New paradigms of *New-Social-Media* communication

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Abstract
The continuous and difficult to notice development in every aspect of the new means of communication represent a challenge for the contemporaneous catechesis. The new paradigms of networking are a constant more and more categorical in everyday life of Orthodox believers. The more and more performing technology in the area of communication became an integral part of the *on-line* landscape of common people. Real life interweaves with hybrid reality developed around these new communication platforms.

Keywords
Theology, Palamas, communication, catechetic

Facebook, Whats'App, Viber, Linkedin, the blogs are just some of the socialisation networks which impose in a vertiginous way a communication method which is totally different from the classical paradigms of communication. The considerable opening that these communication platforms provide has nevertheless certain issues for the contemporaneous catechesis and pastorate, which have to answer somehow to these new states of

affairs. What is called in specialised literature *New Media* represents an unprecedented communicational *boom*.

From catechetic perspective, certain well-defined steps for the construction of an efficient relational pedagogy are absolutely necessary during the catechetic follow-up. The knowledge, the mystery, the respect for closeness of those representing the subject matter of the catechesis are items which cannot be removed from any catechetic approach. The transmission of faith is not an action of rough communication, but it means the development of a tripartite relationship: catechumen - catechist - God and His mysteries, which are revealed step by step. The step by step revealing of the mysteries, the development of the mistagogic approach and the spiritual growth are the absolutely necessary steps we mentioned above.

Which are the consequences of *New Media* paradigms in this context of step by step revealing? The immediate access to information, the instantaneous circulation of information, the possibility to enlarge the group of subjects which relate, the capacity to resort to realities which according to the habitual paradigms of communication are not accessible, are only some of *New Media* advantages. To what extent these advantages become less comfortable when it comes to mysteriously penetrate and to discover step by step the truth? The context of change of anthropologic and cultural paradigm[1] directly affects the gradualness of discovery and penetration of the mysteries of theology. It is very difficult to speak about step by step reflection and communication as long as the temptation to burn the stages is present at a *click* away. Orthodox theology may offer at least some answers concerning these new paradigms.

1. Direct communication *vs.* indirect communication

The first and the most important aspect to approach as for the new communicational methods is the substitution of direct, face to face communication with an indirect, mediated one[2]. In principle, according to the en-

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[1] See *La catechesi dei giovani e i new media nel contesto del cambio di paradigma antropologico-culturale,* a cura di Corrado Pastore, Elledici, Torino, 2015.

[2] See Giuseppe Riva, *Nuovi media e identità: l'impatto delle nuove tecnologie sulla soggettivita dell'individuo,* in vol. *La catechesi dei giovani e i new media nel contesto del cambio di paradigma antropologico-culturale,* a cura di Corrado Pastore, Elledici, Torino, 2015, pp. 71-81.

tire philocaly theology, the believer should have access to divine life in a direct way, by acquiring the divine grace. There is no interface between God and the human being reducing the real communication capacity of the two subjects. Different forms of theology formation trying to speak about ontological limitations of the relationship do not exclude the status of human-God interpersonal communication. God reveals to the human totally, and even if we cannot always speak about a view of God, the hesychast theology insists on the fact that the true relationship of the human with God is accomplished in this *view*. Saint Gregory Palamas asserts in this regard: "But the one that has in an unspeakable way that light and see it, knows God and has Him inside him, but not by analogy, but by a true and transcendent view of all the creatures; because he is never separated from eternal slave"[3]. Modern, *instant* type communication interposes a screen between the two subjects of communication. There is not integral communication as long as important, constitutive factors of a physical, face to face relationship are missing. The transmission of faith in a digitalised epoch may become a difficult to control acrobatics as long as there are no clear parameters of pastoral and catechetic prognosis in the given circumstances. Knowing God and having Him inside us is a philocaly challenge for the modern human, pawn of the screened relationship.

The access to theological information, so easily to achieve because of the access to immense databases containing this information, arises in turn a quite uncomfortable issue: who reveals to whom? The accumulation of theological information, on the catechetic or university way, must not constitute the self-revelation action of God. It is a reality the fact that the human lets itself caught in the spiral of knowledge made possible by the massive technification of the intellectual approach. At the same time though, the danger of the mediated relationship must not be ignored. *New Media* represent both a source of communication, but it may be also a source of objectivisation of the communicated message and of the underlying relation[4]. It is an illusion to believe that media such as *Facebook* facilitate true communication because beyond the appearances which can

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[3] Saint Gregory Palamas, *The Triads* II.3.16, own translation.

[4] See Norbert Mette, *Comunicazione del Vangelo nell'era digitale, in particolare con la generazione che cresce,* in vol. *La catechesi dei giovani e i new media nel contesto del cambio di paradigma antropologico-culturale,* a cura di Corrado Pastore, Elledici, Torino, 2015, pp. 27-41.

be assimilated to the relation there lies the virtual world, a world that cannot be felt, touched, tasted to the fullest. This world of apparent freedom is actually a universe reduced to technology.

2. Addiction to technology in communication

Another aspect which deserves to be discussed in relation to contemporary catechesis and the *New Media* phenomenon is the addiction to terminals which facilitate *instant*-type communication. A simple indication from *Ceaslov* states the necessity that the first thought of each day should be to God. The philocaly tradition insists upon the necessity of the thoroughness of our orientation towards God: "Hesychia obviously means getting away from the sensitive things and getting closer to the sensible things, and this is why it means getting closer to God"[5]. Thus, to get closer to the endlessness of God's sacrament means to get away from everything that is synonymous to being close to the mundane.

The modern technology of *instant*-type communication suggests the exact opposite. The almost generalised presence of internet access incites to an *on-line* type attitude: the frequent reading of mails, *shares*, *likes*, blog presence etc. The day of the individual connected to technology does no longer begin with the quietness suggested by the philocaly theology. What is missing is the time dedicated to introspection and reflection, as it is annihilated by *on-line* time. Active presence on social media networks implies regular and frequent use of the *on-line* media. The *smart-phone* becomes part of the human body, a necessary limb, without which existence can no longer carry on in normal parameters. It becomes a constant the fact that the first thought of many possible candidates to catechesis does no longer go first to god and His theologisation through prayer and worship, but to regaining a certain balance with the *network*. The need to be connected and notified in real time is much more powerful than the philocaly impulse to raise one's thought to God, starting with the first minute of the day. The initial moment of the day becomes automatically the time dedicated to the fast reading of mails, *instant* messages and news flow, distributed either by *feed* or by social networks which in some instances also facilitate the transmission of latest news.

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[5] Sfântul Calist Angelicoudes, *Trei tratate isihaste,* translation by Laura Enache, ed. Doxologia, Iași, 2012, p. 165.

The saying of the psalm writer "God, my God, it is You I look for early in the morning" (Psalm 62, 1) reflects to a very low extent the catechist reality nowadays. The soul's thirst for God is replaced by the thirst to be connected and be visible *on-line* in the morning, during the day or at night. The study of the new way of communication refers mainly to the addiction to terminals such as *smartphones*, *tablets* or other devices. The apparent failure of the idea of real communication has its roots also in this subjectivisation of technology. Technology is worshipped in this paradigm transformation and it becomes an important pawn in our daily schedule. The addiction to *smartphones*, *tablets* and *internet access* is visible mainly in the corporate world. But, if this type of addiction can be understood in such a world to a certain extent, it can no longer be regarded neutrally when it comes to "ordinary" life, which should be led in much more natural lines. The "ordinary" person programs their time, movements, actions, even their feelings depending on the trend of various social media networks they use. This programming, sometimes unconscious, gives birth to living directions that do not completely follow the real personal necessities and aspirations. The desire to focus on the real personal priorities, which in a philocaly approach would be the result of a relationship with one's confessor, becomes the desire to focus on the priorities of the group related to the social media networks. The *device* becomes an omnipresent instrument, with an overwhelming role in updating our own feelings. The person is no longer his own master and no longer works on his spiritual direction – within the boundaries of the believer-confessor relationship -, but technology tends to become an open door to the various directions suggested by the *network*. In this way, already a part of the human body, the *device* is installed in the most secret moments of human existence. Without slipping into a unilateral criticism of this aspect, we cannot help but asking the normal question: how will someone who cannot give up instant checking of the *device* react when suggested a period of "fasting", refrain from continuous use of the *network*? The inhibition in front of such a suggestion, which can be easily predicted, speaks for itself about the indispensability of such gestures which have become so common in the everyday landscape of many of our believers. Saint Grigorie Palama suggestively states in one of his works: "Any union is realised by contact: sensitive in the world of the sensitive, intellectual in the world of the intellectual"[6]. So,

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[6] Saint Gregory Palamas, *The Triads* III.2.14, own translation.

there cannot be an interface adapted to the communication need of man to such an extent as to avoid the risk of relationship screening.

In the same context of emphasizing the reality of the *device* becoming "part" of our body, one cannot overlook the latest tendency to technologically modernize the educational process, especially for the primary classes in public schools in Romania. Replacing classic textbooks with *tablets* can create problems similar to the ones described above. The child will be drawn to the digital format of the content, but the risk is for the *device* itself to become the greatest attraction. A simple, natural relation child to child or child to educator risks becoming a tri-party relation child-*device*-child or child-*device*-educator. The child goes beyond the natural relation with the information itself and becomes dependent on the *device*. The pleasure of reading is replaced by the automatism of the click. Speaking about the impact of television on the child`s mind, bio-physicist Virgiliu Gheorghe said:

> "Reading implies a rhythm which is slower or faster depending on the capacity to understand the text, while television imposes a very fast rhythm, the rhythm of the flow of images, faster than human capacity to process the information"[7].

I consider that the text above, even though it refers to the negative impact of television, is relevant as well for *tablets*, replacements of textbooks (it is worth mentioning that the first phase refers to their implementation as educational supplements). The idea of facilitating access to information, using the exact devices which are known to induce a high level of addiction, can be a regrettable pedagogical solution. The cohesion of the educational group, as frail as it may be, risks becoming a simple image of the past. The future can provide the surprise that the educational act becomes a huge platform of digital access to information.

Nothing guarantees the fact that the addiction to the device will not imply a behavioural autism that will affect the interaction of children with the space around. Once the device becomes an integral part of the child`s body, it will be very difficult to keep a natural relation with the space around as it is described next:

> "First, of course there is a generalization of actions. For example, the child finds himself before a suspended object, he tries to

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[7] Virgiliu Gheorghe, *Efectele televiziunii asupra minţii umane,* ed. Evanghelismos, 2005, p. 45.

grab it, he does not succeed it, but he manages to balance it; he becomes very interested, he continues to hit the object to make it move and then, every time he sees a suspended object, he pushes it and balances it. It is an act of generalization which proves, of course, the beginning of logical generalization or intelligence. The fundamental phenomenon at the level of this logic of actions is generalization"[8].

The smartphone, the tablet or the device in general flattens the relation with space. The simple leafing through the pages of a book – and I am saying this without worshiping the paper support – becomes a real contact with a real world. The apparent addiction to the digital is not really a real appeal to this real world. And the consequences of the presence of *tablets* in the education of children will be the very illusions of facilitating the relation and supporting the appeal to the digital universe of the relation.

3. The Alteration of the Concept of Space and Time

Another aspect which cannot be ignored when it comes to *instant*-type communication facilitated by the social networks is that of the alteration of the concept of space and time[9]. The physical place of a relation in reality is replaced by the *network*. The one who uses the *network* to communicate is located in a hybrid space, which no longer bears the characteristics of the conventional space. The relation dilutes in this hybrid space, and it provokes man to a non-natural adaptation to the new special paradigm. We no longer speak about contact, face to face meeting, but we speak about *on-line* platforms that facilitate the hybrid presence in almost any location and next to anyone in the group of friends. De-localisation and de-temporisation of feelings can lead to a duality of the manifestations of the true personality. To a certain extent, Plotinus' words can be extrapolated and adapted to this context of delocalised and dual communication:

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[8] Noam Chomsky, Jean Piaget, *Teorii ale limbajului. Teorii ale învăţării,* ed. Politică, Bucureşti, 1998, p. 306.

[9] See Giuseppe Riva, *Nuovi media e identità: l'impatto delle nuove tecnologie sulla soggettivita dell'individuo,* in vol. *La catechesi dei giovani e i new media nel contesto del cambio di paradigma antropologico-culturale,* a cura di Corrado Pastore, Elledici, Torino, 2015, p. 73.

"Because on Earth, in each of life's happenings, not the soul, which is inside, but the exterior shadow of man cries, whines, becomes manifest in various ways, people thus playing their role on the countless stages of the great theatre that is earth. Because this is what man does, as he knows only to live in the lowest of things and in exterior things: he does not know that, when he cries in tears and when he takes things seriously, he actually plays a role. Only the serious part of man can seriously do serious deeds; otherwise, man is but a toy"[10].

We cannot help but appeal to the revealing image of the members of a group of young people who cannot get away from their smartphones, even when they take part in the meeting of the group. They are *here/now* because they interact – even if to a minimum, in most cases – with the other members of the group, but they are mostly *on-line*, in the world full of illusions of the digital hybrid non-real. The psychology of behaviour in the digital sphere could not provide an exact definition of this new type of space and time. We do not know how much of this hybridisation involves the real and profound soul and how much of the participation to the real world is actually an extension of the *on-line*. The stage of the social *networks* can easily be transformed into a space of the superficial.

From the point of view of philocaly theology, such a hybridisation of space and time can have exceptional effects on the perception and acknowledgement of the state of hesychia: "The one touched by the beauty of prayer will run from crowds like a wild donkey", says Saint John Climacus[11]. Loneliness, the state of avoidance of the mundane turmoil per se, can no longer be assumed by the simultaneous presence on more social networks. Spreading, although justified by the argument of the relation, does not offer the necessary frame for prayer and quietness. Saint Isaac Sirul states: "Silence is the mystery of the future century. And words, the tools of this world."[12] The *network* cannot offer the time and space necessary

[10] Plotin, *Enneade,* III, 2, 15, 31, *apud apud* Pierre Hadot, *Plotin sau simplitatea privirii,* translation by Laurenţiu Zoicaş, ed. Polirom, Iaşi, 1998, p. 186.

[11] Sfântul Ioan Scărarul, *Scara dumnezeiescului urcuş,* XXVII, 2, 21, in *Filocalia sfintelor nevoinţe ale desăvârşirii,* IX, translation by Pr.Prof.Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, ed. Humanitas, Bucureşti, 2002, p. 372.

[12] Sfântul Isaac Sirul, *Epistole. Despre tăcere,* in *Filocalia sfintelor nevoinţe ale desăvârşirii,* X, translated by Pr.Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, ed. Humanitas, Bucureşti, 2008, p. 425.

to ascetic loneliness, but paradoxically it facilitates the apparition of such loneliness marked by the lack of real communication. And Father Dumitru Staniloae, in a note to these words, adds in a way that almost foresaw the present situation of hybrid space and time:

> "When you meet the next century, either here, in advance, or after death, in its full, you meet a world of mystery the word can no longer name. Words cut reality into pieces in order to be able to contain them. The reality in this world becomes manifest in distinct ways, limited, appropriate to words. Then, this whole will be seen by everybody, but it will not be necessary to be communicated by some to others. It will be a common joy in relation to something they all see, multiplying by the mere fact that everybody has it. It will be another form of communication"[13].

The mysterious meeting that God's Kingdom provokes man to actually transfers man to another dimension which can be called "real" per se, free of any hybrid manifestation. The reality per se of life developed in its complete amplitude cannot screen the relation man-God. The omnipresence of God, completely different from the pseudo-omnipresence offered by the social networks, leads man to the real acknowledgement of space and time.

In the funeral ritual and other liturgical texts we find repeated mentioning of this type of space and time, real per se and with no appearances belonging to this century: "Together with the saints rest, oh Christ, the soul of Your deceased subject, where there is no pain, nor sorrow, nor sigh, but only eternal life"[14]. Letting go of the appearances of this century, which should be a catechist stake of prime importance, is actually the entrance into the "lit [space], the green place, the resting place, wherefrom all the sorrow, and sadness, and sigh have disappeared"[15]. The space of life in God is not a chaotic, hybrid space: "In the land of the kind and in the splendours of Heaven, take, oh God, Your subject, dead into belief, and

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[13] Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Nota 694* to Sfântul Isaac Sirul, *Epistole. Despre tăcere,* in *Filocalia sfintelor nevoinţe ale desăvârşirii,* X, ed. Humanitas, Bucureşti, 2008, p. 425.

[14] *Rânduiala înmormântării mirenilor,* în *Molitfelnic,* ed. IBMBOR, Bucureşti, 2006, p. 225.

[15] *Rânduiala înmormântării mirenilor,* in *Molitfelnic,* ed. IBMBOR, Bucureşti, 2006, p. 225.

make him worthy of the place of wonderful greatness to You to sing"[16]. The praise of God, the doxological state, the embrace of sacrament, all of them are profound characteristics of man, and they can develop only in a space and time that allow the pause for such an attitude. The proximity and unscreened interference between man and the reality of God's presence is a fact of the eternal life of the future century:

> "For the forgiveness of sins and the rest of the souls of God's subjects (N), in a lit place, wherefrom all the sorrow, and sadness, and sigh have disappeared; lay them to rest, oh our God, and place them where the light of Your face shines"[17].

The space and time, as they are accepted, understood and transmitted by the paradigms of the new types of communication cannot claim they have the capacity to offer a frame favourable to the development of a relation into eternity. The real mistagogic catechesis cannot elude the fact that Christian initiation, although it has mundane coordinates as its starting point, is an actual passage from the apparent to the real. The communication *network* de-localises and in some situations de-temporises. On the contrary, mistagogic catechesis develops the sense of sacrament, which is not an object to be discovered, but a climbing from the apparent sign to the sacrament. Paradoxically, the less obvious character of the sacrament actually unveils the evidence of full reality, while the apparent reality of de-localised communication actually hides the haze of altered concepts of space and time.[18] The word of the Gospel always points to its hidden content, which actually is its real sacrament content, while the word thrown into the *network* is most often empty of any content. The "traces" of God's presence cannot become obvious with a "*fast-food*" type communication. The man caught in the paradigms of the new types of communication feels their chaotic character. The logical development of a discussion is shortened, the greeting is reduced to the minimum, and the politeness of a profound discussion is replaced by efficiency, with a focus on speed. Space is condensed, time is overlapped, the *status* partially reflects the personality and mood of the moment, the entire presence in the network gives the

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[16] *Rânduiala înmormântării preoţilor şi diaconilor*, in *Molitfelnic*, ed. IBMBOR, Bucharest, 2006, p. 287.

[17] *Liturghia Sfântului Ioan Gură de Aur,* în *Liturghier,* ed. IBMBOR, Bucureşti, 2000, p. 167.

[18] See Luc Mellet, *Catéchèse mystagogique dans un itinéraire catéchuménal,* presentation at the *Congrès National Catéchuménat*, Saint-Pétersbourg, 29 January – 1 February 2013.

impression of authentic unveiling, although the subject always gives room to behavioural hidings, without any real connection to the space, time and real status.

4. The Dehumanised Feeling

The manifestations of the human being are closely linked to the relation with the external factors. Theologically, the link of man to God is the one that empowers the real expression of feelings. God *is* love, and this makes man relate first to this love as the basis of existence. Living the feeling and expressing it cannot be accomplished beyond personal communication; this makes man abandon his various masks and give himself fully to the call of the other.

Instant - type communication can be a channel to express feelings. Love confessed by *text messages,* grief shared on *Facebook*, sadness advertised in *status*, all of them are forms of public or private manifestations of intimate feelings. The *device* becomes the witness of quantities of "sentimental information" which can no longer be neglected when it comes to the analysis of communication theories. The secret room of feelings and emotions is revealed in the Areopagus of feeling communicated and integrated in the *network*.

Yet, I reserve the right to have some doubts. The time of confessing feelings is a *kairos* - type of time. The feeling, at least the one that manifests love, is revealed after a period of growth which requires adequate time. The maturity of confessing the feeling of love cannot be reduced to manifestations which develop in a *chronos*-type of time. Of course, a real feeling can be transmitted by *text message, Facebook*, or *mail*. The real problem that appears is that the general tendency is to monopolise the manifestation of the feeling through these *instant*-type communication forms. The feeling is mechanised and this mechanisation takes a big part of the beauty of integral manifestation: "The origin of faith will always be a hidden thing. The movement and orientation towards God are aspects which are covered in mystery"[19]. The hidden of knowing God, the integral

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[19] J.C. Carvajal Blanco, *El precatecumenado, al servicio de la conversión inicial,* în *La conversión en el proceso de la iniciación Cristiana*, Teologia y Catequesis, 127/2013, p. 99.

manifestation of the orientation towards beauty, the real *non-digitalised* feeling are but a few forms of communication which are waiting to be re-valorised. To incisive curiosity, typical for internet and *network* addiction, constructive curiosity must be opposed, a curiosity resulting from the gradual acceptance of the fact that Truth can only be discovered mistagogically, by entering the sacrament.

Man cannot and must not divide or diminish his capacity to communicate, developing directions of "septic" relation, lacking the concreteness of non-standard, authentic emotions. He must "*fell his feeling*", in a categorical approach of real emotions, and must not attempt to replace his desire for sentimental comfort with questionable replacements:

> "To be aware, it seems to me it means that I must be aware of something, maybe of a sensation, like that of pain or heat, or of colourful sight or of a musical sound; or I may be aware of the memory of past events or of the fact that I came to understand what somebody says or a new idea that has just come to mind; or of the fact that I consciously intend to talk or do anything else, like standing up. I may also be aware of such intentions or of a pain sensation or of living a memory or of the fact that I came to understand a certain thing; or I may be simply aware of my own awareness."[20]

The development of the manifestation of feeling with the *network, online, instant* creates changes of paradigm which bring practical novelty: the feeling is transmitted without involving the body. Orthodox theology insists upon the role the body has in any human action. Man cannot get rid of the body, cannot activate in a de-materialised universe. The feeling transmitted without the presence and participation of the body misses its purpose. Saint Grigorie Palama has a very interesting remark to this end, a remark which can easily be applied to the new communication paradigms:

> "To take the mind out, not of the bodily thought, but of the body, so that it can encounter spiritual views outside, is the biggest of the dangerous roots, the root and spring of any heresy; it is a creation and concoction of demons, cause for madness and result of lunacy. This is why those who speak under the inspiration of demons are out of themselves, and are not aware of what they

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[20] Roger Penrose, *Mintea noastră cea de toate zilele,* ed. Tehnica, Bucharest, 2001, p. 440.

are saying. But we know not only that we are in our body and in our heart, but also that we drive the mind inside"[21].

The feeling transmitted without the participation of the body, without the possibility of feeling, of appropriating the reaction of the other, is a incompletely revealed feeling, which does not reach its purpose: the direct and unmediated relation with the person to whom the emotional effusion is addressed. The *chat* projects man outside himself, in a misunderstood frenzy of words which transport only momentary, often unconventional states, not subject to the creation of the *kairos*. Man creates the illusion that he enters a relation and that he develops this relation, but the reality of the non-participation of the body reflects the exact opposite: the illusion of the relation ends in depression generated by the incapacity of correctly feeling that the entire being, body and soul, participates in this great challenge called an authentic relation.

Because we speak of the lack of participation of the body to this type of communication of feelings, we must also dwell on the other extreme: the over-involvement of the body in a de-humanised eroticism. From the simple *flirts*, which appear almost instantaneously in many of the *on-line* conversations, to the erotic surrogates suggested by this type of communication, the body is exposed to a new way of "lonely communication". The exciting erotic stimuli, received through the same *device*, which paradoxically also has effects of isolation of the body, lead to states of behavioural schizophrenia. The body is and is not present in this development of digital feeling and, in such a context the step to self-eroticism is a very small one.

5. Hesychasm and communication

Keeping the mind in a state of complete quietness and attention to prayer and repentance is one of the guiding principles of hesychast life. Man enters a state of real communication with God, in a lively and immediate relation, facilitated by the personal discovery God Himself causes. This quietness does not represent a mortification of the work of the body and the soul, but a reorientation of this work towards the personal meeting with God. The person who is dedicated to hesychia puts his entire being into

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[21] Saint Gregory Palamas, *Triad* I.2, 4, in *Viaţa şi învăţăturile Sfântului Grigorie Palama*, ed. IBMBOR, Bucharest, 2006, p. 268.

movement, modelling his every gesture to follow the work of grace. The body is not killed during the ascetic climb, but the temptation of sin. The mortification of the sinful orientation is the real battle fought on the difficult road of the hesychia, and man takes part body and soul:

> "Do you hear which of the bodily works needs to be mortified? Fornication, uncleanliness, and to put it simply, all earthly matters. And which passion (must be mortified)? The bad one, and not the works of the Holy Spirit, which are created through the body, and neither the heavenly and blissful passions, or the powers of the soul which by nature are created for these. For it is said: «Channel your desire towards God and your irascibility should be only against the snake». How can these powers of the soul be mortified if one of them could move towards the heavenly heights by prayer to God or could rise against the snake in the times of its unusual attacks?"[22]

Spiritual life imposes a strict control of sinful impulses. All bodily works that stray from the uncorrupted normality of man must be stopped and reoriented to this normality. The challenge hesychast life addresses contemporary man is one of the most uncomfortable. Control over the passionate drives of the soul and body is much more diminished by the relativism and, in most cases, the disappearance of time dedicated to hesychia, prayer and contemplation. The obsession of on-line connection and presence reduces the time of reflection and internalising. Philocaly teaches us to kill our passionate drives, but it valorises, as shown above, the capacity of human nature to constructively respond to the stimuli which can orient it towards an authentic spiritual development.

Unfortunately, the New Media does not represent the appropriate space for such a valorisation. Man is either lost in the interpersonal space of fast communication, or is wasted in endless exchanges of *instant* messages. The necessary time to notice the passionate attack is diminished, and often man finds himself defenceless in front of his drive to passion. What started to be defined as *over-consume of digital content*[23] tends to

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[22] Saint Gregory Palamas, *Triad* II.2.22, own translation.

[23] To this end we refer to the actions of Mike Ushakov, who suggests solutions to limit the time spent using social networks. The Anti-Facebook application created by Ushakov (available both on Android and iOS) aims at making the Facebook user aware of the fact that the lack of control in digital surfing can have serious consequences.

occupy a worrying proportion of the daily programme of modern man. In this context, we can no longer speak about the mortification of passionate urges, but we actually witness a mortification of vital capacities. "Wasting time", associated with communication and presence in the *network*, leads to behaviour disorders, sometimes irreversible, which affect the integrity of the capacity for real communication. Man becomes slave to his own need to communicate and interact. The "wasted time" in the digital space can hardly be recovered in order to be dedicated to repentance, crying, appeasement. Very often, many users do not know why they spend so much time on social networks and cannot name the cause behind their constant checking of their *on-line* profile.

Spiritual life suggests valorisation, not mortification precisely because man has to overcome the tight frame of gross communication and enter in a state of personal discovery of sacraments:

> "The one who reached the measures of completeness is dead without being dead, living in God where he lies and not living in him. He is blind, as he no longer sees with his own physical eyes. But he reached beyond any natural sight, like someone who received new eyes, far better and above the natural ones. He is non-moving and motionless, like someone who has accomplished his entire work. He is without thought, like someone who has risen to the level of the union beyond understanding and is now resting there, where there is no work of the mind, no movement of remembering towards a thought or meaning. Because, not being able to understand the ones not understood and impossible to understand, he is resting. And this rest is the motionlessness of blissful non-feeling, which is also the delight of non-doubtful tireless feeling of untold delights."[24]

If with digital presence we can speak of loss of self-control through continuous access to the network, this does not happen in the situation described above by Saint Simeon New Theologian. Man "loses" himself in the Godly immensity in order to fully find himself, in the same immensity,

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[24] Sfântul Simeon Noul Teolog, *25 de Capete ale cunoştinţei şi ale cuvântării de Dumnezeu,* 19, in *Filocalia sfintelor nevoinţe ale desăvârşirii,* VI, ed. Humanitas, Bucureşti, 2008, p. 56.

stripped of any type of artificiality. This loss is actually synonymous to giving up wasting time, it is a "*loss of the loss*" and a discovery of the real life coordinates. On the contrary, in the digital world of communication, man is really lost in his own desire to satisfy his passionate lust, without being able to fully manifest and find himself. The Godly immensity which can be reached by going beyond reason (and not by cancelling it) is the familiar universe appropriate for human nature. At the same time, with communication that lacks self-control, man really becomes dead without being dead, living in the network and not living in him. He is blind, but not because he reached beyond natural sight, but because his blindness is a very real one. Continuing with the inversion of the passage of Saint Simeon, we can say that the one who dedicates most of his time to *instant*-type communication becomes *non-working* and *motionless*. He is without thought, not because he has risen to the level of union with God beyond understanding, but because his addiction to the *device* and his *need of on-line presence* make him like this. *Non-working* and *motionlessness* typical of uncontrolled and chaotic internet surfing are totally available for the un-controlled presence on social networks. The language that man generally uses becomes in the context of the *network* a shortcut code which tries to offer comfort and speed to communication. The very idea of communica-tion becomes the prisoner of the new type of *non-working* and *motionless-ness*. Hesychia is replaced by shortened communication and by the need to *appease* the impulse of *mortified* communication. The untold delights no longer represent a challenge for the modern man as long as the *temptation* of impersonal loss in communicational surfing presents much more attrac-tive realities for the desire for *instant*-type communication:

> "the internet is and will be an instrument of unrest because it unites hundreds of peoples and millions and millions of users. «The benefit» of metamorphosis does not cover the damage the internet does especially to the souls. (…) practically, each sec-ond, the sin increases, becomes solid, diversifies. The person who often uses the internet, even without sound, would still be distressed because it is difficult to resist this flood of people, customs, habits, passions, obsessions"[25].

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[25] Cristian Serban, *Internetul. Tinerii în fața provocării,* ed. Egumenița, Galați, 2005, p. 51.

Conclusions. The Process of Conversion: from "Digital Slavery" to Freedom into Holy Spirit

The reality of behaviour changes that characterise an entire segment of orthodox believers cannot be ignored in an authentic catechetical approach. The role of the new communication paradigms raises new challenges to the catechetical person who wants his message to be transmitted and accepted in optimal conditions.

Just like in any other pastoral situation, in the case of excessive relations with the new forms of communication, the appropriate solution is that of valorisation of a return to authentic Christian values. Conversion and reconversion are processes which imply, and also impose, a change of perspective on the state of "digital slavery". Conversion requires detachment from the past, from the interior structured developed on a certain frame, a reorientation which should integrate new living principles. The catechetical person should be aware that such a calibration is not a brutal momentary act, which can have "instant" effects. Conversion from "digital" to real takes time to integrate the new perspectives. Being aware of the state of "digital slavery" implies an "awakening", but this moment is followed by an entire process of development and assimilation of detachment from the previous state.

The conversion phenomenon is a detailed process which cannot be easily analysed. The work of God's grace in this approach is the main act to trigger the "awakening", but this work is present throughout the entire process of conversion: "The one who has cleansed his body through refraining, the one who, through Godly love, has turned his will and desire into a spring of virtues, the one who has presented his mind to God, cleansed by prayer, he will achieve and see in himself the grace promised to the ones with a fair heart"[26]. The continuous conversion provokes a continuous acceptance of God's work, no matter where this conversion takes place. The "digital slavery" and new communication paradigms are action frames which cannot prevent access to freedom into the Holy Spirit and to the real personal development under the guidance of the holy and Godly work of grace. Just like any other passion, "digital slavery" finds its cure in the reorientation of perspective towards the Kingdom of God, the only reality which shelters man from illusion and ephemeral, offering the real frames for a real and true communication.

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[26] Saint Grigory Palamas, *Triad* I.2.2, own translation.