wider social reality. For this reason it is not always easy to distinguish the cause of changes from their effects. The media are changing the society, but also the society is changing the media. Until recently, few have questioned the growing media dominance over people's lives. Those who dealt with media critique, focused primarily on the content, such as the number of scenes of violence or sex in programs. Nowadays, it might be said that the media not only affect the culture, but they are an inherent part of it. One can turn off the TV, put away the newspaper, but it is impossible to escape the impact that the media exert on our lives.¹¹

It should be noted, however, that the role of the mass media in this general transformation process is not that they directly cause the change in attitudes and behaviour of the mass audience subject to that influence, but rather that they crystallize and reinforce the existing attitudes and opinions, or facilitate the transition from undecided opinions and decisions to the stronger ones. There are several types of factors and conditions that mediate in this process of shaping and crystallizing the opinions and consolidating the existing views, and these are as follows: the predispositions of the individual who determines his or her susceptibility to being influenced, selectivity in the choice of the content and memorizing it; impact of the so-called reference groups; daily interaction with colleagues, friends and relatives; influence of the so-called opinion leaders; selectivity of the communicated content, intended and implemented by the communicator with political power and designating a particular ideology.¹²

Moreover, one can not ignore circumstances which strongly seem to favour the process of the mass media affecting and making direct

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 117.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 166.

¹² A 'reference group' is the group with which a person identifies, whose membership is esteemed, whose opinion is important, and which determines this person's behaviour. Cf. F. Adamski, *Siła, zakres i skutki oddziaływania środków masowego przekazu*, in: *Kościół a kultura masowa*, ed. F. Adamski, Kraków 1984, p. 57.

changes in the previous opinions and behaviors of the receivers. This phenomenon is rather accidental. According to many theorists, it occurs when the receivers are in a situation of crossing pressures (then the impact is almost immediate, or direct); they loosen their relationships with the environment, the social class, the nation, the institutions, the organizations with which they are connected; they are subject to a propaganda influence which does not directly harm their beliefs, which are important for them, but attack progressively, systematically providing data, and at a specific moment leading to conflict with previously held beliefs.¹³

In the modern society the mass media play a role similar to the mirror shown in the fairy tale of the Snow White and the seven dwarfs. When we want to find something “best” in it, we can always see only our face there; and we will see it until a new day comes when we see something else in it. We will see the way of life or the heresy that transform the society, or at best the image of the society, created by us. We do not like the media when they hurt us or make harm to us. Then we want to get rid of them or at least accuse them of lying. We do not realize, however, that they have always lied to us because they have represented the image we wished. The same is true with the society in which we live and of which we are a part. The similar situation is with the Church which can use the media with extraordinary skill.¹⁴

J.R. Armogathe thinks that the media now occupy a place that people design for them: the media are either their idols or their slaves. If the people grant them unlimited power, the media will undoubtedly misuse it. If the people neglect them, the media will behave humbly and gently. But we should not be misled into thinking that it is possible not to care for them.¹⁵

Media as a primary communication link can therefore do too much or too little. Too much is when they try to manipulate the public opinion, even for the right purpose. Too little, when they narrow the space of their own responsibility, or when they do not contribute to the social communication bearing fruit of the increased rationality in the collective

¹³ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁴ Cf. J.R. Armogathe, *Zwierciadło królowej*, „Communio”, 6 (1995), p. 54.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 62-63.

life. The boundary between “too much” and “too little” depends on certain circumstances, time, and place. It is certainly impossible to draw this boundary precisely. In the media ethics we should, however, continually ponder over this boundary, emphasizing the responsibility of the parties involved in the social communication. Undoubtedly, the main burden of this responsibility lies with the political elites and the journalistic milieu. Politicians should shape the legal order in which the communication will be carried out smoothly and in conditions of freedom. Journalists are required to adhere to the norms of their own professional ethos, to be independent, and to build a mature public opinion.

It is worth to discuss the responsibility of the receiver of the information message. The receivers should discover in themselves the virtue of understanding the social reality and learn a well-understood criticism. By our own criticism we can undoubtedly influence indirectly the face of the mass media, and the way they affect the society.¹⁶

THE MEANS OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION VS. THE RIGHT TO TRUTH

In the human nature one can discover the desire for truth. In everyday life we observe the man's spontaneous striving to know the objective state of things. It is often unsatisfactory to use the “second hand” information. Within visible creation, man is the only creature who not only is capable of knowing but who knows that he knows, and is therefore interested in the real truth of what he perceives. No one can be indifferent to the question of whether what they know is true or not. If they discover that it is false, they reject it; but if they can establish its truth, they feel themselves rewarded.¹⁷

The concept of truth has a lot of meanings. Generally speaking, the truth is an idea, thesis widely considered to be unquestionable, either as

¹⁶ See: G. Nissim, *Wychowanie do odbioru mediów jako nagłące zadanie*, in: *Kultura i media 2*, ed. B. Spurgasz, Warszawa, 1996, pp. 20-35; See also: A. Lewek, *Podstawy edukacji medialnej i dziennikarskiej*, Warszawa, 2003.

¹⁷ Cf. Jan Paweł II, *Fides et ratio*. Encyklika o relacjach między wiarą a rozumem, Kraków 1998, no. 25 [hereinafter abbreviated: FR].

a result of the human experience or scientifically proven; it is what has come into being, is real and independent of subjective sensations and evaluations; the objective reality; interpretation, or representation of facts in accordance with reality, corresponding to what exists in the objective reality.¹⁸ On the other hand, the truth understood as uprightness in human action and speech is called truthfulness, sincerity, or candor. The truth or truthfulness is the virtue which consists in showing oneself true in deeds and truthful in words, and in guarding against duplicity, dissimulation, and hypocrisy.¹⁹ Man, being called to the truth, shapes himself when he is searching for the truth – in freedom, in time and in society. Far from being perfect, a human person must develop in his or her responsibility. This is because the human being is called to shape oneself in the depths of one's personal being and in all dimensions of social life.

From the ethics point of view, the person should completely recognize himself or herself as a historical and existential project of truth and master its tools: information and communication technology. The truth reveals and defines itself as the horizon toward which man is moving with all his being. Here the Gospel comes in aid with its concrete proclamation: for man the truth is the consistency of his intelligence and of existence with the highest reality of God, which is manifested by the creation, as well as values of conscience, and which is revealed in the word of Christ.²⁰

In searching for the truth the Christian has recourse to divine revelation, which in Christ is present in all its fullness. Christ has entrusted the Church with the mission of proclaiming this truth, and the whole

¹⁸ Cf. *Słownik Współczesnego Języka Polskiego*, Warszawa, 1996, p. 847.

¹⁹ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2468.

²⁰ Cf. Benedykt XVI, *Nowe technologie komunikacyjne i głoszenie Ewangelii*. Orędzie na 45. Światowy Dzień Środków Społecznego Przekazu, Watykan, 2011: „New horizons are now open that were until recently unimaginable; they stir our wonder at the possibilities offered by these new media and, at the same time, urgently demand a serious reflection on the significance of communication in the digital age. This is particularly evident when we are confronted with the extraordinary potential of the internet and the complexity of its uses. As with every other fruit of human ingenuity, the new communications technologies must be placed at the service of the integral good of the individual and of the whole of humanity. If used wisely, they can contribute to the satisfaction of the desire for meaning, truth and unity which remain the most profound aspirations of each human being.”

Church has the duty of remaining faithful to that truth.²¹ The very truth that we profess calls us to promote unity rather than division; reconciliation rather than hatred and intolerance. The free gift of our coming to know the truth places upon us the serious responsibility of proclaiming only that truth which leads to freedom and peace for all.²² In order to properly shape the public opinion, the right of access to sources and channels of information and the right to freedom of expression must first be recognized. It is the right based on the deep need of man and of the modern society.

The basis for rejecting the negation of truth, to be validly recognized as a fundamental principle in the field of social communication, can be sought in everyday experience. There we will find that every man, even if he preaches nihilistic or skeptical views, in his conduct he confirms the possibility of knowing the truth. In ordinary situations in which we act routinely, we know what is true and this is why we do not reflect on the truth and the possibility of knowing it. In everyday life we often use unequivocal judgments in which we say: “this is true”. The problem of knowing the truth in the life of an average person appears only when, due to the complexity of the situation, he or she begins to have doubts about the judgments on the truth. Then the negation of the very possibility of knowing the truth might take place. This may happen when a particular person does not want to bother, despite some doubt, discovering the truth and following it.²³

The common-sense acceptance of the idea of truth does not solve the essential difficulties we face while reflecting on the ethical principles of social communication. What left there still to be solved is such a fundamental question as the criteria for evaluating the veracity of a message.²⁴ The requirement of objective and thorough knowledge of what is to be the

²¹ Cf. Jan Paweł II, *Poszanowanie sumienia każdego człowieka warunkiem pokoju*. Orędzie na Światowy Dzień Pokoju 1991, in: *Orędzia Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II*, Kraków 1998, p. 124.

²² Cf. *ibid.*

²³ Z. Sareło, *Problem prawdy w mass mediach*, in: *Religia a mass media*, ed. W. Zdaniewicz, Ząbki, 1997, p. 19.

²⁴ See: Papieska Rada ds. Środków Społecznego Przekazu, *Etyka w środkach społecznego przekazu*, „L'Osservatore Romano”, 2001, no. 4, pp. 48-56.

message is a perfect ideal. This is because the human knowledge is always fragmentary. We can grasp only some, sometimes even quite numerous, but never all aspects of the examined reality.²⁵

The truth in social communication is also dynamic. It should not be interpreted in a relativistic sense, because the recognition of the dynamic nature of getting to know the truth, or of the search for truth, does not equate with the rejection of its objective and absolute character. The truth, even though its cognition at a given stage is not complete, has some fixed reference points and these points are of a transhistorical character. The process of reaching the truth is always related to the development of the personal entity. In the context of social communication, one can also talk about the gradual search of a community for a deeper knowledge of the truth. In practice this means, on the one hand, that a person (or community) is not a “quiet holder” of the whole truth, but is called to continually search for that fullness, and on the other hand, it is a call for tolerance to all who err but have a positive attitude towards the search for objective truth. The truth in social communication is not something that one learns and assimilates in a definitive way, but it is always something that is known in part.²⁶ Man tends by nature toward the truth. He is obliged to honor and bear witness to it: “It is in accordance with their dignity that all men, because they are persons (...) are both impelled by their nature and bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. They are also bound to adhere to the truth once they come to know it and direct their whole lives in accordance with the demands of truth.”²⁷

Modern people should be provided the information that is full, consistent, accurate and true so as to be able to understand the perpetually changing world in which they live. Man should also stand up for events and changes that continuously require him to give judgment and make decisions. Finally, man should assume an active and serious role in his

²⁵ Z. Sareło, *Problem prawdy w mass mediach*, p. 21.

²⁶ J. Nagórny, *Powołanie i posłannictwo dziennikarza w dzisiejszym świecie*, „Ethos” 24 (1993), p. 66.

²⁷ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2467.

community and be a part of its economic, political, cultural and religious life.²⁸ Therefore, in the society men have a right to information, in accord with the circumstances in each case, about matters they should know about. The proper exercise of this right demands, however, that the news itself that is communicated should always be true and complete, within the bounds of justice and charity. In addition, the manner in which the news is communicated should be proper and decent, in both the search for news and in reporting it.²⁹ Therefore, it is not enough for the information to be objective. In addition, the information should impose the boundaries required by the higher good. It should be able, for example, to respect the right of others to their good name and not to infringe the rightful secrets of their private life. This means that the information must be true and accurate.

The rights to information, communication, freedom of belief and expression are not a privilege, or predominance of individuals or groups. Their obligatory character does not even result from social benefit. These laws are enforced imperatively as human values, requirements absolutely necessary for man to live and flourish in his autonomy and rationality. The correlation of these rights and duties, based on an integral image of man, not only assures their unchanging character, but also points to the universal extent of their content. From this moment of the personal and social vocation of man results a moral confirmation of rights and duties. They appear closely related to one another in practical implementation and in development, since they are called to mutual conditioning and to dialectical mutual balancing.³⁰

The modern means of communication, serving the man's development, facilitate the communication, gathering the people in close community in which everybody participates in a dialogue in search of general brotherhood. Thanks to the media, daily conversations of individuals actually resonate, spread and disseminate, thus creating a public dialogue of the whole society. The flow of information and opinion pouring through

²⁸ Cf. CP 34.

²⁹ Cf. IM, no. 5.

³⁰ C.J. Pinto de Oliveira, *Prawo do prawdy i komunikacji społecznej*, in: *Perspektywy i problemy teologii moralnej*, ed. T. Goffi, Warszawa 1982, p. 268.

these channels makes all the people take part in the problems and concerns experienced by individuals and the human race.³¹

Contemporary man is unable, without proper information, to understand the world and the current phenomena in it. It is the information that stimulates his intellect and willingness to educate. It contains the associated sociological, political or economic knowledge that helps the individual to embrace the real world and, according to the information obtained, begin to act and make decisions. The information is a seed that gives birth to the imagination, which with its goodness fills in an empty space, if necessary, between what is known and what is not discovered. These are not just dry figures. This is the sum of the data subject to the assessment, meeting the conscious demand for knowledge.³²

Therefore, the truth communicated by the media should always be at the service of the good of all people. The society has the right to information based on truth, freedom, justice and solidarity. This right to information is inseparable from freedom of communication. Indeed, social life depends on a continual interchange, both individual and collective, between people. This is necessary for mutual understanding and for cooperative creativity. When social intercourse makes use of the mass media, a new dimension is added. Then vast numbers of people get the chance to share in the life and progress of the community.³³

It is not acceptable that the exercise of the freedom of communication should depend upon wealth, education, or political power. The right to communicate is the right of all. This calls for special national and international efforts, not only to give those who are poor and less powerful access to the information which they need for their individual and social development, but to ensure that they are able to play an effective, responsible role in deciding media content and determining the structures and policies of their national institutions of social communications.³⁴

³¹ Cf. CP 19.

³² Cf. T. Zasępa, *Media, człowiek, społeczeństwo*, Częstochowa 2000, p. 57.

³³ Cf. CP 44.

³⁴ Cf. Papińska Komisja ds. Środków Społecznego Przekazu, *Aetatis novae*. Instrukcja duszpasterska o przekazie społecznym w dwudziestą rocznicę ogłoszenia „Communio et progressio”, Watykan 1992, no. 15.

A similar respect for the truth, corresponding diligence in the search for it, is demanded of those who have recourse to the mass media for their information. It is the receivers that are required to be active and responsible, to feel conscious of this responsibility and to be prepared for the active and critical acceptance of whatever is coming from the outside. Man ought never abdicate his right to make his contribution to the search for truth: not only abstract and philosophical truth, but also the workaday truth of concrete daily happenings. If he did so, he would risk losing his own personal dignity.³⁵ Receivers can be described as active when they know how to interpret communications accurately and can judge them in the light of their origin, background and total content. They will be active when they make their selection judiciously and critically, when they fill out incomplete information that comes their way with more news which they themselves have obtained from other sources, and finally, when they are ready to make their views heard in public, whether they agree, or partly agree or totally disagree.³⁶

The “right to information” formula, as well as the right to truth, go back to such premises as the dignity of the human person, the call for universal development, the social ownership of information, the natural need to inform oneself and others, creative participation in the social life of the nation, maintenance of law and order. They are the justification of this right, and at the same time provide a lasting basis for educational activity which tends to develop appropriate attitudes towards all human rights, including the right to information.³⁷

The ethical ideal to which any information system must strive, requires the simplicity of the selection and interpretation criteria, the fidelity to the code of openly designated values, and the honest presentation of the interests (considered right) with which one is bound. Facts become events of interest to the present history and society only when they are important and connected to the affairs and interests of at least

³⁵ Paweł VI, *Orędzie na VI Światowy Dzień Środków Społecznego Przekazu* (24.04.1972), in: *Kościół o środkach komunikowania myśli*, ed. J. Góral, K. Klauza, Częstochowa 1997, p. 280.

³⁶ Cf. CP 82.

³⁷ Cf. A. Lewek, *Kościół a mediokracja w Polsce*, „Kultura – Media – Teologia”, 2 (2010), pp. 24-43.

a portion of the general population. The criteria of objectivity are thus specifically defined and determined by combining two elements: the reality of the facts that are intended to be faithfully communicated and the social significance that these facts may have for the whole or a large part of society.³⁸

The search for truth, of course, is not always so transparent nor does it always produce such results. The natural limitation of reason and the inconstancy of the heart often obscure and distort a person's search. Truth can also drown in a welter of other concerns. People can even run from the truth as soon as they glimpse it because they are afraid of its demands. Yet, for all that they may evade it, the truth still influences life. Life in fact can never be grounded upon doubt, uncertainty or deceit; such an existence would be threatened constantly by fear and anxiety. One may define the human being, therefore, as the one who seeks the truth.³⁹ One way of doing this is through mass media.⁴⁰

THREATS TO TRUTH

Today the media, so quickly improved, are capable of overcoming and destroying the barriers erected in the past between people due to the diverse circumstances of time and place. They also show their efficacy as factors affecting the closer approximation and consolidation of the community. Thanks to these media, news of any event circulate the world in an instant and allow people to actively participate in the lives and events of today's world. Thus, the teaching at all levels should shape the communicators' sense of responsibility and give the receivers a critical sense of the provided content.⁴¹

³⁸ C.J. Pinto de Oliveira, *Prawo do prawdy i komunikacji społecznej*, p. 274.

³⁹ Cf. FR 28.

⁴⁰ This issue is widely discussed in: R. Leśniczak, *Mass media i sacrum – spojrzenie Benedykta XVI*, in: *Sacrum w mediach*, ed. M. Chmielewski, M. Jodkowski, D. Sonak, J. Woźniak, Lublin 2015, pp. 43-60.

⁴¹ Cf. Jan Paweł II, *Środki społecznego przekazu pomostem pomiędzy wiarą a kulturą*. Orędzie na Światowy Dzień Środków Społecznego Przekazu 1984, in: *Orędzia Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II*, p. 222.

Mass media are in themselves good and useful because they are intended for human development. However, moral problems are caused by their use. The way the media will be used depends primarily on the personal decision and responsibility of individual receivers. Placing or recognizing a clear purpose and knowing the loss (not just material) that can be caused by an inappropriate response to the mass media will probably help to develop a proper attitude in this regard. The basic dangers are: distortion of the harmonious interaction of intellect and will, which harms the very essence of humanity; leading to addiction, which signifies the intrinsic dependence of man on the mass media, and the volitional illnesses, manifested in the will illness and absence of proper interpersonal relationships.⁴² “For the proper use of these media it is most necessary that all who employ them be acquainted with the norms of morality and conscientiously put them into practice in this area. They must look, then, to the nature of what is communicated, given the special character of each of these media. At the same time they must take into consideration the entire situation or circumstances, namely, the persons, place, time and other conditions under which communication takes place and which can affect or totally change its propriety. Among these circumstances to be considered is the precise manner in which a given medium achieves its effect. For its influence can be so great that men, especially if they are unprepared, can scarcely become aware of it, govern its impact, or, if necessary, reject it.”⁴³ The distorted ways in which the means of social communication lead to dissemination of anti-values, raise moral objections, threaten personal and social morality, and the holiness of the family life. Anti-values are the privations of the values, and not just their simple negation.⁴⁴

The public authority is bound by special responsibilities in view of the common good, to which these media are ordered. The same authority has, in virtue of its office, the duty of protecting and safeguarding true and just freedom of information, a freedom that is totally necessary for

⁴² Cf. Z. Sareło, *Mass media – źródła dezintegracji tożsamości osoby*, „Communio”, 6 (1995), pp. 39-43.

⁴³ IM 4.

⁴⁴ J. Mariański, *Mass media jako nośniki wartości i antywartości*, in: *Religia a mass media*, ed. W. Zdaniewicz, Ząbki 1997, p. 118.

the welfare of contemporary society, especially when it is a question of freedom of the press and Internet. It ought also to encourage spiritual values, culture and the fine arts and guarantee the rights of those who wish to use the media. Moreover, public authority has the duty of helping those projects which, though they are certainly most beneficial for young people, cannot otherwise be undertaken. Lastly, the same public authority, which legitimately concerns itself with the health of the citizenry, is obliged, through the promulgation and careful enforcement of laws, to exercise a fitting and careful watch lest grave damage befall public morals and the welfare of society through the base use of these media. Such vigilance in no wise restricts the freedom of individuals or groups, especially where there is a lack of adequate precaution on the part of those who are professionally engaged in using these media.⁴⁵

The means of social communication will never serve solidarity and intelligent development when they contribute to the consolidation of secularism, consumerism, materialism, dehumanization, disregard of the tragic fate of the poor and abandoned. The most serious objection to mass media is the unilateral promotion of consumerism, and the dissemination of the view that possession of something should be a major motive for human aspirations and actions.⁴⁶

It is worth mentioning that although mass media enrich contacts with the nearer or distant environment, they always do it indirectly. They contact the receiver with the reality through word, movement, or image. Such contact can not be as fresh and spontaneous as direct communion with nature or conversation with another person. Therefore, it is impossible to completely replace the direct experience of the real world with mass media.⁴⁷

In order to realize the dangers posed by mass media for the development of the human person, it is necessary to take into account the risks of reception, the dangers associated with the nature of the received content, and the threats to the social issues, which are as follows: the

⁴⁵ IM 12.

⁴⁶ Cf. J. Mariański, *Mass media jako nośniki wartości i antywartości*, p. 119.

⁴⁷ E. Jarosz-Mackiewicz, *Człowiek w medialnym labiryncie*, „Kultura – Media – Teologia”, 3 (2011), pp. 98-102.

trivialization of the intellectual, moral, religious, aesthetic and other sensitivities through a non-reflective and too frequent reception of the program, which in the end produces psychological satiety, fatigue and boredom; the weakening of the will by the inability to choose a program according to the age of the audience, their spiritual maturity, interest or time; seeking satisfaction of unfulfilled desires (identifying with the characters from the films); strengthening consumer attitudes (longing for unattainable prosperity); chase for adulthood (watching adult movies by children); distortion of conscience (when films ridicule the good and depict the evil in a way which is appealing); watching the television or Internet becomes more important at a given moment than a living person who needs the presence of another person, their words, help, or friendly look; the use of mass media often limits family interactions, and television often “substitutes” parents in raising children.⁴⁸

Another great threat posed by the media is the insufficient political pluralism of the information and journalistic media. This signifies a great advantage only of certain political trends and ideological concepts in the possibilities of shaping social consciousness. This also means one-sidedness and lack of objectivity in the assessment of political opponents, especially the promotion of only some conceptions and political evaluations, and selected people representing these concepts, ridiculing or ignoring others.⁴⁹

The politicization of the media takes place at the expense of informing the public. The media have become the scene of acute political strife, and many journalists take part in this battle, neglecting the obligation to give information to the public impartially. Information in this situation is primarily a weapon in the political struggle, and thus the media are too much a service to political groups and interest groups. It is often not important what is said, only by whom.⁵⁰ The freedom of speech, however, is not linked to the responsibility for the word. The concept of journalistic responsibility includes not only the impartiality and reliability

⁴⁸ Cf. Ibid.

⁴⁹ See: R. Buttiglione, *Plus ratio quam vis. Rozważania nad prawdą i demokracją na progu XXI wieku*, „Ethos”, 57-58 (2002), pp. 265-268.

⁵⁰ Cf. K. Doktorowicz, *Powinności mediów publicznych wobec demokracji*, in: *Polityka a środki masowej informacji*, ed. M. Lipińska, Warsaw 2004, p. 94.

of information, the culture of polemics and respect for the society, but also the interaction in shaping civic awareness and rational attitudes toward one's own state and institutions. Moreover, it is important to distinguish the deliberate giving of the false testimony, from the concern for the public good or the interest of the state, requiring the disclosure of truth which is very unfavorable to persons or institutions – on the necessary condition that it is the truth.⁵¹

The next threat is the violent entry of free markets without the development of mechanisms to support content and non-market forms. There is a conflict between the role of the media as an informer, a forum for the exchange of views and finally the role of the creator of the so-called cultural values and the provider of good standards, and their role as a profit-making enterprise. The basic question is: what should be done to prevent a situation that only the market interest dictates to people what they are to feed their minds with and where to draw patterns.⁵²

The next great danger is that the mass media are exchanged, among others by journalists, into the arena of ruthless fighting, where no one has the right to the truth, or at best can express subjective opinions. In this way all values become relativized. And the communication becomes only a flow of dry information.⁵³ The condition of the authentic communication within the mass media is to participate, as opposed to manipulation. The manipulation is a direct or indirect pressure on will through the intellect, captivating the person and influencing his or her views and attitudes. The evil of the manipulation lies in the instrumental use of another person, and on the conscious propagation of lies. This harms the dignity of the human person and deprives the man and society of the opportunity to know the truth.⁵⁴

Both journalists and ordinary readers, viewers and listeners are commonly ignorant of manipulative traps in informing. When going against the journalistic ethics, some do so because of lack of sensitivity,

⁵¹ J.W. Adamowski, *Czy i na ile można wierzyć temu, co widzimy i słyszymy w dzisiejszych mediach?*, in: *Jaka informacja?*, ed. L. Dyczewski, Lublin 2009, pp. 181-185.

⁵² Cf. Ibid., p. 183.

⁵³ See: A. Lepa, *Ład medialny a społeczeństwo informacji*, in: *Kultura – Media – Społeczeństwo*, ed. D. Wadowski, Lublin 2007, pp. 275-290.

⁵⁴ See: Znyk, P., *Od komunikacji do manipulacji*, Łódź, 2008.

and the others, mostly starting work, because of the ignorance or lack of experience. What is more, beliefs have become established, saying that objectivity and impartiality are boring, and that the sensation is justified. Furthermore, knowing what you are writing about is not a priority, and a good journalist is an aggressive and insensitive journalist.

A journalist can be both a perpetrator and a victim of manipulation. He or she is the manipulating subject when he or she uses disinformation and in this way tries to control others. On the other hand, the journalist may also be the object manipulated by, for example, his or her employer, political groups, or a particular lobby. In this situation, being manipulated, the journalist becomes a tool of mass manipulation by a more organized manipulating subject, being the socially structured entity.⁵⁵ The journalist is obliged to respect the general law of his or her country; and in professional matters the journalist shall recognize the jurisdiction of colleagues only, to the exclusion of every kind of interference by governments or others.⁵⁶

Apart from manipulation, active or passive, the journalist may be endangered by the conformism. The roots of this attitude should be sought in the contempt or neglect of value. The conformism can be the result of blindness in values or as a result of amoral motives: for example, the journalist can be driven by a desire for cheap popularity, flattery, willingness to make an easy profit, or a thrill of sensation. The conformism is the avoidance of responsibility for the true good. This attitude does not harm directly, but it is difficult to see conditions favourable for authentic communication in it. The conformism, as a moral attitude, is very often associated with the superficiality of the profession of a journalist⁵⁷, resulting in the loss of society.

The manipulation radically destroys communication. It involves the conscious use of the means of social communication for the moral

⁵⁵ See: W. Warecki, M. Warecki, *Co wpływa na dziennikarzy... i na co mają wpływ dziennikarze*, Warszawa 2006.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Deklaracja zasad postępowania dziennikarzy*, „Ethos”, 8 (1998), p. 229. *The Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists* was adopted by 1954 World Congress of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

⁵⁷ See: *Poprawność polityczna stała się medialną poprawnością. Rozmowa z bp. Adamem Lepą*, „Nasz Dziennik”, 19-20.09.2009, p. 10.

disintegration of man. This is the sharpest example of manipulation, because it refers to the tendency to evil, which can be found in the human being, and makes it a base for building the experience. This problem may less affect the journalism in the classical sense, but rather the how-business developed by the mass-media, which often promotes violence and pornography. The lie can be found here only in claiming that such propaganda is harmless. It comes from the premise of social liberalism, stating that in the name of freedom everything is allowed. Such freedom can be destructive, especially when it becomes, in the name of the proclamation of liberation, the way of reigning one over another.⁵⁸

The impact of the media is in fact ambivalent. They can not be clearly judged either positively, or negatively. They create and disseminate both values and anti-values. They are a source of something of great importance, which becomes a condition of human freedom and something extremely dangerous, which can cause a regression of the ability of thinking and feeling. In the process of social communication, the critical sense of the audience should be shaped. A critical attitude towards increasingly aggressive mass media proposals for anti-values will allow receivers to distinguish between the enriching and potentially damaging content.⁵⁹

Unfortunately, a realistic examination leads us to recognize that in our time the immense potentials of the mass media are very often used against man, and that the prevailing culture disregards the encounter with faith, both in countries in which the free circulation of ideas is permitted and also in places where freedom of expression is confused with irresponsible license. It is the task of everyone to improve the field of social communication and to lead it back to its noble aims. The communicators should adhere to the rules of a correct professional ethic. The critics should carry out their useful clarifying action, fostering the formation of the critical awareness of the receivers. The receivers themselves should know how to choose with prudent care books, newspapers, films, plays and television programmes in order to derive from them occasions of growth and not corruption. Furthermore, also through suitable as-

⁵⁸ See: P. Lisiewicz, *Dlaczego dziennikarze nie rozumieją, że kłamią?*, „Gazeta Polska”, 2009, no. 36, p. 9.

⁵⁹ J. Mariański, *Mass media jako nośniki wartości i antywartości*, p. 126.

sociated forms, may they make their voice heard by the operators of the communication that it may always be respectful of man's dignity and his inalienable rights.⁶⁰

Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger made a valuable remark on the mass media, saying that: "Our civilization will have to learn moral and intellectual control over the extraordinary means of communication that it has developed. It will be more difficult than mastering, for example, nuclear energy. This is because the civilization of communication, arising before our eyes, will have positive or negative consequences for the physical, mental and emotional existence of all of us. And these consequences will only be mastered by the personal learning of freedom if we do not intend to allow the entire human population to depend on the economic interests involved in these huge investments".⁶¹

CONCLUSION

The media at high speed are capable of overcoming and destroying barriers raised in the past between people due to the diverse circumstances of time and place. They also show their effectiveness in the process of influencing the closer approach and consolidation of the community. The mass media are in themselves good and useful because they are intended for human development. However, the skillful and proper use of them is the problem. This, however, depends on personal decision-making responsibility of individual receivers. The basic dangers associated with the use of these means are as follows: the disruption of the harmonious interaction of the intellect and the will that reconciles itself to the essence of humanity; the rise of "addiction", which implies the inner dependence of man on the mass media, especially the internet, television and film, diseases in the free world, and the inadequate interpersonal relations.

The proclamation of the Good News is a collaboration with the anticipatory grace of God, which transforms man. Since the man can be

⁶⁰ Jan Paweł II, *Środki społecznego przekazu pomostem pomiędzy wiarą a kulturą*, art.cit., p. 224.

⁶¹ J.M. Lustiger, *Wybór Boga. Z kardynałem rozmawiają J.L. Missika i D. Wolton*, Kraków 1992, p. 236.

ultimately fulfilled and satisfied only by raising the question about God, it is inevitably at the centre of the New Evangelization. It is precisely the greatest challenge sent to human freedom at a time when a lot of people live practically as if God did not exist. In order to achieve effective help from the use of the media, the value of the human factor present in their functioning must be appreciated, so that everyone would be fully aware of their responsibility and properly prepared as members of the human community. There is a necessity for a formation to teach the general principles of the application of the means of social communication, since they truly enrich the mind and soul of man only when he is able to master their nature and manner of use.

Summary. It is an expression of concern for the truth in the media to educate the wise audience. The primary goal of the media is not to seek sensation, unlimited desire to possess, nor to create one's own, often distorted reality, but to serve the truth by showing people its glory. Media, in order to contribute to the human growth, must be filled with the Good News. For this reason, an attempt was made to show the essence, place, and role of truth in the mass media by presenting the link between the value of the human communication and the content contained therein. It should be clearly stated that there is a constant need for continuous work on the value of communication of the information to ensure that the truth is respected and proclaimed.

Key words: media; truth; journalism; journalistic professional ethics; politics; manipulation; communicator; audience (receiver).

Streszczenie. Media służące człowiekowi czyli etyczny wymiar przekazywania informacji. Artykuł przedstawia rolę środków masowego przekazu w zakresie kształtowania postaw odbiorców. W miarę rosnącej roli mediów w życiu społeczeństwa, coraz istotniejsze staje się ukierunkowanie mediów na prawdę.

Aby media mogły przyczyniać się do prawidłowego rozwoju człowieka powinny, zamiast koncentrować się na sensacjach i przedstawianiu wypaczonych rzeczywistości, podnosić wartość prawdy i dawać świadectwo Dobrej Nowinie.

Celem artykułu jest próba ukazania istoty, miejsca i roli prawdy w *mass mediach* i przybliżeniu fundamentalnych zasad związanych z miejscem prawdy w komunikacji medialnej.

Słowa kluczowe: media; prawda; dziennikarstwo; dziennikarska etyka zawodowa; polityka; manipulacja; nadawca; odbiorca.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adamowski, J.W., *Czy i na ile można wierzyć temu, co widzimy i słyszymy w dzisiejszych mediach?*, in: *Jaka informacja?*, ed. L. Dyczewski, Lublin, 2009, pp. 181–185.
- Adamski, F., *Komunikowanie masowe i jego oblicza*, in: *Kościół a kultura masowa*, ed. F. Adamski, Cracow, 1984, pp. 7–18.
- Adamski, F., *Siła, zakres i skutki oddziaływania środków masowego przekazu*, in: *Kościół a kultura masowa*, ed. F. Adamski, Cracow, 1984, pp. 56–73.
- Armogathe, J.R., *Zwierciadło królowej*, „Communio”, 1995, no. 6, pp. 54–63.
- Buttiglione, R., „*Plus ratio quam vis. Rozważania nad prawdą i demokracją na progu XXI wieku*”, „Ethos”, 2002, no. 57–58, pp. 265–268.
- Catechism of the Catholic Church*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM. [Accessed April 13, 2017].
- IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists*, <http://www.ifj.org/about-ifj/ifj-code-of-principles/>. [Accessed April 13, 2017].
- Doktorowicz, K., *Powinności mediów publicznych wobec demokracji*, in: *Polityka a środki masowej informacji*, ed. M. Lipińska, Warsaw, 2004.
- Drożdż, M., *Osoba i media. Personalistyczny paradygmat etyki mediów*, Tarnów, 2005.
- Dyczewski, L., *Kultura polska w procesie przemian*, Lublin, 1995.
- Encyclical Letter *Fides Et Ratio* of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Relationship Between Faith and Reason, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html. [Accessed April 13, 2017].
- Jarosz-Mackiewicz, E., *Człowiek w medialnym labiryncie*, „Kultura – Media – Teologia”, 2011, no. 3, pp. 98–102.
- John Paul II, *Social Communication: Instruments of Encounter Between Faith and Culture*. Message of the Holy Father John Paul II for the 18th World Communications Day, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_24051984_world-communications-day.html. [Accessed April 13, 2017].
- Kozłowska, A., *Oddziaływanie mass mediów*, Warsaw, 2006.
- Lepa, A., *Ład medialny a społeczeństwo informacji*, in: *Kultura – Media – Społeczeństwo*, ed. D. Wadowski, Lublin, 2007, pp. 275–290.
- Leśniczak, R., *Mass media i sacrum – spojrzenie Benedykta XVI*, in: *Sacrum w mediach*, ed. M. Chmielewski, M. Jodkowski, D. Sonak, J. Woźniak, Lublin, 2015, pp. 43–60.
- Lewek, A., *Kościół a mediokracja w Polsce*, „Kultura – Media – Teologia”, 2010, no. 2, pp. 24–43.
- Lewek, A., *Podstawy edukacji medialnej i dziennikarskiej*, Warsaw, 2003.
- Lisiewicz, P., *Dlaczego dziennikarze nie rozumieją, że kłamią?*, „Gazeta Polska”, 2009, no. 36, p. 9.
- Lustiger, J.M., *Wybór Boga. Z kardynałem rozmawiają J.L. Missika i D. Wolton*, Cracow, 1992.

- Mariański, J., *Mass media jako nośniki wartości i antywartości*, in: *Religia a mass media*, ed. W. Zdaniewicz, Ząbki, 1997, pp. 108–127.
- Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the 45th World Communications Day. *Truth, Proclamation and Authenticity of Life in the Digital Age*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20110124_45th-world-communications-day.html. [Accessed April 13, 2017].
- Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the XXIV World Day of Peace. *If You Want Peace, Respect The Conscience of Every Person*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_08121990_xxiv-world-day-for-peace.html. [Accessed April 13, 2017].
- Nagórny, J., *Powołanie i posłannictwo dziennikarza w dzisiejszym świecie*, „Ethos”, 1993, no. 24, pp. 52–71.
- Nissim, G., *Wychowanie do odbioru mediów jako nagłące zadanie*, in: *Kultura i media 2*, ed. B. Spurgasz, Warsaw, 1996, pp. 20–35.
- Paul VI, *Message of the Holy Father for the World Social Communications Day*, https://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_p-vi_mes_19720421_vi-com-day.html. [Accessed April 13, 2017].
- Pinto de Oliveira, C.J., *Prawo do prawdy i komunikacji społecznej*, in: *Perspektywy i problemy teologii moralnej*, ed. T. Goffi, Warsaw, 1982, pp. 264–282.
- Pokorna-Ignatowicz, K., *Kościół w świecie mediów. Historia-dokumenty-dylematy*, Cracow, 2002.
- Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Pastoral Instruction “Aetatis Novae” on Social Communications on the Twentieth Anniversary of “Communio et progressio”*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_22021992_aetatis_en.html. [Accessed April 13, 2017].
- Pontifical Council for Social Communications. *Communio et Progressio*. Pastoral instruction on the means of social communication, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_23051971_communio_en.html. [Accessed April 13, 2017].
- Pontifical Council for Social Communications: *Ethics in Communications*, <http://www.cuf.org/2001/10/pontifical-council-for-social-communications-ethics-in-communications/>. [Accessed April 13, 2017].
- Poprawność polityczna stała się medialną poprawnością. Rozmowa z bp. Adamem Lepą*, „Nasz Dziennik”, 19-20.09.2009, p. 10.
- Pinto de Oliveira, C.J., *Prawo do prawdy i komunikacji społecznej*, in: *Perspektywy i problemy teologii moralnej*, ed. T. Goffi, Warsaw, 1982, pp. 264–282.
- Sareło, Z., *Mass media – źródła dezintegracji tożsamości osoby*, „Communio”, 1995, no. 6, pp. 39–43.
- Sareło, Z., *Problem prawdy w mass mediach*, in: *Religia a mass media*, ed. W. Zdaniewicz, Ząbki, 1997, pp. 17–27.
- Second Vatican Council. *Inter mirifica. Decree on the media of social communications*,

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19631204_inter-mirifica_en.html. [Accessed April 13, 2017].

Słownik Współczesnego Języka Polskiego, Warsaw, 1996.

Słownik wyrazów obcych PWN, ed. H. Szkiłdź, Warsaw, 1974.

Warecki, W., Warecki, M., *Co wpływa na dziennikarzy...i na co mają wpływ dziennikarze*, Warsaw, 2006.

Zasępa, T., *Media, człowiek, społeczeństwo*, Częstochowa, 2000.

Znyk, P., *Od komunikacji do manipulacji*, Łódź, 2008.

