

# THE USE OF RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL RITUALS IN CONTEMPORARY COMMUNICATION

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**ABSTRACT.** *This article identifies the main characteristics and trends in the development of media power in the context of increasing its connection with the other powers in the society, especially with the political and ecclesiastic power. The development of communication technologies, especially during the last half of a century, has led to the improvement and increase of the efficiency of communication functions at all levels, regardless of the distances between those who manage communication and the target public. The sacerdotal and political powers of our days have taken over the results of mass-media development in order to use them intensively in the attainment of their own mission and strategies, seeking to be as successful as possible. An essential way for fulfilling the goals of political and ecclesiastic power is the intentional use of specific ceremonies and rituals in the communication exchanges with the public. The “directors” and “screenwriters” involved in the organization of such spectacles and their media coverage all over the planet have so perfected this art that the powers receiving extensive media coverage have become seductive celebrities, increasingly capable of manipulation, for an increasingly wider public. The author taps into a comprehensive historical, philosophical, sociological and practical documentation in order to demonstrate the increase in the functions of audiovisual, verbal and nonverbal communication in our days, and some perverse effects of this evolution.*

**Keywords:** *conversation, communication society, media power, religious and political rituals, globalization*

## **Current dimensions of communication**

It has been argued since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the development of communication means would remove the barriers among peoples, would facilitate the transfer of material, scientific, cultural and spiritual values, so that it would come to unify life on Earth. This caused J. Ortega y Gasset to state, more than seven decades ago, that:

“over these last years, each people has been receiving, every hour and every minute, such an amount of news, which are so recent about what is going on with the other peoples, that an illusion was created, that they are actually in the middle of the other peoples or in their immediate proximity...for the effects of universal public life, the sizes of the world have suddenly shrunk. The peoples have swiftly become dynamically closer”.(Oretega y Gasset 2002: 117-118)

In his theory of the noosphere, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin foreshadowed the emergence of the infosphere, of a planetary consciousness generated by the interactions among the billions of individual consciousnesses, reaching a new stage in the development of humankind – a new specific layer of the Terra – called the Omega point (Teilhard de Chardin 1970).

The road to *cyberculture*, to the *cyberspace spirit* – as the *noosphere* is called in our days, has its origins in oral, verbal and nonverbal communication, of the “face-to-face” conversation type, over 500,000 years ago. Written communication, with its specific iconic, linguistic, logical and semantic components, was invented more than 5,000 ago. The advent of printing (Gutenberg, 1450) was followed by the invention of the telephone (Graham Bell, 1876) and the radio (G. Marconi, 1899), whereas the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the strong development of television, the Internet, mobile telephony, satellite communication, multimedia as a whole. Thinkers (philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, futurologists, economists etc.) enthused by the global-scale development of new communication technologies, digital culture and their effects on individuals, groups and peoples, established a diagnosis on the new realities: some called the new stage – the *information and communication society* (cyberneticist Norbert Wiener was convinced, in 1949, that information and communication were factors of global transformation of society, of superior organization and management of shared life, so that it will be possible to prevent / eliminate anomic states and conflicts, and to increase the degree of order in the society); the knowledge-based *postindustrial society* or the *knowledge society*, which eliminates ideologies (Daniel Bell – the end of the 1950s) by enthroning reason and transparency; the *society of information globalization* (M. McLuhan, in 1962, in his work *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, anticipated the formation of a sort of “global village”, of a single world in which the individual can communicate at any time and with anyone on the planet, instantaneously, through images, sounds and texts, as a consequence of the explosion of the information culture, including telecommunications); the *teledemocracy society* (of which Alvin Toffler wrote, in the sense that in advanced societies there is an abundance of remote information and communication sources, owing to which all citizens have access to culture, to decision-making, in a democracy effected in a virtual plane, “directly”, thus increasing the autonomy of the individual); the *technotronic society* (Zbigniew Brzeziński foresaw it as a society of cyberspace networks regulated by ideas, values, norms, laws and moral principles); a

*society regulated by "universal consciousness"* (philosopher Pierre Lévy made the prophecy that, through digital networks, a universal consciousness, a universal sphere of knowledge would be formed). Other thinkers used the expression *mass society* (S. Moscovici), which specializes in broadcasting, directly and instantaneously, news and opinions to the entire planet.

Thus, a current of thought was constituted, materialized in the *communication society ideology*, in the myth and mystification of the infosphere society, emerging in the 1980s. Essentially, the statements of the followers of this ideology were:

- the communication society eliminates boundaries, barriers among individuals, social and ethnic groups, peoples, social classes;
- universal access to global, generalized and transparent communication;
- the democratization of social life;
- an increase in the people's degree of autonomy and freedom;
- the diseases of liberal societies will be healed by generalizing welfare, cooperation, dialogue;
- it is possible and feasible to reach a consensus in establishing the order and advance of the society;
- the globalization of information broadens knowledge and guarantees the equality of chances for individuals and collectivities.

For another category of intellectuals (philosophers, anthropologists, political scientists, sociologists etc.), the new information and communication technologies have generated not only advantages, transferring lifestyles, practices, traditions, customs, values from one part of the planet to another, but also alienation and disillusion associated to and in line with the prophecies of prior theorists. In other words, the information and communication society is a myth, a utopia that must be submitted to critical analysis (Philippe Breton, Lucien Sfez, Erik Neveu etc.). Ph. Breton states that "the communication society utopia" cultivates the illusion of harmony and order in the society, the leveling of knowledge, human estrangement, social tribalization and the collapse of the system of values. The alienated individual, isolated from society, finds a palliative in the sphere of virtual communication, losing the sense of his/her existence. The globalization of information and communication levels out knowledge and culture, generates an artificial consensus, devoid of substance.

The globalization of information does not increase the degree of understanding of the world by the people. The abundance of information, for a large part of viewers, listeners or readers, may lead to disorientation, loss of value criteria, limitation to an average, commonplace threshold of understanding and knowledge. Communication through images on a monitor or screen limits intelligence, reflection and critical thought. This is a general characteristic of the iconic means of communication. The image may entice and produce a direct pleasure. The reception of images presupposes a lesser effort for understanding the significations and the message, in comparison with understanding a text or a logical

– linguistic communication. The culture of the public generally privileges the iconization of the message, the image producing pleasure, enticement, a more rapid formation of convictions and increasing situations of dependence. All these limit critical thinking, depth of thought, reflection and creative intelligence. Moreover,

“the perfectly transparent communication is a myth. Messages are often ambivalent, the receiver selects the data, but the real stakes are often hidden”. (Dortier 2010: 11-22)

Another critical observation targeting the “information and communication society” model consists of the fact that most real Internet users and television screen “addicts” may, partly, become a virtual community, but are in fact estranged people, isolated from society, who, in spite of physically residing in their homes, are attached to some cultural values that make up a fundamentally artificial, imaginary community, based on the fascination induced by the Internet and the “tyranny” of pleasures triggered by the images on the screen / monitor. The aspiration of building a virtual community, involving the participation of all members of society, of the entire humanity – contemplated by some prophets, is a new myth, just as the “teledemocratic society” is a new ideology a new illusion of reality.

Another criticism refers to the identity of cultures and civilizations, of the different communities, in the sense that telecommunication and multimedia development can alter this identity, can generate an eclectic mix of cultures, by bringing remote individuals and peoples together. The promotion of multiculturalism is naturally based on the respect for identity, for the specificity of each culture. As such, the new information and telecommunication technologies, the process of information globalization should be oriented in this direction. This very idea was held by D. Wolton, who believed that:

“alongside communication, we must strengthen cultural identities, in order for people to not feel deprived and threatened by their opening to the others. Otherwise, the risk is casting them into what I call a “refuge-identity”. (Wolton 2010: 295)

Likewise, other authors (such as Manuel Castells, A. Bressand, C. Dister, N. Maffesoli) point out to the increasing inequalities between those who are connected to the networks and those that do not have access to them. Hence, an increase in social discrepancies, inequities, the formation of centrifugal, conflictual groups, a democracy that generates social fragmentation and “tribalization”. Such real trends reveal the weaknesses in the myth of information and communication society. The *mass-media* standardize the frameworks of thought and behavior only for those who receive their messages. Those who are not connected (individuals, groups, communities), those who cannot or do not want to receive it, will adhere to other values than the ones being disseminated, second by second, by the “cultural

industry" based on new communication technologies. On the other hand, in a great deal of cases, the *mass-media* do not equidistantly reflect the opinions and currents of opinion held by the public. The most disadvantaged one are those who are not connected to the networks. Most of them are not part of the public to whom the *mass-media* are addressed, directly or indirectly, or whose opinions are adopted and expressed. For this reason, the new cultural and communication industry often creates and maintains a limited, superficial and artificial consensus; it is an agent of cultural and social leveling only on the scale of a specific public, but not on the scale of the entire public, nor to that of the crowd that is not part of the viewership, audience or readership.

As compared to original communication –“face to face” conversation, having developed for hundreds of thousands of years as a source of public opinions, collective attitudes, influencing and forming collective mindsets, causing the direct contagion of individual thoughts and feelings, communication at the infosphere level estranges people from one another, transforms them into separate viewers, readers or listeners, each being isolated in their own room, connected to the Internet or addicted to the television program. As Serge Moscovici observed,

“the television intervenes, separating individuals, locking them up in their homes, making them stiffen in front of the screen, and contact becomes as limited as possible, even within the same family”. (Moscovici 2001: 19)

As the *mass-media* develop, a marginalization will follow, an overthrowing of the role of communication and direct connections among people. To this background, certain effects will appear with respect to alienation, to a new form of human estrangement. In this context, opportunities for public reunions, debates and public events decrease. It is more difficult today to convince people to step out of their homes, to leave the screen or the Internet in order to participate in a political meeting, a public reunion or a religious celebration.

With all the pros and cons to the information and communication society myth, we can ascertain the steady growth of the functions of the media power, the enhancement of the role of *mass-media* in contemporary society. The media power presents itself not only as a means and a partner for the other powers (political-administrative, sacerdotal, military, judiciary, economic etc.), but also as an entity that can counteract, threaten, convince, shatter, manipulate, distort the functions exercised by the other powers in society, delimiting itself from them, sometimes arrogantly and perfidiously, sometimes assuming a position of equality and transparency. The increase in the role of media power in society occurs through the development of its relations of communication with the other powers and, most of all, with the public whose interests, options and values it tries to assume through a competition, much greater than in the past, with the other powers. It is clear that in these last few years of economic and financial crisis, which is gradually added unprecedented social, cultural and moral crises, a wide scope is open for the growth

of the role of media power, of influencing public opinion, as in the case of other crises, wars or natural disasters. Generally speaking, when people face a grave danger, a war or even a crisis with intolerable "sacrifice curves", they turn into very motivated viewers, readers or listeners. In such situation, communication can become an "opiate of the people" – preparing the ground for the media power to maximally increase its functions.

### **The position of some religious institutions regarding the role of communication in the era of globalized information**

Spiritual leaders, hierarchs of the great religious institutions of today and of all times, have been aware of the role of communication in the growth and development of adherent communities; they have used media coverage tools, as much as the level of technological advancement of each era allowed them to, in order to attain their goals. In its essence, religion gathers people and communities together, around the same values; Christianity teaches the love of God, as a supreme value, by people, and of people by each individual. The formation and development of spiritual communities are not possible without communication, in all its forms, which is meant to unite people into a solidary community.

The Holy Christian Apostles used communication by letters with a maximum intensity, specific to the level of civilization; likewise, the Fathers of the Christian Church brought innovations, in the sense of increased efficiency of communication, with elements that are well integrated in the audiovisual system. Christian images are found in catacombs, whereas liturgical hymns appeared in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., being the first elements of audiovisual communication. The Holy Scripture notes the importance and extraordinary power of words; they can unite people or, on the contrary, they can divide them. Saint James's Epistle mentions that "Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be." (James 3:10).

Throughout its entire history, Christianity has used written and audiovisual communication to full extent, so that the Church approaches the history of human communication as a long road covered by humanity from the Babel project – generator of reciprocal confusion and misunderstanding, to the use of the gift of languages, which led to the restoration of communication among people, centered on Jesus, finding its supreme ideal, the model of perfection, in God, who became a human and a brother. The first Epistle of John the Evangelist emphasizes the spiritual valences of communication:

"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ". (1 John 1:3).

According to the classic teachings, Christian institutions, especially Orthodox and Catholic ones, assign a central, privileged importance to media

coverage. Thus, Orthodoxy in general and the Romanian Orthodox Church, in particular, have launched public policies, throughout the last 20 years, for the development and intensive use of a proper media power, being aware of the pastoral, missionary and cultural importance of the *mass-media*, especially that of iconic communication, including the Internet. In this sense, the Romanian Patriarchy created the Basilica Press Center, with the following components: the TRINITAS TV television station, the TRINITAS Radio, the publication *Lumina*, the BASILICA News Agency, the Press Bureau, having an editorial policy adequate to accomplishing the spiritual mission of the Church in society. Apart from these, over 100 daily and periodical Orthodox publications are currently edited in Romania.

Different documents of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church address the increase in quality and efficiency of the pastoral and cultural mission, underlining that the general functions of the *mass-media* (informative, critical-civic, educative, cultural, community binder, entertainment) must be exercised through the spiritualization of readers, viewers or listeners in all social, ethnical, professional and age categories. The Orthodox Church thus stretches out a hand to those uninterested in religion, to the hesitant ones, promotes *mass-media* responsibility for educating youth in the spirit of Christianity, is concerned with the expansion of public and the increase in audience rating, with the rise in popularity by spiritualizing the communicational act. The institutions of the Romanian Orthodox Church, eparchies, archpriest parish districts, parishes, monasteries, theological institutes have launched portals, sites cumulating multimedia libraries, missionary databases, study archives and articles in Church journals, forums etc. Communication via the Internet thus becomes the meeting place of the Church with its members and Christians interested in the message of the institutions of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

The force of influencing people's knowledge, feelings and attitudes by using multimedia communication is appreciated by today's successors of the Apostles, due to the instantaneous, complete and transparent way in which information and images are broadcast and can be received by social categories with a lesser intellectual training. Television is the most efficient means for popularizing the wealth of the Church's liturgical rituals, for strengthening human solidarity in the multi-religious, multicultural and multiethnic European area. In this sense,

"The Orthodox Church promotes an attitude of reconciliation, of completion of the concept of tolerance through that of Christian love, which can only be achieved when we shall have crossed the borders of self-sufficiency, in an attempt to know and understand the culture and religion of those who are different from us." (TRINITAS Television)

*Mass-media* foster dialog, cooperation for the purpose of renewing Christian life and Romanian society, openness towards other spiritual values in Europe and elsewhere. Among the objectives assumed by the institutions responsible for the

media coverage of the R.O.C., the most important ones are: promotion of the values of Christian Orthodox life, a moral-religious education, cultivation of the esthetic of the sacred, promotion of Christian and Romanian culture within the country and abroad, promotion of the Church's social and philanthropic activities, the dissemination of environmental culture (TRINITAS Radio).

On the other hand, the Catholic Church increased its interest in the modern means of social communication. The *Pastoral Instruction on the Means of Social Communication* "Communio et Progressio", published in 1971, underlined that:

"The Church recognizes these tools as a "gift from God", meant to unite people in a close fraternity, according to His providential plan, in order to help them collaborate to His Redemption Plan".

In this sense, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications reacted, as always, during the World Communications Day, by underlining the increasing use of the means of social communication for the accomplishment of the mission of the Catholic Church. His Holiness addressed his messages to Catholic believers around on occasions such as this.

The modern means of social communication are factors of cultural and spiritual prosperity, and can contribute to the increase in the degree of order in human society, to the widening of horizons and the intellectual enrichment of people. The Catholic Church seeks to attain, as shown in the documents of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, two main objectives with respect to the *mass-media*:

- The support for the development of the means of social communication;
- The correct use of *mass-media* for the good of the people, for progress, justice, peace, in the spirit of solidarity and proclamation of the Gospel.

As its Orthodox counterpart, the Catholic Church has been concerned with internal, as well as external communication. In its relations with the exterior, the Church has engaged in dialog with the factors responsible for the *mass-media*, seeking to obtain the drafting of *mass-media* public policies, in order to grant support and encouragement to media institutions. At the same time, the Church intermediates the communication between God and the people, being the keeper and guardian of the Divine Revelation; as a communion of Eucharistic persons and communities, the Church has an essential internal communication, which is why the communication practice within the Church must be exemplary, rising to the highest standards of truthfulness, responsibility, sensitivity towards human rights.

The documents of the Pontifical Council for Social Communication have been emphasizing, over the last years, the fact that the means of communication are key factors for influencing the course of events in the world of today, and that their power has become so great that they can create either positive or negative reactions of the public to the events, according to their interests. For this very reason of having such a great power, people who work in the media must observe the

deontological code of their profession. Its essence is to serve truth, justice, freedom and Christian love (*Pacem in terris*, 167). The philosophical core of such a code was expressed by Pope John Paul II in his address during the 37<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, on January 24, 2003. In this sense, the pontifical message mentions that:

“Freedom is a precondition of true peace as well as one of its most precious fruits. The media serve freedom by serving truth: they obstruct freedom to the extent that they depart from what is true by disseminating falsehoods or creating a climate of unsound emotional reaction to events. Only when people have free access to true and sufficient information can they pursue the common good and hold public authority accountable”.

Consequently, the people in the *mass-media* must serve truth, common universal good, peace and happiness for all, in order to live up to the highest standards in practicing their profession.

In the last century, religious institutions have brought a greater amount of information to believers, broadcast with enhanced effects in the plane of forming convictions, due to the improvement of communication rituals, techniques, methods and procedures. The high hierarchs, as well as the masters of the powers in society, have become rulers over a world of specific signs and information, coordinators of media coverage, succeeding in using symbols, ideas, messages in order to promote the values of religion and accomplish the pastoral, spiritual mission they had assumed. The current communication culture, with all its components, has been assimilated and applied by religious institutions, which led to the improvement of ceremonies and rituals, to the interweaving of verbal and nonverbal communication, of logical-semantic and audio-video communication into new, original structures. All these have led to the increase in the visibility and audience of religious institutions, in the spiritual extension and cohesion of religious communities, not only in Europe, but also in the remotest geographical areas on the planet.

Verbal communication, through conversation, exposition, sermons, catecheses, and, generally speaking, through oral or written discourse, is today integrated into the system of audiovisual communication, which addresses itself to millions / billions of people. In this system, persuasion methods build mostly upon images taken over from religious rituals – icons, all kinds of objects of worship – all of them presented in color and using techniques that emphasize, with a greater power than that of the spoken word, the superior esthetic valences and the sacred, solemn and persuasive character. The ingenious intertwining of the different forms of communication during the organization and process of religious rituals manages to amplify esthetic emotions, religious feelings, to seduce both participants and viewers, to convince. For the mass of believers, the power of priests has assumed a

leading part, due to the development of *mass-media*, which broadcasts, widely and instantaneously, images of persons situated at the top of clerical hierarchy, important religious ceremonies, special events such as the visits of the Pope, ceremonies occasioned by the great Christian holidays, or by the funerals of important spiritual leaders of the world, images from the Holy Synod, the presence of the Patriarch in Parliament, meetings of the Pope / Patriarch with politicians or prestigious personalities affiliated to other religions or cultures etc. Thus, religious power has increased in our days, owing also to the media coverage of the spectacular aspects of rituals, to the broadcasting of images related to the great religious events, to the utilization of science and art direction.

### **The use of rituals in political communication**

The role of political events taking place in a solemn ambiance, of rites, ceremonies or customs in the consolidation of power was intuited by the great governors / great priests since the Antiquity, practically since the emergence of state formations. The religious functions of rituals were taken over, through doubling or transfer, by the lay political power for the purpose of maintaining, strengthening or creating a certain type of order in society, of ensuring social stability, cohesion, and coherence in the functioning and development of human collectivities, of obtaining recognition in increasingly larger social circles, of consolidating its legitimacy and increasing its performance as a public authority. For this reason, the millennia of development of human culture and civilization resulted in the improvement of the management of rites, the organization and staging of religious and political ceremonies, the use of political spectacle at the right time and in the right place, according to the strategy of political actors. This is why P. Lardellier was right when he wrote that:

“The new contemporary world is still laden with rites, abounding in rituality, fertile in myths and symbols, which the outspoken rationality of our modern world hardly manages to conceal, or do away with.” (Lardellier 2009: 9)

In the present study, by ritual (rite or ceremony) we mean a repetitive social activity, performed according to a set of regulations, in a solemn ambiance, having a strong symbolic charge, implying a good “orchestration” and the intervention of a “stage director”.

In the “New dictionary of neologisms”, by ritual is meant a certain custom, performed according to certain rites. Another meaning consists of:

“the staging of a sacred event or myth; religious ceremony” or “magical act with folkloric implications, having the object of orienting occult forces, malign or benign, towards a determined action being carried out in accordance to certain rules”. (*Noul dicționar de neologisme* 1997: 1254)

Rituals and ceremonies are generally:

“assimilated to historical forms of constraint, imposing class affiliations on the individual, as well the burden of “outdated” customs and traditions, originating from another order, from another epoch”. (Lardellier 2009: 11).

Thus, the vigor of political rituals is an indicator of community adhesions to a founding past, to a universe of values and a civilization, an index for the degree of order in the communities for which ceremonies symbolically plead.

Rites, ceremonies, and their orientative myths were practiced over 6.000 ago (Eliade&Culianu 1993). In Mesopotamia, for example, around 3500 BCE, temples were being built, and religious, political and administrative institutions were functional. The legitimation of the first kings, the selection of chieftains and military leaders were supported by rituals, by organizing opulent ceremonies that were addressed to a broad public. The rituals consisted of prayers, offerings and votive statues placed in front of the God's altar, as well as organizing the New Year Celebration. The ritual of sacred matrimony enjoyed particular importance and popularity – even the king participated in it; he was joined to the goddess Inanna in order to secure wealth for the inhabitants in the following year. The Hebrews organized, in approx. 2.000 BCE, religious ceremonies associated to the praising of kings and great prophets; for this purpose, during the reign of king Solomon, the Temple of Jerusalem was built (10<sup>th</sup> century BCE), in order to shelter the Ark and to host religious rituals. In Pre-Islamic Arabia, tribal religions were practiced, sanctuaries were erected, offerings were given to the main tribal deities, animals were sacrificed, and there were rituals connected to religious holidays, fasting and pilgrimage. When, following the years of exile spent in Medina, Muhammad received the divine revelations, then, as a result of the Mecca being conquered by Muhammad and an his army, the above-mentioned city became a stronghold, the focus of prayer and a pilgrimage site for all Muslims. After the emergence of the Torah, the Gospels and the Qur'an, Jews, Christians and Muslims had their respective fundamental practices (rites, ceremonies etc.) of religious life fixed in writing, with the specific doctrinal effects for the political, administrative and judicial powers. All these powers were keepers of other rituals, blending together the sacred and the profane.

In other parts of the world, such as India, temples, places of worship, various Vedic rituals and hymns were ubiquitous, the ceremonies being organized by “masters”, thoroughly familiar with the formula and rules of performance. The Vedic priests, surrounded by assistants, methodically ensured the observance of ritualistic rules. The Vedic culture and civilization included a wide range of rituals, among which were those of consecration, initiation, birth, marriage, death. The Brahman *guru* often played an essential part in some types of rites. In the Chinese world, a great deal of rites was based on the Confucian canon ever since the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Rituals were used by spiritual and political rules in order to ensure

order in social life, to bestow coherence upon the activities being carried out, to secure the observance of the law or the *Dao* way, meant to guarantee the equilibrium of individuals in society, and of social states with respect to one another. Unlike Buddhism, which promoted social hierarchies instituted by monks and laymen, Confucianism had no priests. The performers of its rituals were prestigious, just, knowledgeable and responsible people, thought to be capable of refereeing the most diverse rituals, including bureaucratic ones, designed for the occupation of high positions in the imperial bureaucracy.

Other civilizations, such as the African, Aztec, Maya or US Native American ones, also feature rituals (connecting societies to divinities) of sacrifice, community purification, healing diseases in individuals touched by the forces of evil, rites of passage, death- and birth-related, ancestor worship, communication with the gods through dances likely to induce a state of trance. The Mayas practiced sacred rituals, the nodal moment of which was sacrifice. The Aztecs, as a people "of the Sun", would organize periodical rituals with primordial human sacrifices, for the Sun to follow its course, and for human life to last until "The Fifth Age". Ritualistic sacrifice occurred in the *Templo Mayor*.

It is not necessary to bring further examples, including those from Daco-Roman culture, or from the medieval and modern eras, in order to understand the role of rituals in ensuring the continuity of human communities of all kinds, in increasing their social and organizational cohesion around some fundamental values, in asserting their identity and their readiness to open themselves to communication with outsiders. All these are demonstrated, first and foremost, by the media successes and effects of religious rituals. The functions of rituals in political life seem to have been understood and used even since the first kings or emperors and, in our days, they are employed by the political power in a well-crafted way, leaving aside the costs that can often amount to fabulous sums. The relationship between sacredness and power, between the faithful/ the Church and God, is skillfully used by various *staffs*, teams of experts in "image" or in media coverage, by staging some pseudo-religious rituals, so that the functions of religious ceremonies are being taken over through the "conversion" of religious rituals into political rituals.

The ceremonies taking place in connection to the visits of the Pope, of presidents, kings or emperors are prepared, staged and carried out, in our days, in accordance to a detailed code of rules, so that no mistake would arise – being shaped in the image of religious rituals. The same happens in the case of funeral ceremonies of heads of state or highly influential politicians, coronation ceremonies, the signing of treaties, the launch of the electoral campaign of some outstanding political leaders etc.; all of these follow precise codes, pre-established sequences, so that their "live" broadcasting should fascinate the public, persuade and entice the spectating citizens. Not only does the organization of solemn, festive celebrations dedicated to the "National Day", of the several commemorations in which the head of state and other political personalities etc. participate use the specific myths, symbols and effects of religious life, but in many countries even priests, hierarchs of

religious institutions are attracted to the ceremonies, in order to increase their prestige, credibility, influence and persuasive force with respect to the citizens involved in communication as direct participants and viewers via television.

The presence of rituals in political and global media coverage is due to the advantages brought to the power: the increase in the degree of legitimacy, the increase of prestige and influence, the strengthening of community cohesion and the existing socio-economic order, the internalization and generalization of values propagated by the power, the prevention of tensions and anomic states. The use of rituals and ceremonies and their ample coverage in the media is explained by their persuasive force, motivating and activating the public in the sense of strategies and programs adopted by the power, which is much greater than that specific to the verbal media. The audio-visual political communication, implicitly the ritualistic one, is much more complex than the verbal one and has more efficient formative and, most of all, affective and conative valences. In this sense, N. Frigioiu wrote:

“Through ritualistic communication, group loyalties and identities, the values and norms of an organization and a leader’s principles of legitimacy become visible”. (Frigioiu 2009: 20)

The modern techniques of *mass-media* communication increase the efficiency of the media discourse, which is especially due to the iconic component, the use of images, the drama being broadcast live – which set human affectivity and attitudes in motion. Yet, at the same time, it personalizes the power, transforming it into an enticing ‘star’. And, in our days, as R. – G. Schwartzberg wrote:

“The power as a star is a mobilizer, as well an integrator and a stability factor ... it makes it easier for popular masses to accept the discipline and constraints that are necessary to common progress”.( Schwartzberg 1995: 259)

The media coverage of the real facts of power by resorting to different rituals staged by masters, by specialists, consultants in *media*-related issues, increases the spectacularness of power, creating stars in politics. The same author believes that the spectating citizen will evolve, as a result of the reception of this political show, towards a state of alienation. Seduced by the political circus presented on the TV screen, by the prettified, counterfeit or artificially created images of the “giants” of politics, viewers become admirers of the “show culture”, declining into a “submission culture”. In such situations, the spectating citizens are easier to manipulate. Complacent in their adoration of screen idols, their critical-civic spirit will diminish. This is why, following the development of modern communication technologies, of the *mass – media*, the amount of information has increased, but so has the amount of non-information and misinformation of citizens. Such an evolution is beneficial to the power, to the preservation of the existing social order.

The symbolic universe generated by the broadcasting of political ceremonies and rituals is ferment not for social, organizational or decisional innovation, but rather for the reproduction of the social order, for the conservation of the *status-quo*.

The political actors of today, the political agents who launch and implement public policies, the important agencies of the state (the Presidential Institution, the Parliament, the Government, the Ministries) have been transformed into factories producing and reproducing diverse ceremonies: rituals of commemoration, inauguration, awarding of titles, medals and decorations, opening or closing ceremonies, appointment or coronation ceremonies, fraternization banquets, hunting rituals, with the participation of the head of state and officials, the ceremony of receiving letters of accreditation, different forms of celebration (the queen's official birthday, the birthday of the head of state, a baptism in the royal or presidential family etc.). Regardless of their type (confrontational or consensual, individual or communitarian, commemorative or inaugurative, electoral or coronation-related, compensatory or integrative, founding or transitional), political rituals have a spectacular form, are symbolically charged and are efficient on the social and institutional plane, as well as that pertaining to collective mentality. Broadcasting the spectacle of public ceremonies focuses on the celebration of community values, marking those moments, historical actions, important achievements that can lead to an increase in the degree of order in the society, in the coherence of the projected activity, and to the consolidation of political cohesion.

There is a founding paradigm for each type of ritual, which is often correlated to a myth, to a symbolic universe meant to awaken emotions, to captivate the attention of a wide public or to end the indifference of crowds. For example, in the case of commemorative rituals (celebration of the Union of Walachia and Moldavia, the National Day, Victory Day, the Europe Days etc.), publicity is made several weeks / months in advance, by using the system of symbols and values connected to the commemorated event; official (and unofficial) invitations are addressed to personalities in the country and abroad, seeking to attribute a certain grandeur to the event; as the commemorative event approaches, its political, cultural and spiritual importance is intensely propagated through the media, in order to attract the public into participating, directly or only as viewer/listener; the *mass-media* are invited to the ceremonies, in order for them to record and broadcast these ceremonies live, then in reruns, covering the country and various corners of the world where there is public; mass psychology is influenced by using some traditions related to the event, in order to motivate people into participating, promising several offers to them ("beans and trotter", "sarmas and Romanian polenta (mămăliguță)", „mici and beer" etc.); the announcement of the place (localities, precise locations) and time when the rituals are to be held; preparation of the spot and the "spectacle" to take place: tribune, flags, logos, banners, portraits of the leaders, route markings, slogans, flower bouquets etc.; design of the protocol and its application, in the tiniest details, regarding the order of arrival and departure of the heads of state, prime ministers, the Patriarch, foreign guests, political leaders etc.; wreath ceremony,

conducted in accordance with the previously announced order; official speeches; the staging of the participating public's manifestations (applause, raising flags, using flowers etc.) in order to maximize the efficiency of the image effect; parade of the armed forces, accompanied by stunts performed by the military aviation, rounds of cannon etc., with the use of specific marks; interviewing the president or other representatives of the power, in front of video cameras; leaving the tribune in the pre-established order; "crowd bathing", performed by the charismatic leader; popular celebrations; the reception given by the head of state; observance of the departure ritual until boarding the airplane etc. The other types of political ceremonies have similar structures and phases, but with some specific elements.

All political ceremonies are open to borrowing elements from religious or other rituals, so that they may succeed in maximizing the use of the psychic dominants of the crowd, the emotiveness and the faith of the masses. At the same time, they can promote innovation when they count on increasing the number of adherents, electors or sympathizers. The grandeur of celebration, the ritualistic and popular spectacle, the charismatic speeches invoking the patriotism of ancestors, the solidarity, the almightiness of God etc., the solemnity of the ritual make the public admire the beauty and grandeur of the event, to forget their current, everyday problems, to abandon their feelings of contempt and distrust towards their leaders. All these cause the force of transfiguring religiousness into various important political ceremonies to reveal, as Al. Dorna wrote:

"an amazing fact: the revival of religion affects all social levels, especially in Western countries: urban sectors, immigrants, young people and intellectuals disillusioned with modernity". (Dorna 2004: 239)

The wide public does not necessarily question the truth and rationality of the symbolism, of the speeches integrated into political rituals, but rather the feeling and the faith. Consequently, the reactions and attitudes of the masses, expressed in behaviours, show the frailty of the values of science, rationalism and materialism, and emphasize the existence of a crisis of meaning, of axiological orientation in contemporary societies. Faced with these realities, the myth and the entire symbolism of political rituals are going through a reinvigorating process. It has become a crucial objective for the state power institutions to integrate themselves into the ritualistic scene, to broadcast important events launched by them in an atmosphere of ritualistic solemnity, with a charge of "sacredness" as credible as possible. To the question, asked by Pascal Lardellier:

"Why are all the important moments of political life enclosed (and, ultimately, protected and divinized, at the same time) by a protocol and by a ceremonial?"

the given response is:

“From the very moment of its installation, power is neither accepted as absent, nor as anonymous. Therefore, its manifestations are never coincidental. On the contrary, they are systematically ritualized, according to esthetic and symbolic modalities precisely established through protocol and tradition.”(Lardellier 2009: 49).

Political ceremonies, regardless of the type to which they pertain, the ritualistic channels through which they are broadcast to the public, are the most efficient means of the power in order to impose itself, and cultivate respect, attachment, fear and submission. But rituals, taken per se, are not the only key to attaining success in realizing the strategies of certain policies. On the other hand, the ritualistic failure may be a sign for the degradation of a policy. We remember all too well how the organizers of the last meeting of Nicolae Ceausescu, in accordance to the traditional rite applied to the great popular assemblies, meant to legitimate, to praise and to sustain a communist regime, had contradictory effects to the purpose desired by the authorities; these happened due to the intervention of some unforeseen elements, with a role of “psychological bomb” transmitted to the collective mentality. The failure of that ceremony foreshadowed the end of a political system, of a totalitarian regime.

Generally speaking, both political rituals, and some of the religious ones, may influence the march of politics in a state or that of a political actor in three different ways:

- That of legitimacy, consecration, solidarity and cohesion of the existing political system. The Orthodox Church has often oriented important rituals, throughout history, in the sense of legitimizing the existing regime, of preserving the *status-quo*; the Catholics in Germany have always endorsed the Christian Democratic Union party etc.;
- That of contesting politically directed movements and processes. For example, the Church has contested the taking of some political initiatives, of some legislative projects involving the infringement of human rights, the discrimination of women, immigrants or other social categories, it has submitted to critical analysis certain freedoms assumed by the *mass – media*, by which human dignity was debased, or the education of youth and children was negatively affected etc.;
- That of expressing an attitude of protest with respect to the organization of certain events and to the implementation of projects contravening to the canons of religions, such as the organization and propagation via mass-media of rituals belonging to unnatural sexual groups, the legalization of same-sex marriage, the legalization of prostitution, the legalization of medically-assisted death (euthanasia),

the launch of policies with destructive effects for the biosphere, and the environment in general.

### **Instead of conclusions**

In this era of globalized information and communication, anticipated and evaluated by many great thinkers of modernity as being built on the values of science, rationalism and humanism, the issue of ideological dominance constitutes an essential stake. The media power as a whole, the political and sacerdotal powers involved in the media propagate their creeds, values and systems of symbols, sometimes forming alliances, resorting to new technical means of communication, perfecting both their discourse and, especially, the iconic, nonverbal communication, implicitly by means of intensively using rituals on all communication channels, in all directions and places on the planet.

In contemporary societies and states, legitimation obtained by having recourse to the sacred, to religious values, to the affective and persuasive valences of sacred rituals, both old and new, to myths and symbols, has invaded political life. The phenomenon is very visible in former communist countries, but not only. Through their spectacular force, through solemnity, grandeur and influencing capacity, the great political rituals are addressed to an increasingly wide public, dispersed not only throughout one country, but also in different parts of the planet, exercising multiple functions on viewers, listeners and readers – not only associating and integrating them into the community, and this includes virtual communities, but also promoting the identity of their culture and fundamental institutions; in order to do so, they might steer the organizations to which they belong in contrary or even antagonistic directions.

The ceremonies organized in our days by states, by the high hierarchs of religious life, assume the form and drama of impressive, pompous, grandiose and sumptuous shows, of “profane liturgies”. The real political life, the existing political institutions are clad in an artificial cloak, a “façade”, prettified so that it might fascinate the public, attract it and turn it into its ally. Truth, reason and arguments become secondary. The purpose is to fascinate and convince crowds, to cultivate fears so that, in the end, the strategy of power could be carried through, and that the public would comply with the social hierarchies and the desirable order. Thus, a new type of human estrangement is produced, a human addicted to media culture, a virtual conformist or, if not, one who is easier to manipulate by the stagings of the political power.

In periods of crisis, wars or natural disasters, the public has a greater inclination towards receiving the ritualistic message. The functions of ritualistic communication find it easier to attain the performances anticipated by the power, provided that they make use of specific ceremonies, adequate to the historical situation. The secular experience of political leaders emphasizes the fact that, from the stock of myths and rituals of humanity, it is most appropriate, in such historical contexts, to give media coverage to the specific spectacular form of those connected

to the cult of ancestors, heroes and, last but not least, the dead. Commemorative ceremonies are replacing the inaugurative ones, community ceremonies have much greater effects in the plane of ensuring cohesion than individual ones, the efforts of the political power to attract the sacerdotal power on its side, as an ally, are becoming much greater than in those historical stages that were based on balance and calm. Rites of celebration are being replaced by those that will succeed in distracting the attention of crowds (victims) from the everyday hardships they face and to orient it towards a sacred universe, towards a prosperous future or towards the "life after death". In other words, the political power manages communication, the messages being transmitted, the use of rituals, symbols, myths and values, according to the historical stage – which implies not only a good mastery of communication sciences, but also of the art and philosophy that decides what must be transmitted to the public, in what way, how much and to whom exactly.

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