

THE TELEVISION

The television and the Christian life



Television is, probably, not only the most influential medium, but also the one which itself signifies best modern Western civilization, which we are part of either we liked it or not.

Modern orthodox thinkers and theologians are mostly confused in front of the obvious power which television has both on the atheists and the orthodox. The most radical ones recommend simply to throw the TV set out of the window, others to sell it, the third ones - to turn it off and turn it on quite rarely, in strictly controlled occasions. More or less, they all agree that the influence of watching TV programmes intensively is harmful, but they mainly decide with effort to declare bad and harmful television itself as a human invention.

The beginning of the process whose temporary ending is the appearance of television (the process hasn't probably been finished yet) goes back into the Renaissance time. In Western part of the Christian world apparently defeated paganism raises its head. Spiritual view on the world symbolically presented on the icons and frescoes becomes disturbance to chaotically nervous desire of the man to rule the world not in the way that God offered him, but in the way which separated our forefather from God.

The renaissance people don't see everything created as God's gift which the man can and should return to God as a return gift, they don't see the world as the man-child's aid with the help of which he can communicate with his heavenly Father. The renaissance people take back the wrong opinion of their oldest ancestors as strong as they can - they grab greedily the rotting world as their only and sufficient food as they think. Revived greed is angrier than ever before - a renaissance man wants to swallow the whole world without remnants. A new practical view of the world is necessary for that inhuman effort

(superhuman as they think in the renaissance).

In the works of art, new ideas and wishes are tried. The "..primitive" and "static" orthodox art is rejected. On the pictures of the renaissance painters appears perspective. More and more skilled illusion takes the place of truth.

The ingenious orthodox thinker Paul Florenski, who perhaps could sometimes theologically go astray, wrote interesting works about this, but although he was a mathematician by profession in the first place, he was characterized by a real artistic intuition. Florenski described perfectly the absurdness of trying to get to new dignity of the man and nature by covering all visible by a general scheme.

From his point of view, that scheme, in fact, depersonalises and equalizes everything could it not be used more easily in accordance with scientific laws. Presenting something seen from different sides at the same time and placing more centres on a picture required care and approaching everything created, taking part in reality and interpreting of its final meaning with respect from the man. The renaissance arrogance and abrupt activism found their expression in presenting reality by the net of lines met in a distant dot, which is, in fact, only one distant - nothing.

That nothing doesn't oblige us, so that everything from that directly in front of us to that quite distant are observed as objects given to our will without question. The price of such pride is high. The man releases himself from the feeling of reality and responsibility at the same time. In such image of the world a man "closes" the approach to God and like every spoilt child who has slipped away his parent's control, breaks his new toy. He becomes even more furious. The illusion of power is paid by uneasiness, uncertainty and fear. Shapeless schemes pulled over the world enable the most skillful ones to use and interpret them of their own will while others will become passive observes. Life ceases to be the field of responsibility, but it becomes a theatre with predefined roles, with performers and passive observes.

The next station on the way to television is the theatre. It is the theatre in

which perspective has moved, the illusion theatre i. e. the theatre which is dominated by a new form of the organization of the scene - the box scene.

Since "new" ideas were tried and analysed in painting in the Renaissance, their working out in architecture, town planning and theatre was the next step of Western culture, the baroque. Rulers 'organize both their courts and towns in accordance with the ideas established in the renaissance. They organize the world from which God was banished in accordance with the new centre - in accordance with themselves. Everything starts from them, in a visible manner. Since the world is still too wide to be caught in a glance and in that way makes impossible complete pleasure of the rulers in their "divine" power big toys of self-styled "divinities" or theaters are raised at royal courts. The perspective established in the places of their rich ordering parties, apart from finishing in an invisible dot in the background of the picture implies also one dot in front of the picture - for an ideal observer. You can achieve complete pleasure in illusion only by observing from that dot. The ideal observer should be motionless, but here comes the mischance, the fixity of the picture makes the illusion incomplete. The rulers of the baroque time "revived" the illusion in their theaters. In the box made in accordance with all rules of the perspective, alive people appeared in front of the rulers' eyes who were fighting among themselves, fighting against their own passions and suffered for the complete pleasure. The whole machinery moved on that enabled the nature to "revive" - to move the clouds, sun, sea waves, birds.. The rulers could enjoy the feeling that the world was made just for them themselves. They would sit on the place predicted for an ideal observer, and other dignitaries, depending on their status, were nearer or further from that point.

It can be said that in its most precious achievements such a theatre was not a mere entertainment. Sometimes it was a kind of laboratory where the spirit of the time, relationships between people, the condition of human psyche were explored. Still, in its nature it did not demand a

special activity from the observer except approving or disapproving. Even the "all-mighty" observer was only the observer and those occupy themselves with schemes pulled over the world deadened and stiffened by the perspective (regardless the artificial movements, the theatre world is also a stiffened world, the world closed to God) were the only ones who showed the right although not always well directed activity. Finally, they "overruled" the world i. e. they approached the complete freedom to impose their schemes to all observers even to the "ideal" ones.

Experienced by successful revolutions they aspired to democratise the observing role which turned out to be losing, so as to save a larger number of observers. And the illusion was so sweet that the observers readily accepted their role enjoying the false power.

Scientific principles standing behind the perspective bear a dark chamber. "Objectivity" of a photograph and then a film captured completely the observers. The perspective ruled fully over the way of seeing the world. A secret control over the observers became bigger and bigger. The illusion began to use the motion again.

Rise of film "democratic" art enjoyed by the crowd corresponds to the rise or raw totalitarian ideologies and parallel to the rest of mass media helps their establishing and existing. Both fascism and communism gave great importance to film and often used it in advertising purposes from their beginnings.

The illusion cannot be resisted without God. The fight against the raw totalitarianism i. e. vulgar obvious control of the observers leads to the invention which will strengthen the illusion and break the potentially dangerous crowd and push back the observers into their houses.

Television was first "enjoyed" by the richest so as to spread slowly over the whole world. Television is at the same time a reward for passiveness and one of the greatest producers of passiveness. It is a delivery of a new, sophisticated totalitarian ideology which needs permanent and sure passiveness of the observers. In spite of its great controlling power, television's aim is not arousing any true activity,

except accepting the "evident" reality which is created by itself (relied upon the results of its artistic and media predecessors). Its aim is to have more observers taking part in that "reality" in the best way for the "reality".

New totalitarianism won even its toughest opponents - primitive eastern totalitarianism mainly with the help of television itself, and now it's just about to overwhelm the world finally and completely. Western "democracy" is riding on a television car in its victorious raid. With the help of television, strategists of the new totalitarianism produce and inspire wars and riots and elegantly solve them. We are not going to engage ourselves any longer in foreboding of the orthodox about what would a complete victory of the new totalitarianism mean for the destiny of the world. Let's have a glance at the influence of television on our everyday life.

Every persistent TV programme spectator is a small "sun king" in his home. The whole world is his property, placed in his box, in his house. Peeping into the furthest places of the world the man in front of the television is withdrawing at the same time more than ever in his history. Regardless their apparent diversity, pictures changed in his box, although they should give splendour to his gray everyday, they actually resemble him. If it were different it would be unbearable because it would remind him of what he was deprived of. On television everything appears as if it belongs to him, because he himself does not belong to himself.

The nature of television as a medium is such as it, in fact, not only removes everything that is different from his expectations in front of the man, giving him sense of experience without demanding adjusting which is necessary in real taking part, removes in front of the man - the other one. It shows pictures, sounds to the man, but never a personality. A man can laugh or cry, hate or be afraid and to avoid acknowledgment of aerial physical existence and appropriate demands of those who inspire those emotions. Television draws us back into our infantile stadium (in which they cease to exist when we remove an object or a

person out of our sight).

Television, simply, enables us who are often tired and hurt not to admit somebody's real existence. We are the only ones who exists. As in the early childhood. We exist in a false kind of existence.

Is everything in connection with television so black, somebody will ask. Still, television has done much to keep people more in their homes, to keep the families together, the television offers many opportunities for education of the widest audience, and it gives abundance of needed information to people in the remotest parts.

Because of the television people, indeed, stay longer in their homes but they talk less to each other. As it "releases" the man from the "other's" presence from the world, so television releases him from "the other" from the house. In many houses TV sets are on most time of the day and they "release" members of the family from the "surplus" strain of talking among themselves as well as to the guests.

Let's consider more widely the educational aspect of television. Surveys have proved that success of schoolchildren who watch television is no better than success of schoolchildren who don't watch it. It has been also proved that the intense

following TV programme often leads to postponing the development of speech. As the grown-ups are concerned, the surveys have also proved that the improvement in learning is achieved mainly in direct contact, with the authority who teaches us and transfers knowledge to us. A great majority of people is not ready for greater intellectual effort if there is no authoritative person to urge him on it. Besides, a spectator experiences every information got from television which is out of what he expects, as more or less unreal. For him real messages are only those which at least partly correspond to his knowledge up to that moment and he accepts them more like messages of support (he is right, he is on the right way, only minimal corrections of the present knowledge are needed). Of course, there is acceptance of the data which are completely out of already achieved knowledge, but out of any system, more like some exotic addition to knowledge, useful for solving

crossword puzzles or giving answers in quiz programs, in any case like something which is more or less a waste game.

So, television is a part of one picture of the world from which God has been pushed out, and the man and the world pushed through television lose characteristics of the other one. Television is not even a reflection of the false/sinful man's aspiration to find the well of his life in the world, absolutely in the created world. It offers only empty pictures of the world created as a permanent dazing means of consolation because of the failure and loss of the world and itself.

We haven't deliberately mentioned the content of TV programme up to now in order to obscure clearly noticing the main problems connected with the relationship of television and life in orthodoxy. And TV programme mainly provokes our common passions and responds immediately to them, making us somnambulist hopelessly involved in the most diverse disturbing thoughts and empty reveries. A great part of the programme which is absorbed by grown-ups and children (while the difference between "infantilism" and "adulthood" is constantly decreasing, as if they long for creating general grown-up-child infantilism) serves to directing of dissatisfied lower impulses and their satisfying in imagination. In order to be watched, television, must not ask from the spectators any kind of serious effort.

It is difficult to fight for the space in such a crowd of absurd products and to address those who are eager for truth and meaning, and it is even harder to awake deeply buried desire for the fullness and truth of life in the others, to move them on from the destroying passiveness if it possible at all, it is possible only in synchronized several directions and in several ways.

We should immediately get rid of the delusion that it is really possible to transfer a real knowledge, the knowledge of the foundations of the orthodox religion by means of television. Television can in any case, only arouse interest in spectators, to be an aspiration of the desire for knowledge.

It is expected from television to avoid transmitting any, even the

smallest, meaningful entirety. Everything should be unfinished, questioned, it should direct to fulfillment which is clearly explained that television cannot give it. If we try to imagine the orthodox TV programme we must be aware that it can be made if we call the spectators to the doorstep of the secret by all technical and artistic means, but we don't even indicate what is there behind that doorstep. For example, bishops of our orthodox church made in the nearer past a set of mistakes in contacts with television, not understanding that transmitting. A Liturgy on television is not a Liturgy any more but a naked unclear row of official actions less interesting than a football match or tales about migrations of salmon.

We should try more often and serious to take down the essence of the illusion of television medium in front of spectators (work against false evidence by all powers).

Participation of a greater number of creators which is difficult to meet in the Church is necessary even for this cited as the beginning of thinking about the orthodox use of television. To approach the orthodox use of television, the solution are teams which would include the creators who do not. perhaps live a completely Christian life but their interests and ideas partially concede with the aspirations of the Church. It is important, in the first place, to retain the common consciousness of inhumanity, of absurdness or perhaps even foreboding of the present use of television as well as its essential remoteness from the spiritual vision of the world. According to Albert Einstein, wondering about the meaning of life means to be religious already. And there we are half-step from the approaching the faith in the life of God. Alive.