MISSION OR COUNTER-MISSION: THE DIVINE LITURGY “ON-AIR”

Dumitru a. Vanca*

Abstract: *Mission or counter-mission: The Divine Liturgy “on air”.*

The aim of this study is to assess whether there are conceptual or religious conflicts between the “digital liturgy” and the “live liturgy” and, if so, whether such conflicts can be resolved. The development of new media technologies (e.g. radio, TV, internet) enables online transmission of religious services. However, their use requires careful assessment and delineation of guidelines for the use of tele-liturgical services in the personal lives of believers. Which aspects of the liturgical act can be tele-transmitted? What should be the goals for its use? The Church should address these questions. We must take into account that participating in the Liturgy does not mean just listening to the service, but also partaking in the Eucharistic Christ, and communion with the community members. However, such tele-transmitted services may help to address the pastoral needs of the faithful who cannot come to church due to serious illness.

Finally, my analysis provides some pastoral answers and solutions to the problems raised by this conflict between new technological challenges and Church tradition.

Keywords: *Liturgy, Radio-Television broadcasts, Romanian Orthodox Church, liturgical practice.*

* PhD, Associate Professor, „1 Decembrie 1918” University, Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Alba Iulia, Romania.

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Premises

The discovery of electromagnetic waves opened a new set of avenues to explore the world. If Gutenberg revolutionised knowledge and science through the facilitation of transmitting knowledge simultaneously to several people, Herz¹, Tesla², Marconi³, Baird⁴, Licklider⁵, Berners-Lee⁶, etc. brought communication to dimensions unimaginable fifty years ago. Due to the radio, television, and internet, we are almost able to take part in historical events: we watched the collapse of the twin towers in New York live, and we felt threatened together with the Baghdad inhabitants when the first bombs fell. The mass media makes it possible to be enthusiastic at sports competitions, as if we were on the stadium. We experience helplessness as we watch floodwaters swallow all of a woman's belongings. Radio, television, the internet, allow us to observe, as their contemporaries, worldwide events which then become part of our daily lives.

Always renewed in the Spirit, never aged, the Church has answered the social realities of people in different epochs, using everything in its power to bring man closer to God. As a living

¹ Heinrich Rudolf Hertz (1857-1894) was a German physicist, who discovered electromagnetic waves, the technology on which radio-TV broadcasting is based.

² Nikola Tesla (1856-1943) was an American inventor of Serbian origin, who discovered radio waves and wireless TV transmission.

³ Guglielmo Marconi (1874-1937), an Italian physicist, established the system of radio communication (1894), and is also considered the father of the radio.

⁴ John Logie Baird (1888-1946), a Scottish engineer, is considered the inventor of television (1926).

⁵ Joseph Carl Robnett Licklider (1915 -1990), is considered the inventor of the internet.

⁶ Tim Berners-Lee (1955-) is considered the inventor of the *world wide web* (the network of hypertext documents, stored and interconnected through the internet).

organisation, the Church accepts the new means of communicating the faith, to the extent that these do not alter the content and meaning given by the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Apostles. In the new media *areopagus*, printing, electricity, the radio, television, and internet are only a few elements which, unknown to Christ or the Apostles, today form new methods for communicating the faith and facilitating the spread of the Gospel. Using the Basilian concept – taking over from the world whatever can be useful – the Church must understand the times, and make use of mass communication media to achieve its own goals: preaching the Gospel and making people saints.

The relation of the Church with the mass media has been the topic of recent studies and monographs published in Romania, analysing the relation of the Church (especially the Orthodox Church) with the written press⁷, with radio and television⁸, and even with the internet. Nevertheless, few studies analyse media broadcasts

⁷ Botezan Florin, “Biserica și mass-media”, in *Credința Ortodoxă*, IV (1998), No. 1; Coman Mihai, *Mass-media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, Iași, Polirom Publishing House, 2003; Nicolae Dascălu, *Biserica și mass-media sau despre metamorfozele comunicării*, in “Teologie și Viață”, VIII (1998), No. 5-12; *idem*, *Comunicare pentru comuniune. O perspectivă ortodoxă asupra mass-media* [Communication for Communion. An Orthodox Perspective on mass-media] Iași, Trinitas Publishing House, 2000; Radu Preda, *Comunicare și comuniune*, in “*Renașterea*”, 5-6/1994; *idem*, *Misiunea radioului ca misiune a Bisericii*, in *Renașterea*, 6/1999.

⁸ While a little ‘apocalyptic’ (although not without justification), one of the most relentless analysts of the influence of TV on the soul and mind of the Christian is Virgiliu Gheorghe: *Efectele televiziunii asupra minții umane și despre creșterea copiilor în lumea de azi* [The effects of television on the human mind and about raising children in today's world], București, Publishing House: Evangelismos, 2005; *idem*, *Revrăjirea lumii sau de ce nu mai vrem să ne desprindem de televizor* [Re-enchantment of the world or why we do not want to detach from TV], București, Publishing House: Prodomos, 2006; *idem*, *Știința și războiul sfârșitului lumii. Fața nevăzută a televiziunii* [The Science and the War of the end of the world. The unseen face of television], București, Publishing House: Prodomos, 2007.

from the angle of liturgical and doctrinal truths.

If the Church is a living body which offers answers to new issues⁹, it is only natural to ask ourselves what is the Church's position towards such mass-media, and, in particular, *what*, *how*, and *how much* can new media technologies be used to achieve (or preserve) the eschatological space of our encounter with God.

1. The Holy and Divine Liturgy – An Eschatological Ladder. Media Challenges

In a previous study¹⁰, we presented a few of the doctrinal difficulties concerning television broadcasts of the Holy Liturgy. We highlighted that in radio and television broadcasts there is: a) a deficiency of perceiving the liturgical *invisible*; b) a deficiency of communion (*koinonia*) and active participation; and c) the total absence of the finality of the Liturgy – receiving the Eucharistic body. This present study enriches and further develops these conclusions, which social and pedagogic research have confirmed¹¹. In particular, I explore additional pastoral realities, essential to a fuller analysis of the topic.

⁹ Nicolae Dascălu, *Comunicare pentru comuniune...*, p. 125.

¹⁰ Dumitru A. Vanca, *Sfânta Liturghie în transmisiunile TV* [The holy Mass at TV], in “*Credința Ortodoxă*”, IV (1999), No. 2, p. 65-75.

¹¹ These deficiencies have been analysed for some time in the Western specialised literature (see also D. Vanca, *quoted article*), have been confirmed by a study made in Alba Iulia by Monica Opriș. The research, although not sufficiently detailed, and utilizing only a small sample, still provides a rather clear image of this phenomenon. Repeating the research, on a larger sample, and more diversified in terms of age and occupation, might add to the understanding of the phenomenon. (Opriș, Monica, *Cuvântul sau drumul dintre viață și denaturările din mass-media*, in “*Invasia nonvalorilor într-o lume multimedia. Criza spirituală și discreditarea sacrului*” [Invasion of non-values in a multimedia world. Spiritual crisis and discrediting of the sacred], international symposium, Alba Iulia, 6-8 mai 2010, Alba Iulia, Publishing House: Reîntregirea, 2010, p. 318-333.

Taking into account the importance of the Holy Liturgy, it has been natural for the community of the faithful and theologians to call into question the correctness and efficiency of “the broadcast liturgy” ever since the appearance of the first radio-tv broadcasts¹². Some Churches have even created special committees to deal with this topic, trying to identify and impose deontological frameworks and liturgical norms. Moreover, the rhythm of development of the new digital technologies continues to increasingly blur the distance between the real and the virtual, thus making legitimate the Church’s concern regarding this phenomenon.

To understand if, and how, the Holy Liturgy can be an object of radio and television broadcasts, we must first clarify certain insights and doctrinary meanings regarding this liturgical act.

2. The liturgical act – a communication between the visible and the invisible; between the real and the virtual

The world we live in routinely changes under our eyes. Inter-personal relationships are evermore abandoned in favour of technical and mechanical relations (automatic coffee machines, soda machines, ticket machines, virtual payments, on-line shopping, etc.). Under the pressure of technology, the old concepts of *space* and *presence* seem to acquire not only new nuances, but also new content. Thus, the word *virtual*, although ontologically opposed to the real, assuming only a potency (according to the Romanian Explanatory Dictionary), has begun to indicate a new sort of reality in recent years. Virtual space and presence offer a reality that no longer depends on physical presence; however, they do confer a certain degree of participatory and active social presence¹³. In the new cybernetic space, the border

¹² On the beginning of mass-media (with special reference to television) see in my article: *Sfânta Liturghie în transmisiunile TV*, p. 65-66.

¹³ On these theories, see Antonio Spadaro, *Cyberteologia. Pensare il cristianesimo al tempo della rete*, in “Vita e Pensiero”, Milano, 2012, p. 95-118 and Giuseppe Giordan, *Dio a portata di mouse. Credere e far credere*

between real and virtual space does not necessarily relate to anything corporeal. Being connected to a virtual network tends to equate to a kind of absent presence. This is the reason why *on-line* communication has become, for many people, as seemingly alive and real as the communication between two people face to face, who are able to touch each other. In this context, we must know how clearly to set limits between *the liturgical act as an ecclesial event*, and *the liturgical act as a news event*. Through everything that creates the context for the liturgical sacrifice of Christ, every time the Liturgy is accomplished, it renews our relationship with God.

Religions are founded on the possibility of communication between man and God. To simplify the discussion, we will accept that the act of Revelation is God's communication with man (He is the one Who initiates the dialogue), whereas Worship is man's answer to God's call (man is the initiator of the dialogue)¹⁴. God enters a dialogue with man so as to convey His will. Any sacramental work of the Church goes beyond the material concepts of existence and, therefore, every theoretical analysis regarding the sacraments must take this reality into account.

Mystery of mysteries, climax of the liturgical mystery, place of encounter and communion between man and God, the Holy Liturgy is the conjunction of the visible and the invisible. Using the empirical materiality, through the liturgical act, the Church creates a new means of communication between man and God, which goes beyond secular definitions and concepts of communication¹⁵. Unlike

nell'era digitale, in "Credere Oggi", CLXXXIII (2011), No. 3, p. 18-28.

¹⁴ Dumitru A. Vanca, *Introdúcere în teologia liturgică* [Introduction to the liturgical Theology], Alba Iulia, Publishing House: Reîntregirea, 2009, p.42.

¹⁵ In the act of inter-human communication (horizontal), theorists mention three elements involved in this process: (1)*sender* – (2)*message* – (3)*receiver*, the functions of the two extremes, the sender and the receiver being interchangeable according to the direction of the message (to-from). According to specialists, and to the way of approaching this issue, the scheme is sometimes amplified, involving elements such as *codifier*-

simplified schemes of communication, at a liturgical level, to cover both the sensible and suprasensible level, communication is achieved through symbolic language. The language is carefully chosen; it is the only language which works and which is valid. This descent of the invisible into the visible is accomplished in the Liturgy only “now” and “here”; otherwise, it remains inoperative or, maybe, at most, partially operative.

“Operating with the two extremes: sensible and suprasensible, the liturgical action establishes intertwined relations with immanent humanity and with transcendent divinity. In this battlefield, the only operational language is the symbolic one. [...] Element of connection between two worlds, the symbol is the totality of some actions, words and feelings which *transform* the visible into something that no longer belongs to the immediate sensible, without losing the immediate quality of a sensible fact. Liturgical symbolism is, from this point of view, a dialectic between present and absent, between past, present and future; it does not act subsequently, it does not work “after”, but “now and here”¹⁶.

The liturgical act has a strong symbolic connotation, which is codified and decodified according to the initiation level of the receiver (the believer). Together with the common message, which is seen and heard, the liturgical work also transmits an invisible message. In liturgical television broadcasts, virtual reality does not succeed in creating an atmosphere of the liturgical-symbolic communication established in the Church.

Static and mobile in TV images. One may notice that TV broadcasts of the Divine Liturgy often benefit from the whole artistic arsenal of secular broadcasts: long shots, close-ups, moving images, and commentators providing a great deal of explanation; each is used

decodifier, disturbing elements, etc. For details on the mental processes in the act of communication see Bruno G. Bara, *Pragmatica cognitiva. I processi mentali della comunicazione*, Torino, Publishing House: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999.

¹⁶ D. A. Vanca, *Sfânta Liturghie în transmisiunile TV*, p.71.

to add something visible to the broadcast. This very element, however, alters the establishment of a relationship, which should introduce the tele-believer into the liturgical atmosphere. The eye and the physical position of the believer in the church will never be able to capture the details of the believer in front of the TV. The information our subconscious perceives is infinitely greater than what is offered by the *director*. The human eye has a better visual field than any video camera. Mediated by the technical instrument which interposes between the one who communicates (the priest) and the receiver (the believer), the liturgical message diminishes in value and loses exactly what is the most important – the invisible layer of liturgical communication.

Active and passive in the liturgical tele-transmissions. Unlike the tele-believer in front of the TV, who sees only what the director offers him, the believer in the church can freely turn his eyes towards the sound coming from a certain part of the church. He can choose which details to watch, elements that might have been insignificant for the director. He is an active viewer, who is free to choose, whereas the person who watches TV or listens to the radio will see or hear only what the director permits.

Another deficiency lies in the lack of personal participation or individual offering in the broadcast liturgical act. The Liturgy is the gratitude that the Church brings to God for the gift of Christ's sacrifice. The Liturgy is a gift brought by all for all, received by Him, and turned into the gift of the Eucharist towards us; a sort of "a circuit of love"¹⁷. However, the tele-believer will not be able to take part in this gift circuit; he does not offer and does not receive any of the gifts presented by the Church. The only things he gets are information, words, and sounds; undoubtedly, these are forms of partaking of Christ¹⁸, but they are weak and imperfect forms. My

¹⁷ D. Stăniloae, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturgia ortodoxă*, București, Publishing House: IBMBOR, 2004, p. 459.

¹⁸ On the forms of Christ's presence see Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Modurile*

conclusion is that *only direct and active participation appears to be completely and perfectly adequate*, and capable of fully involving the believer in the invisible spiritual (non-virtual) reality.

3. The liturgical context

Present in the church, through everything that contributes to the construction of the *liturgical space* (shapes, odours, lights, etc.), the believer is *enraptured* from the present of this world in order to partake in the eschatological realities of *the world to come*. In a mysterious way (yet as directly as possible), the very beginning of the Holy Liturgy places the whole liturgical work that follows within “the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”. Under the movement of the Spirit, the space turns into a different reality, by virtue of the very context it re-defines in a spiritual way. Thus, each detail – however apparently insignificant – contributes to the creation of a liturgical space, which is not at all similar to the space in my flat, where I am comfortably seated in my armchair to “watch” the Holy Liturgy¹⁹. Even in this expression, one can see the mental difference that the faithful make: nobody will say *I am going to / I am coming from / I have been to* Liturgy, when referring to the act of watching a Liturgy on TV. If I am watching the service on TV, my participation is more passive than active. I cannot enter the participative context created in a real church from the comfortable

prezenței Lui Hristos în cultul Bisericii [The ways of Christ's presence in the worship of the Church], in “Mitropolia Banatului” XXII (1982), No.7-9, p. 429-456; see also Ioan Ică, *Modurile prezenței personale a lui Hristos și a împărtășirii de El în Sf. Liturghie și spiritualitatea ortodoxă* [The ways of Christ's personal presence in the divine Liturgy and communicating with Him in Orthodox spirituality], in *Persoană și comuniune*, works in the honour of Rev. Fr. Prof. D. Stăniloae, Sibiu, Diocesan Publishing House, 1993.

¹⁹ For a detailed analysis of the relation real-virtual in the liturgical act see Paolo Tomatis, *Virtualità dei media e verità dell'azione liturgica*, in “Rivista Liturgica”, XCIX (2012), No.5, p.739-755.

confines of my armchair.

Marshal McLuhan, a theoretician and pioneer of mass-media communication, warned against the threats that the new technologies will bring to liturgical broadcasts. Thus, in spite of the advantage of making the message audible in many places and for many people at once, paradoxically, the means of amplification lead to *the loss of orality* of the Liturgy. Hearing from all directions the voice of the priest, a believer who is standing outside of the cathedral will certainly lose the invisible part of the message that unites the body with the voice, the gesture with the liturgical orientation of the celebrant²⁰, while also uniting the clergy with the people. Such relations are also impossible in front of the TV or of the radio. The same is true regarding the twilight of the liturgical space as opposed to the *technical light* coming out of a projector, which is necessary for a good view of the ceremonies. More and brighter light can sometimes mean seeing less of the liturgical realities²¹.

Moreover, in the flat where I *watch* the Liturgy on TV, I will always lack those *codes* which contribute to the context that renders the church something else than a domestic space²². Let us analyse just a few of these codes²³:

²⁰ Sometimes it is strange to notice believers bowing in front of screens (a new form of idolatry?), placed against the liturgical East. Thus, the communion of those inside and those outside is lost on the way from utility and efficiency.

²¹ Marshal McLuhan, *La luce e il mezzo*, Roma, Publishing House: Armando, 2002, p.123-159.

²² Carlo Cibbien identifies no less than eleven such codes that contribute to the contextualisation of liturgical communication. (*Comunicazione e liturgia*, in [Dizionario di] *Liturgia*, Milano, Publishing House: San Paolo, 2001), p. 414-419.

²³ This detail can be noticed in the behaviour of the tourists from the Far East (not initiated in Christianity), who, not having the perception of architectonic sacredness, *consume* the space they visit with the eyes, the mouth, the camera... without perceiving the differences in sacredness between different areas of a church.

The architectonic code. Entering the sacred space, the believer does not enter simply another neutral space, but the unearthly space, an invisible world, properly visible only for the initiated ones: “*Standing in the temple of Thy glory, we think we are standing in heaven*” (usual troparion at Lenten Matins). This invisible reality is postulated even upon entering the church²⁴:

“O Master Lord our God, Who hast appointed in the heavens the ranks and hosts of angels and archangels unto the service of Thy glory: With our entry do Thou cause the entry of the holy angels, serving and glorifying Thy goodness with us. For unto Thee is due all glory, honour, and worship: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. (*The Prayer of the Entrance*, the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom).

Due to the domestic context and to that *something invisible*, my house will never become “the centre of the universe” as each church is²⁵. Entering the space of the church, the believer perceives a different reality; the world around him, although part of the terrestrial realities, escapes the laws of this world. As a result, the believer never mistakes the liturgical space for the common space. Even if certain liturgical services take place outside, in the neighbourhood of the church, that place is not the church. Hence, in such situations, we are trying to construct a sort of sacrality in the new space of worship,

²⁴ Before the formation of the introductory part of the Divine Liturgy, it began with the entrance of the clergy and the people in the church and the prayer (which is uttered today at the “little entrance”) was uttered at the entrance of the church, as a visible form of entering the invisible world. Robert Taft, *Ritul bizantin*, Alba Iulia, Publishing House: Reîntregirea, 2008, p. 33, 43. (see also Andrew Wade, *Ce fel de Liturghie a săvârșit Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur?* [What is the shape of the divine Liturgy performed by St. John Chrysostomos?], in “*Credința Ortodoxă*”, I (1996), No.1, p. 33-51.

²⁵ Details on the sacredness of the church in Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturghia Ortodoxă* [Spirituality and Communion in the divine Liturgy of the Orthodox Church], 2nd ed., București, Publishing House: EIBMBOR, 2004, p. 46-190.

using common liturgical objects as candles, crucifixes, icons etc; but still, the two places will never be equal in sacramental quality²⁶.

The liturgical space has a historical and eschatological memory. The objects and places inside the church bear witness to the connection between the Golgotha sacrifice and the liturgical act²⁷, projecting them in an eschatological dimension. Oriented towards an eschatological aim, which is invisible to the eyes, the Church in prayer is in a liturgical pilgrimage towards, and with, Christ. The journey is marked by anamnestic boundary stones: the entrance, the altar, the Gospel, the Eucharist, the Cross of the crucifixion, the east... therefore, *the inside of the church keeps a vivid and immediate connection to Christ* and to His Sacrifice, but also with “the world to come”.

The iconic code is also a central element in the Liturgy. Encountering the faces of the saints, the believer enters a family and a familiar space (even when he is not in the church of his home community). The icons convey that psychological comfort, but also go beyond temporal and historical spatiality. In church, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Saints are contemporaries to the believer, who thus benefits from their charismatic presence through the holy icons²⁸. As a complete whole, the entire Church (both militant and

²⁶ Such is the case of the services for the consecration of churches, or at the feast of patron saints when, sometimes, the service is held outside the church. In such situations, one observes a diminution of the pious behaviour of the faithful (compared to the inside space), but not a complete lack of reverential attitude, due to the new sacredness offered by portable icons, cross, labara, Gospel, incense, candles, etc.

²⁷ Saint Germanos of Constantinople, *Tâlcuirea Sfintei Liturghii* [On the Divine Liturgy]. I used the Romanian transl. by N. Petrescu, București, Publishing House: Anastasia, 2000, p. 12.

²⁸ For details on the theology of the icon, see Leonid Uspenski, *Teologia icoanei* [Theology of the Icon], Romanian transl. by T. Baconsky, București, Publishing House: Anastasia, 1994, also in our work: *Icoană și cateheză* [Icon and Catechesis], Alba Iulia, Publishing House: Reîntregirea, 2005

triumphant) attends all liturgical celebrations. Icons are significantly more than pictures or photos; they are not merely a memory. Instead, the icons of the Saints remind us of their presence in the Grace of the Lord, as they look at us from the iconostasis and the surrounding walls. Thus, *icons delimitate and valorise the liturgical space, making it something else* than the domestic space in which objects, images, paintings etc. create a composite scenery.

The olfactory code is perhaps the most neglected one in the theological treatises dealing with the liturgical act. Images of the Heavenly Church (Saint Germanos; Saint Maximus) illustrate it as full of waves of smoke rising to the sky, the symbol of the prayer of the Church (Rev. 5.8; 8.3-4). The smell of incense and burnt wax contributes distinctly to the creation of the liturgical context. Entering the church still bearing the odours of prayer, even when there are no liturgical celebrations, the believer *remembers* that the place in which he walks is a place marked by God's presence (Ex. 3.5). The smell of coffee, food, perfumes, etc. that mark the domestic space, by contrast, can only *remind* one of the empirical realities of daily life. Such smells fail properly to orient one to God.

The gustative and the tactile codes. The believer who participates directly in the liturgical act can take communion in a real way, or can at least take antidoron. Those who merely watch or listen to broadcasts of the liturgy will lack this possibility. The words "*taste and see that the Lord is good*" will remain only formulae from a *mise-en-scène*, without real finality. Moreover, kissing the icons, touching them, touching other persons, etc. create together a context of holy mystery that will be absent for the believer in front of the box out of which comes the sounds and the images of the liturgy he does not attend.

The sonorous code equally contributes to the creation of that context of *another place*. The voices, rhythms, and songs, the

(especially the chapter *Relation between icon and word*).

tonality around you, create an atmosphere that the believer recognises and accepts as part of the whole Liturgy. The music is of a certain type. Listening to the singer, the priest, and the choir, despite all inaccuracies or deficiency of sonorous clarity, creates an acoustic environment which not even the most competitive audio system, radio, or computer, can equal.

All these are just a few reasons why we can conclude without erring that *only the church constructs the appropriate liturgical context* for the complete encounter between man and God. Apart from this space, God can reveal Himself (He often does). The Church in its pilgrimage towards the Kingdom encounters the Lord most directly here. Participation in the Church's Divine Liturgy requires active involvement of all the senses. In contrast, participation in front of a computer or TV screen will only require the passive involvement of sight and/or hearing, which inevitably dilutes the liturgical mystery.

4. The Holy Liturgy – Synthesis of Communion

Communion and co-celebration are conditions and premises of the Eucharist²⁹. The Eucharist has no sense in the absence of the faithful, the ones who form the Church – the mysterious body of the Saviour³⁰ (Rom., 12.5; 1 Cor., 10.17), and can be fully accomplished only in the liturgical dialogue. This state of communion and dialogue cannot be recreated in the domestic space in which we face the TV. The Eucharist, ultimately the Liturgy, is the expression of the gratitude of people, of the Church, towards God, but also God's answer to the eschatological cry "*Thy kingdom come*". Inaugurating "the Kingdom to come", the Liturgy is the expression and synthesis

²⁹ Alexander Schmemmann, *Euharistia, Taina împărăției* [Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Kingdom], Romanian transl. by B. Răduleanu, București, Publishing House: Bonifaciu, *sine anno*, p.17-31.

³⁰ The very word *church* (Εκκλησία) means gathering, which reveals the communal character of the Church and of its most important work – the Holy Liturgy.

of the absolute communion: (1) with the trinitarian God, (2) with one's fellows, and (3) with the whole of creation. It is common dwelling ("*the bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*"); it is a banquet and a feast of communion (Mt., 8.11; 26.29; Lk., 13.29; 14.15). The faithful gathered together in church in the name of Christ and in His presence (Mt., 18.20) form the Church. The Church does not exist outside of this communion, materialised in faith, prayer, feelings, compassion, and love.

In this work of communion, communication and dialogue are essential. Throughout the Liturgy, there is an ample and full process of communication. God communicates His will (in the Gospel) and His life (in the Eucharist), while the faithful respond by glorifying Him, communicating to Him their wishes and distress³¹. The vertical and horizontal dialogue presents unity and communion. Even when some believers do not articulate the prayers or participate in the singing, they still create a collective atmosphere of active participation in which "with one mouth and one heart" they confess the "unity of faith", once expressed in a sensible way in the "kiss of peace". The communication of faith means opening to the other, understood as Lord and fellow being.

"Faith is first of all and always the encounter with Another, addressing to Another, receiving Him as being «the Way, the Truth and the Life », the love towards Him and the wish of complete unity with Him, so that «yet not I, but Christ lives in me » (Gal., 2.20). Faith is always directed towards Another, it is man's reaching out of the limits of his «Ego», it is firstly, a radical change towards oneself."³²

Even if such communication might be partially accomplished,

³¹ It is worth mentioning that all we bring to God either does not belong to us ("*Offering to you these gifts from your gifts...*" utters the priest rising the Eucharistic bread and wine during the Mass), or does not rise to the measure of a possible change (the majority of the prayers in the Liturgy speak of our unworthiness). Therefore, everything we get from God is actually a gift, so the Eucharist is a Gift.

³² Al. Schmemmann, *Eucharistia...*, p.182.

and in certain conditions may be the best one can do (for example, in an asylum, a nursing home, etc.), those who only receive the message and *enter into a dialogue through the TV* experience a qualitatively different type of communion among believers.

The believer, who comes into the space of the church, is involved in the liturgical act, accomplished through the gifts we take to the Liturgy. They are the expression of our own sacrifice, brought to God for us and for others. The Liturgy offers itself and is offered as a gift. This gift should not be neglected. Moreover, this gift cannot be achieved in front of the TV or radio, because *I am not there*, and the ones I see on the screen or discern in the fuss coming out of the loudspeaker move in *a different space*.

In the liturgical act, the Eucharistic bread confers image and substance to the complete communion. Tasting from one bread and one cup (1 Cor., 10.17; *Didache*, 9.4), the faithful become partakers of God, with their fellows, living and dead³³, and with the whole creation. This is why the notion of Liturgy without partaking of Christ's body is nonsense. For the same reason, not taking communion consecutively at several liturgies was for the Christians of the first centuries a cause to worry and suffer. Participating in the Liturgy culminates and has full meaning only in taking communion – our gift returned to us by God, in order to accomplish the communion: “*and all of us who partake of the one Bread and the one Cup do Thou unite one to another, in one communion of the Holy Spirit...*” (*Prayer after Epiclesis*, the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great). By taking communion, we are all incorporated into the body of Christ, accomplishing through our participation in the Chalice the very Body of the Church. ***This is the reason why taking communion is imperative and essential***³⁴. Even if there are spiritual benefits in

³³ St. Nicholas Cabasilas, *Tâlcuirea Dumnezeieștii Liturghii* [The interpretation of the Divine Liturgy], XLII, Romanian transl. by E. Braniște, București, Publishing House: IBMBOR), 2011, p. 88.

³⁴ The issue of taking communion frequently, the whole polemics, as well as the patristic literature concerning frequent communion, was studied and

listening to the Gospel, to the homily, to the prayers and songs (undoubtedly even in the case of broadcast services), we must not forget that these are only the means through which we prepare to be united with Christ (“[...] *that with a clear conscience I may partake of Your Holy Body and Blood, and may have You dwell and abide in me together [...]*” –*First pre-communion prayer*), the purpose of every Holy Liturgy³⁵. Taking communion is an essential element in a plenary and complete liturgical act.

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In the light of these partial conclusions, it is clear that participating in the Holy Liturgy must take into account the liturgical context, active and direct participation, and the communion character of the liturgical act. All these realities are a *sine qua non* of any Holy Liturgy. Consequently, those who broadcast the liturgical act must take into consideration such constraints when, in conditions of pastoral economy, a guiding principle in the pastoral practice of the Orthodox Church, one asks the question: Are there pastoral exigencies that allow the temporary adjournment of these doctrinal and liturgical conditions? Our answer is: yes. As a result, we will identify and analyse a few of these pastoral realities.

5. (Un)Justified Absences and Liturgical (Non)Participation.

In the study quoted earlier, we mentioned the results of sociological research in Italy, regarding people who watch religious services on TV and over the internet. The study highlighted three categories of people who watch those broadcasts: a) people absent because of *justifiable reasons* – those who are physically unable to take part in the liturgical act (e.g., the ill/ old/ isolated people); b)

published by Ioan I. Ică jr., *Împărtășirea continuă cu Sfintele Taine. Dosarul unei controverse. Mărturiile Tradiției*, Sibiu, Publishing House: Deisis, 2006.

³⁵ N. Cabasilas, *Tâlcuirea ...*, p. 11.

people who find it *more convenient* – those who consider it more comfortable to watch the liturgical act on TV; and c) elitists, who are focused on watching the *best liturgical performance* – those who consider the broadcast Liturgy a more refined artistic experience (e.g., the presence of a better choir, nicer vestments and churches, more elaborated homilies, etc.)

Leaving aside the last two categories of individuals, who cannot justify their absence from the ecclesial liturgical context, for the first category of the faithful, the broadcast Liturgy fulfils a real need³⁶. Even if it were possible to transport the ill to church, and even if there were sufficient chapels in the hospitals and social protection institutions of Romania (236³⁷), there will still be a considerable number of ill or old people, who, because of their health, cannot participate directly in the Holy Liturgy, and the Church cannot abandon them. This category of believers has been a focus of the Church's concern since the first centuries, such that they were given the Eucharist at home, by deacons. Today, because of great distances in urban areas, and because of the lack of a continuous and permanent relationship between the local Church and the members of the ecclesial community, this is difficult to accomplish, or is a rare and exceptional event. As urban communities grow larger, there are a significant number of believers whose health prevents them from participating completely in the Liturgy, including taking communion.

For these reasons, the Church is asked to find pastoral

³⁶ In 2013 Romania were approximately 125.000 places in the hospitals financed by the government, and at least 2.000 in private hospitals. If we think that at least 10% have to stay in hospital for more than a month, the religious assistance on this considerable number of people, by offering them the chance to participate at the Liturgy on the radio and on TV, must not be neglected.

³⁷

http://www.patriarhia.ro/ro/opera_social_filantropica/biroul_pentru_asistenta_religioasa_1.html (accessed on 23.03.2014)

solutions, which also respect doctrinal truths. In this context, broadcasting the Liturgy through radio and television can be of real use, even if it cannot fulfil all the doctrinal and liturgical requirements. Taking into consideration that Christ is given to the believer in several ways (word, singing, sight³⁸) and not only through the Holy Communion, for these situations it is preferable to have even this form of *relative communion* through the broadcast services. Persons who are isolated and unable to leave their beds, wishing to comfort their souls and strengthen their hopes, may find it useful to watch the Liturgy on TV. Much of the time, this may be their only option.

Undoubtedly, one can admit that such *participation* in the Liturgy is incomplete: the believer does not bring his gift, he does not accomplish communion in prayer, he does not take communion, he does not live the sensation of the presence of the liturgical sacred. But, *is nothing right?* One can take into consideration, for example, the partial broadcasting of the Liturgy, up to the beginning of the Liturgy of the Faithful (a variant we suggested in a previous study³⁹), which would be in agreement with the old practice of the Church. The faithful would partake of the singing, prayer, biblical readings, homily, etc. This attitude is, however, somewhat problematic, since even most of the faithful in the Church do not take communion at every Liturgy. Moreover, nothing should stop us, at least in small communities, from taking the Eucharist to those people who cannot come to church.

Consequently, despite incomplete, passive participation, and the non-sacred space, believers, who cannot leave their bed out of reasons independent of their will, can be offered the chance of participating in the Liturgy in a virtual audio-visual way.

³⁸ See Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Modurile prezenței Lui Hristos ...*, p. 420-422 and St. N. Cabasilas, *Tâlcuirea ...*, p. 11-13.

³⁹ D. A. Vanca, *Sfânta Liturghie în transmisiunile TV*, p. 65-75.

6. Radio vs TV

In this context, another question arises: Given the circumstances of incomplete participation in any of the alternatives, which broadcast media offers better participation and involvement of the faithful in the liturgical act? We consider *it preferable to listen to the Liturgy on the radio rather than to watch it on TV*. Unlike the radio, television causes distraction and disconnection, diffusing even the slight atmosphere of sacredness that may be created. *Consuming* the details offered by the director: a drawing on the vestment, a face in an icon, a scholarly comment, etc., the believer is in danger of paying attention to insignificant details and missing the essence of the service. Coming between the sender (the priest) and the receiver (the believer), the commentator might even alter the message (voluntarily or involuntarily). Especially in the case of secular TV stations, commentators routinely juxtapose, on the liturgical message, information which transforms the Liturgy from the event of the Church into a worldly event, and reinterpret liturgical reality through personal comments, making us *see* something else.

Listening to the Liturgy on the radio permits the believer to concentrate more on the message. He can imagine himself for a while in his own parish church, among familiar people that he left only temporarily. He can assimilate better and more correctly the liturgical atmosphere. Television provides everything, whereas the radio leaves space for meditation, and for a certain personal cerebral activity. It is also incontestable that the radio offers us only sonorous images, making it more difficult to double it with a juxtaposed message from the studio. This leaves more space for the believer to interact mentally and spiritually with the event, on condition that he does not fall into the trap of simultaneously doing a household activity⁴⁰.

⁴⁰ A 2007 Report of the National Audiovisual Council (CNA) shows that, unlike TV viewers, radio listeners are more willing to do some activities, while listening to their favourite shows. *Raport privind obiceiuri, atitudini și satisfacția publicului radio și TV*, disponibil la

7. Final considerations and conclusions

The new evangelisation and the tempting beauty. It is obvious that in radio-TV broadcasts Liturgies cannot have the maximum *liturgical effect* that the believer experiences participating directly in church. This is, however, the very meaning and aim of television, which permits the partial participation of those who cannot attend an event directly and physically. Actually, making an analogy with the Byzantine debate in the VIIIth century, concerning the possibility of the icon, we can say that radio-TV broadcasts are possible due to their participation in a prototype. The broadcast reveals and makes the Liturgy visible. Iconoclasts accused the lack of consubstantiality of the icon with its prototype, which, according to Saint John Damascene, is the very logic of the icon – that of being different from its prototype⁴¹. My presence in front of the icon, although different from the presence of the people contemporary with Christ, is to a certain extent a presence in front of the person Christ. In the same way, although it is different from real and concrete participation, the broadcast Liturgy still contains something of the community's Liturgy, even though I do not attend it physically. Leaving aside the cases in which someone does not participate on grounds of convenience, snobbery, or elitism – cases which have nothing in common with the liturgical and evangelical spirit – we can conclude that, in the case of a temporary absence from the liturgical community, it is better to have a broadcast Liturgy, despite incomplete and passive participation, than not to participate at all.

<http://arhiva.cna.ro/cercetari/sondaje/Raport%20final-ro.pdf>

⁴¹ “The icon is a resemblance, a model of somebody, which presents that someone. In general, however, the icon does not resemble the original completely, that is the represented one. The icon is something, and the original is something else, and in general one notices a difference between them, because this is not the other, and the other is not this. St. John Damascene, *Cele trei tratate contra iconoclaștilor* [Three Apologetic Treatises against those Decrying the Holy Images], Romanian transl. by D. Fecioru, București, Publishing House: IBMBOR, 1998, p. 137.

There are also situations in which broadcasting the Holy Liturgy can have other beneficial effects. If it is true that the Liturgy of the Orthodox Church seduces through its beauty – a truth expressed figuratively in the legend of the Christianisation of the Russians – it is equally true that watching a Liturgy (even on TV) can create in the viewer the same impression of tsar Vladimir's emissaries when they saw the Liturgy in Constantinople:

“Then we went to Greece and the Greeks led us in the halidoms in which they adore their God; and we no longer knew whether we were in heaven or on earth. Especially since on earth there is not such splendour and such beauty; and we do not know how to describe it. We only know that God lives among those people and that their liturgy is the most beautiful among the ceremonies of the other nations. Because we cannot forget such beauty”.⁴²

In these situations, those who do not know Christianity, who ignore or are hostile to Christ, in a moment of grace can have a revelation similar to Vladimir's emissaries on seeing the Constantinopolitan Liturgy. Even if no one has heard of such conversions through a liturgical tele-participation, we cannot exclude this possibility a priori. Therefore, broadcast Liturgies must be well organised, with good priests, orators and singers, with discreet and elegant movements, having a positive effect on the people through their work. Although this will still not provide the same effect of active participation in Divine Liturgy, we think that in the case of broadcast liturgies, this would be the maximum possible effect: an optical kerigma – that impulse which moves you towards Christ.

A possible active participation: taking communion post-factum. If some faithful, who cannot come to Church for a long period of time because of medical reasons, want to have complete participation (at least periodically) with the Eucharistic Christ, the priest can go to their houses in order to give them the Holy Eucharist.

⁴² *Cronica lui Nestorie, apud Robert Taft, Oltre l'Oriente e l'Occidente, Roma, Publishing House: Lipa, 1999, p. 154.*

In such situations, the priest might make recommendations to *adapt* the domestic atmosphere in order to allow the listener of a broadcast Liturgy to extract the maximum possible out of such a situation. For example, a candle might be lit, or a grain of incense might be burnt, and the position of the believer should be a reverential one, as it is proper in front of a sacred thing, not as in front of a football match, so that watching of/listening to the Liturgy should produce at least the cleansing effect of the hymns and prayers sung by the believers in church. The atmosphere might be enriched by eating the antidoron brought previously from church, if the priest cannot come with the Holy Eucharist to the house of the sick person.

This way of approaching the matter might help to maximize the benefits in asylums and nursing homes, for old people, incurable people, etc. A closed-circuit television system, with the priest taking the Eucharist to the sick at the end of Liturgy, may be very beneficial.

A minimum professional deontology in broadcasting the liturgical act. The liturgical act, unlike other human activities, is subject to some exigencies and constraints that the TV producer must take into account. In the case of cultural, sports, political or other broadcasts, in order to reflect the event as *truthfully* as possible, the event must have as much visibility as possible: several cameras, several shooting angles, several details, much light, much information, etc. The liturgical act, in contrast, must be surrounded by a hieratic atmosphere, which can be rendered in the opposite way: less details, less light, fewer comments, etc. What might appear to be a lack of professionalism to people who do not frequent the church, can provide a certain liturgical atmosphere even in the media (as it seems to occur in the broadcasts of Trinitas television).

Consequently, we believe it is imperative to have some guidelines for radio-visual practice for cameramen and directors in the liturgical space.

A special litany for the ones who cannot participate in the

Liturgy, but who listen to it on the radio or watch it on TV. For a more concrete pastoral effect, in the case of some broadcast Liturgies it might be useful to introduce a special litany to mention those who cannot participate at the Feast of Christ on grounds of health or temporary isolation.

Undoubtedly, some might reply that there are litanies mentioning already *those who are not present on grounds of blessed causes*; let us admit, however, that this is a sort of *no name* metaphor. The Church has found solutions for concrete and real situations, why should we be afraid now? A new situation calls for a new solution. Such was the reason for introducing special litanies for catechumens, for energumens or penitents. There are special litanies in time of rain or drought, for travellers, etc. Two or three special supplications introduced in the Litany of fervent supplication should not disrupt or alter the Holy Liturgy.

These supplications should refer to “*the ones who on grounds of human inability or against their will cannot attend the service and the Lord’s Supper*”, but also to “*the ones who serve the others through their work making the Word heard and the glory of His Church seen*”. Perhaps they would be added only if that service is being broadcast on radio or on television. Many might consider this too great a desacralisation, but we must bear in mind that many things the Church uses today were subject to long controversies, in which the *for* or *against* positions seemed irreconcilable.

Let us not say “never”, for the future belongs entirely to Him.

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