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Monograph

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THE FOUNDATION OF SOCIAL PROGRESS:

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The present collective monograph "The foundation of social progress" constitutes a comprehensive interdisciplinary scholarly inquiry into the profound transformations underway in contemporary scientific cognition and their multifaceted impact upon the fundamental axiological categories of human existence. The central concern of the volume is the critical examination and reinterpretation of the categories of humanism, justice, and spirituality, which are understood not as immutable classical universals, but as dynamic, historically situated, and contextually evolving constructs that are undergoing substantial reconfiguration under the pressures of digitalization, the advancement of artificial intelligence, geopolitical instability, hybrid warfare, and the pervasive value crisis of modernity. The monograph integrates philosophical-anthropological, socio-political, cultural, and educational-scientific dimensions of analysis, offering a coherent intellectual framework for understanding the transformation of scientific knowledge and its role in shaping contemporary civilization.

The volume comprises four interrelated sections, each building upon the preceding one to create a coherent intellectual trajectory from philosophical anthropology through socio-political and cultural analysis to educational and natural-scientific inquiry.

The monograph is addressed to the international academic community, including researchers, university faculty, doctoral candidates, and postgraduate students in philosophy, cultural studies, political science, media studies, education, and cognate disciplines, as well as to specialists in science policy, educational reform, national security, strategic communications, and digital ethics. The work is intended for a broad intellectual readership concerned with the current trajectories of scientific development, the future of humanistic values in the digital age, and the prospects for preserving human subjectivity and ethical agency in the context of accelerating technological and civilizational change. By bringing together diverse disciplinary perspectives and addressing the most pressing challenges of our time, the volume contributes to the ongoing dialogue on the role of science in shaping a just, humane, and sustainable future for humanity.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction …… 05

CHAPTER I. PHILOSOPHICAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF HUMANISM AND HUMAN EXISTENCE

1.1 Nazip Khamitov
META-ANTHROPOLOGY AS A METHODOLOGICAL AND WORLDVIEW BASIS OF HUMANISM OF THE CIVILIZATION PROJECT AND THE SUBJECTIVITY OF UKRAINE …… 06
1.2 Svitlana Krylova
REASONABLE ALTRUISM AS THE BASIS OF THE IMAGE OF THE FUTURE AND HAPPINESS: APPROACHES OF META-ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIAL META-ANTHROPOLOGY …… 14
1.3 Mykhailo Murashkin, Namig Isazade
THE STATE OF ETERNAL SALVATION IN THE INTERPRETATIONS OF THEORETICAL PHILOSOPHY …… 22
1.4 Larysa Proskulykova
"NIETZSCHE'S FORMULA": THE PROBLEM OF HAPPINESS AS A DERIVATIVE OF COGNITIVE VITALITY …… 32
1.5 Serhiy Hudkov, Andriy Morozov
THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN DESTRUCTIVENESS IN THE WORKS OF EUROPEAN AND UKRAINIAN THINKERS: FROM ORIGINS TO CONTEMPORARY CONSUMER CULTURE …… 47

CHAPTER II. SOCIO-POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND RELIGIOUS-CONFESSIONAL PROCESSES

2.1. Viktoriya Bokoch
CONFESSIONAL LANDSCAPE AND STATE POLICY IN UKRAINE: TRANSFORMATIONS OF WARTIME …… 60
2.2. Oleksandr Kolomiiets, Mykola Matsiuk
MODERN WARFARE AS A CONFLICT OF WORLDVIEWS AND CIVILIZATIONAL VALUES …… 70
2.3. Vitalii Matvieiev
THE ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF CHAPLAINCY FOR THE MODERN UKRAINIAN ARMY …… 88
2.4. Andriy Morozov, Natalia Shust
INFORMATION SOCIETY IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL INSTABILITY: MAIN CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND PROPOSPECTS FOR INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT …… 104
2.5. Olga Dobrodum, Namig Isazade
PUBLIC RELATIONS THEORY: DIGITAL REFRAMING OF JUSTICE AND NEW HUMANISM …… 120

CHAPTER III. CULTURE, MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS IN THE ERA OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATIONS

3.1. Oksana Smorzhevska
SEMANTICS OF RESISTANCE: HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL METAPHORS AS A TOOL FOR SHAPING THE UKRAINIAN NARRATIVE IN WARTIME …… 129
3.2. Alla Hotsalyuk
THE AESTHETICS OF EXPRESSIVENESS IN CONTEMPORARY APPLIED ART PRACTICES IN UKRAINE ……..…..….. 144
3.3. Eleonora Shestakova
"MEDIA-GASTRONOMIC" LANGUAGE OF LITERARY CULTURE: A SEMIOTIC APPROACH TO THEMED DESSERT-TEXTS OF THE DIGITAL EPOCH …….……..…. 155
3.4. Konstantin Ryliov
VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL: BINOCULAR OPTICS OF CULTURAL ANALYSIS. THE CASE OF MICHAEL JACKSON ……...…….. 175
3.5. Vadym Slyusar
RELIGIOUS MEDIA DISCOURSE IN NEW MEDIA: THE MEDIATIZATION OF RELIGION IN POSTSECULAR SOCIETY ……..…… 188

CHAPTER IV. EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATIVE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

4.1. Oleksandr Savenko, Tetiana Savenko, Maryna Goriunova
COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH, KNOWLEDGE INTEGRATION, CURRICULAR REFORM AND THE SEARCH FOR BALANCE OF CORE, SPECIALIZED AND ELECTIVE EDUCATIONAL COMPONENTS AS WAYS TO AVOID TEACHING ASYMMETRY …….…….…… 200
4.2. Maryna Yakushevych / Bachynska
EDUCATION AS THE FOUNDATION OF SOCIAL PROGRESS IN CONDITIONS OF MODERN TRANSFORMATIONS ……...……...…… 220
4.3. Artem Bilyk, Oleksiy Kyrychenko, Yevhen Kovalenko
DEVELOPMENT AND CONTACT OF CIVILIZATIONS ……...…….. 231
4.4. Oleksandr Vovk
GENETIC SIGNIFICANCE OF CRYSTALLOMORPHOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS: THE EXAMPLE OF ZIRCON ……..…..…….…. 243
4.5. Olena Hudzenko, Anastasiia Aleksandruk
PSYCHOLINGUISTIC MECHANISMS OF COGNITIVE STEREOTYPE FORMATION IN MEDIA COMMUNICATION ……..…….…… 252

Conclusion ……..…….…….. 270

3.5. RELIGIOUS MEDIA DISCOURSE IN NEW MEDIA: THE MEDIATIZATION OF RELIGION IN POSTSECULAR SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the article is to identify the features of the functioning of religious media discourse under conditions of new media and to conceptualize the mechanisms of the mediatization of religion in postsecular society. The study draws on an analysis of the concept of postsecular society as presented in the works of J. Habermas and C. Taylor, as well as theoretical developments on the mediatization of religion elaborated by S. Hjarvard, N. O. Finnemann, H. Knoblauch, K. Lundby, and J. Sumiala. The methodological basis consists of comparative and hermeneutic analysis of Western theories of mediatization, which made it possible to compare alternative interpretations of this process and to identify contradictions in different researchers' approaches to the relationship between religion, media, and the public sphere. As a result of the study, six conditions that new media create for the functioning of religious media discourse are identified: mediatization as the principle of subordinating religious communication to media logic; interactivity and networking; algorithmic visibility and personalization; transnational deterritorialized circulation of content; discursive construction and sacralization of the medium; and digital publicization of sacred practices. The first two conditions are analyzed in detail: it is shown how religious content adapts to the requirements of the media environment (formatting, visuality, clickability) without losing its doctrinal core, and the specificity of networked religion is revealed, in particular the transformation of religious authority in the digital age through the emergence of new actors of influence – moderators, opinion leaders, and «faith influencers». The main conclusion is that mediatization does not reduce religion to entertainment or purely consumerist content, but rather promotes the emergence of new forms of religious identity, communality, and communicative interaction, while preserving the sacred dimension of religious experience. The results obtained can be used for further research on the transformation of media communications, the public sphere, and religious socialization in the digital age.

Keywords: new media, media discourse, religious discourse, social networks, religious PR.

Introduction

The last decade, marked by the growing role of science in all spheres of social life and the pervasive implementation of digital technologies, has also brought new challenges. One of the most significant is humanity's loss of the sense of its own superiority over all living beings. Alongside the ideas of posthumanism, there is a rethinking of the worldview role of religion. The capabilities of contemporary information technologies allow us not only to learn about the religions of the world but also to reveal their cognitive potential for spiritual searching. At present, one can observe in Western democratic societies the establishment of the principle of coexistence of secular and religious worldviews within a single communicative environment. This state of affairs has found its reflection in the concept of postsecular society, which has been gaining relevance with the emergence and spread of new media.

The issue of the interaction between religion and new media demonstrates a steady growth of scholarly interest: researchers continue to record the deepening of the processes of the mediatization of religion in the digital age, emphasizing the need to update the theoretical toolkit for describing religious communication. In our previous studies, we analyzed the PR activities of religious organizations through new media [19; 20], as well as «streaming violence» and «fictional violence» as forms of media violence [18]. Becca Smith and Eszter Hargittai, based on interviews, identified the advantages and disadvantages of online communication on religious topics [21]. Olha

Dobrodum revealed the nature of the influence of new media on sacred meanings, family religiosity, and ritual practices [25]. Mariusz Boguszewski showed what opportunities contemporary forms of communication offer for reaching a wide audience with spiritual content [1]. A team of Kenyan scholars – Francis Wachira, Lydia Radoli, and Agneta Alubala – investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the relationship between media and religion in the context of accelerating changes in religious mediatization [24].

Research Methodology

In the research dimension, techno-epistemology in the digital age appears as a methodological approach that offers a conceptual framework for research in the media sphere, particularly new media, understood as a socio-technical environment. As an approach, it possesses initial premises and the strategy, tactics, and research methods that follow from them. Its foundational tenets can be defined as follows: knowledge is not only a social but also a technological phenomenon; technologies are mediators of human experience and practices that actively shape the relationship between humans and the world; practical «technical» knowledge and theoretical knowledge have merged; trust in technological systems becomes a key element of techno-epistemology. Although techno-epistemology does not possess specific methods of scientific research, one can distinguish a set of methods drawn from various disciplines that forms an integral toolkit based on the aforementioned founding principles, in particular: methods for analyzing the technological mediation of knowledge (or analysis of instrumental mediation), the method of epistemological analysis of media practices, mediatized discourse analysis, the constructivist method, the method of network analysis, and comparative analysis of epistemic structures.

The method of analyzing technological mediation reflects the principles of techno-epistemology, involving the study of how recommendation algorithms, platform interfaces, the principle of news presentation, and artifacts contribute to audience perception of information and the production of new knowledge. Applying the method of epistemological analysis of media practices to the study of new media makes it possible to reveal transformations in social roles, practices, forms of knowledge, and narrative structures. Mediatized discourse analysis offers a way of defining the mechanisms of entextualization and resemiotization that new media use to transform separate fragments of reality into texts, visual forms, and multimedia messages.

Theory and Calculation

Jürgen Habermas's concept invites a rethinking of religion's role in contemporary society. Until the early twenty-first century, scholarly discourse largely affirmed the link between secularization and social modernization. However, the presence of religiously grounded conflicts and their transformation from local into global forms give rational grounds for doubting the truth of that thesis. The main arguments in defense of secular processes retain their relevance, but they do not explain all the processes that continue to unfold in contemporary social life. In particular, the scientific worldview continues to contradict the theological and metaphysical one; the nation-state still assumes institutional functions of control over law, politics, culture, education, and science, while religion in Western societies remains largely a private matter for citizens; the transition to a post-industrial society contributes to a reduction in the general sense of existential insecurity [8, p. 60]. Regarding these worldview contradictions, it should be noted that Habermas relies in his assessment on the Western liberal tradition rather than on Averroes' concept of double truth, who in fact argued for their complementarity. The functions of nation-states have undergone substantial transformations since the mid-nineteenth century, having been affected by globalization processes, and are currently undergoing further changes in the context of the consolidation of an ideology of nationalist capitalism. The events of recent decades have significantly intensified processes of social destabilization and, consequently, growing disillusionment with Enlightenment projects of rationalizing the social order. The missionary expansion of world religions, fundamentalist radicalization, and political instrumentalization allow one to assert the growing role of religion in the contemporary world, which provides believers with clear doctrinal guidance in an era of

instability. But desecularization does not mean the return of religion's former social functions or the role of religious organizations. Rather, it is more appropriate to speak of new meanings within the already existing relationship between «religion» and «society», since over the past two centuries religious practices have become increasingly individualized. At the same time, the need arises for a public space in which secular citizens can meet religious ones as equals. Within it there is an expectation that secular citizens will not exclude what they may discover even in religious statements – semantic content and hidden personal intuitions that can be translated and introduced into secular discourse [8, p. 76]. One of the main platforms on which this encounter takes place is the media space.

In this context, Charles Taylor's work A Secular Age is significant: although the author does not use the term «postsecular» – disagreeing with its application to designate an era of the revival of faith – he does analyze a social condition in which the hegemony of the master narrative of secularization is increasingly called into question [23, p. 534]. He reveals the specific influence of print media on the public sphere, in which people who have never met communicate with one another. That is, people would read, for example, a newspaper, and then discuss the information they received in public places, where public opinion was formed out of a set of shared ideas. He explains this through the concept of «common act of attention,» which points to the presence of a shared object (information) that all participants in a discussion turn to – a series of joint actions that results in the formation of public opinion. The researcher distinguishes between the concepts of «topical common space» and «metatopical common space». The former emphasizes a specific attachment to the place where the discussion occurs, while the latter is a non-local space in which direct meetings do not take place, but people understand that they are engaged in a shared discussion. For a long period, the state and the church served as such a metatopical space. But today we are dealing with a new metatopical space that has an extrapolitical status (it is not itself a manifestation of power, but is called upon to control it) [23, p. 190]. The Church and religious organizations are such a metatopical project, capable of entering this extrapolitical public sphere and influencing «public opinion».

The issues of the representation of religion in media, the use of media by religious organizations, and the social interaction between religion and media have been studied within the social communication sciences, but the concept of postsecular society is organically combined with theories of mediatization, which makes it possible to determine the mutual influence of both institutions – an influence that is significantly intensified under the impact of new media. The Finnish scholar Johanna Sumiala carried out research on mediatization in postsecular society in order to establish new perspectives for analyzing the interaction of media, religion, and politics. She based her work on the concepts of the secular public sphere in postsecular society and the significance of the mediatization of religion in the news. The author disputes Habermas's idea about the necessity of communication in the public sphere occurring primarily in a language comprehensible to the whole public within the media discourse of postsecular society. This concerns, of course, not natural languages but a sign-semiotic, metaphorical system with an emphasis on the secular character of the public sphere. However, Sumiala notes, European media regularly cover public debates about the use of religious symbols, religious practices, and scandals connected with systems of religious prescriptions and prohibitions, which requires a reconsideration of the role of religion in the contemporary European public sphere [22, p. 362]. An analysis of current publications on this topic allows the author to conclude that there is a tendency for religion (and, we would add in this context, religious organizations that carry out media activity) to adapt to media logics as a condition for access to the public sphere. Another conclusion the author draws concerns the heightened attention of European media to the topic of Islam, especially in the context of coverage of events related to Islamic terrorism.

The Danish media scholar Stig Hjarvard proposes the concept of the «mediatization of religion» to designate this state of substantial influence of contemporary media as agents of religious change in society – a concept that, in his view, can be considered part of gradual secularization, since it appears as a historical process in which media have taken over many social

functions previously performed by religious institutions [12, p. 13]. Indeed, he uses the concept of the «mediatization of society» to designate the process by which society, to one degree or another, becomes subordinated to or dependent on media and their logic [13, p. 113]. The mediatization of religion thus appears as a process in which mass media shape the cultural and social environment within the relevant social institutions, taking on their functions of providing spiritual guidance, moral orientation, ritual transitions, as well as a sense of community and belonging [11, p. 124]. On the one hand, media become integrated into the work of other social institutions; on the other, they themselves become institutionalized. This also applies to the institution of religion, in which, under the influence of mediatization, resacralization simultaneously takes place. Mediatization, in his view, is a two-way process in which media increasingly develop as an autonomous and independent institution while at the same time becoming integrated into the work of other institutions of society, since mass media, interactive media, and their combinations have become ordinary, natural components of everyday life, alongside education, politics, family life, and religion [11, p. 123]. Moreover, as Hubert Knoblauch points out, «the use of interactive and digital technologies leads to new structures of communicative action, which, accordingly, transform religious communication and religion in general» [14, p. 144]. Essentially, mediatization does not reduce religion to a passive object of media logic, but rather contributes to the emergence of new forms of religious practice.

Regarding religion, Hjarvard identified as one of the key factors of mediatization the unprecedented presence of the theme of the supernatural in the media space. This includes fictional images of fantastical characters and magic, as well as documentary series, entertainment shows, and news, in which themes of a religious nature are actively disseminated. Essentially, contemporary media, on the one hand, change the role of religious institutions in society and shape the agenda regarding religious issues, while, on the other hand, they offer new forms of interpersonal interaction concerning religion. That is, those interested in religious information and its discussion typically identify mass media as their primary source.

A qualitatively different understanding of mediatization is offered by Niels Ole Finnemann, who examines this problem in the context of digital media. Analyzing four interpretations of this process (as the media logic of traditional mass media, as the logic of contemporary media with interactive elements, as a concept of the interrelations between different media, and as a metaprocess), the Danish scholar proposes studying this phenomenon through the lens of the concept of «media matrix» – a set of media in a given society during a particular period. He distinguishes five main eras, each of which formed a media matrix universal for that era, the last of which is oriented toward digital media. Each such matrix possesses a specific set of spatiotemporal, material, and perceptual characteristics. The digital matrix is the most complex, since it integrates the storage capacities of print media with the transmission speed of electronic media [6, pp. 85–86]. The Norwegian scholar of journalism and sociologist of religion Knut Lundby limits the potential of mediatization to three spheres of public religion: the secular sphere of journalism; the cultural sphere, in which elements of religion can become part of entertainment and popular art; and religious media, which are run by religious institutions [16, p. 241]. Thus, this does not touch upon those forms of individual religiosity or spirituality that are not manifested in the public sphere as public religion. The change in the media sphere marked by the emergence and consolidation of new media significantly affects the transformation of public religion, on the one hand stimulating mediatization, and on the other hand changing the character and forms of media activity through audience interaction with content and the establishment of direct feedback. It should be taken into account that audiences composed of adherents of a single confession, who share common knowledge, are active in interaction and capable of rapidly coordinating their actions through media.

Let us clarify the main conditions that new media create for the functioning of religious media discourse, in particular in postsecular society. It is, of course, problematic to describe them as a coherent system, since accomplishing this research task must be correlated with the specifics of national media systems (above all, the role of independent media), with the role of religious institutions in society, and with the mobility and readiness of religious organizations for innovation.

We will focus on the Western European model, in which the processes of secularization–postsecularization are most pronounced and conceptually elaborated in contemporary media theories.

The main conditions include: mediatization as the principle of subordinating other spheres of social life to new media; interactivity and networking; algorithmic visibility and personalization (which determine access to the public sphere); transnational deterritorialized circulation of content; discursive construction and sacralization of the medium; and digital publicization of sacred practices that traditionally had a limited or private character. Let us examine mediatization, interactivity, and networking in more detail.

The first condition – mediatization – points to the necessity for religious discourse to adapt to media logic in order to actively enter the public sphere. Stig Hjarvard, drawing on Joshua Meyrowitz's idea of dividing communication media into three different aspects – media as conduits (intermediaries), media as languages, and media as environments – extrapolates them to the processes of postsecular society. Media as conduits transmit symbols and messages from a sender to an audience located at a certain distance from it. In essence, religious attributes, sacred texts, and audio and video materials become media products [12, p. 14] – that is, they already function according to the rules of the media environment. The media logic of their production and dissemination is oriented toward accessibility, visual appeal, speed of dissemination, the ability to attract audience attention, an orientation toward clickability, and subordination to algorithms. Characteristic features include formatting, newsworthiness, and sensationalism, which often take precedence over theological or ritual considerations. Moreover, they become autonomous units of the media environment, acquiring formats characteristic of new media: reels, online broadcasts, social media posts, and so on. The genre diversity of media content on religious topics, produced by media themselves rather than by religious institutions, gives Hjarvard grounds to argue that media become disseminators of «banal religion», and can therefore serve as a source of re-enchantment [12, p. 14]. However, the use of this term, as well as a number of other controversial claims by this media scholar, has provoked debate in academic discourse. We agree with the position of the German sociologist Hubert Knoblauch, who holds that mediatization does not turn religion into «banal» religion and does not reduce it to a «shared culture» that is merely «represented by media», since it allows believers to become an integral part of the event; it supports a transformation toward popular religion that allows both access to designated forms and their intersection [14, p. 156]. This is a process of change in communicative action (religious communication becomes media-mediated), a transformation of religious services into mediatized events in which they become accessible not only to direct participants but also engage an online audience through interactive modes of participation and interaction. Thus, mediatization does not reduce religion to a set of media images and mediatized symbols, but changes the ways in which religious community is constituted in the digital age. For this reason, Knoblauch considers the concept of «popular religion» more accurate for designating this phenomenon. C. Helland also points to the role of the internet in the establishment of «popular religion,» since it allows for much broader and easier contact between people than was previously possible through books and «old-fashioned» gatherings, becoming an environment for a generation of religious seekers [10, p. 34]. Online popular religion thus emerges as a space of freedom for religious self-expression.

For a long period in the history of religion, the symbol remained within its original ritual context, in antinomy to the profane. But it first underwent transformation as a result of the «iconic turn» described by Walter Benjamin, brought about by the introduction of technologies for the mechanical reproduction of works of art, which made it available for copying. Subsequently, contemporary myths emerged within mass consciousness which, while retaining the main features of traditional, including religious, myths, possess qualitatively different forms of functioning. In the process of mediatization as a whole, there occurs a recoding and recombination of religious symbols, which religious institutions prove unable to control. Media as an intermediary transmit the sacred, but not as a neutral, indifferent agent, since in this process the status of the symbol undergoes transformation as an object of consumption and a new interpretation by the audience.

However, we cannot reduce the sacred in a postsecularized society exclusively to a consumer object; it should be noted that it remains on the margin of mediation processes between constructed notions of the potentially sacred and the audience's actual devotion. The mediation of the sacred, in Lundby's view, «requires the creation of icons or symbols that have the potential to become 'marked out' and to evoke a sense of awe in those who perceive these representations» [17, p. 60]. Already as a media product, sacred texts and symbols effectively undergo resemantization, an adaptation of their original content to audience expectations.

Media as languages, in contemporary Western society, shape the religious imagination in accordance with the genres of popular culture, bringing the content of the corresponding material closer to the specificity of the medium transmitting it, since the choice of medium and genre determines the features of narrative construction and the ways in which an informational message is perceived. In this context, it is worth considering both properly religious narratives and narratives of «alternative spirituality» (following L. S. Clark) [5], which reflect stories of the supernatural, in particular about demons, hell, and the afterlife, grounded in religious traditions. This concerns primarily adolescents, whose worldview conceptions of religion are largely being formed and lack clear confessional orientation. Under these conditions, doctrinal tradition gives way to the genre conventions and narrative strategies of popular culture, and a demarcation occurs between the sacred and entertainment content of media messages. The identification of such tendencies gave Hjarvard grounds for the bold, though rather debatable, claim that «thanks to the language of mass culture in the mass media, religion has become more oriented toward entertainment and the consumer, and the approach to religion in general has acquired a more individual character» [12, p. 14]. However, this thesis underestimates the capacity of religious institutions to adapt media formats to their own doctrinal and communicative needs, since new media precisely facilitate the popularization and commodification of religious content, the formation of religious-confessional identity, and the establishment of horizontal networked communicative ties. This thesis about the inevitable «entertainment orientation» does not take into account the capacity of religious institutions to selectively appropriate the language of media. For example, religious organizations actively use the streaming format on social media to broadcast religious services or for educational activities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, streams became a means of maintaining the unity of religious community through virtual participation in religious practices. Although we may to some extent regard this tendency as a continuation of the «electronic church», in which religious communication was established through television channels – but this was rather a one-way connection [7], whereas contemporary digital platforms ensure interactive audience participation and feedback.

Podcasts («confessional podcasting») devoted to religious education, theological discussions, and the discussion of pressing social problems from confessional positions have become widespread. Indeed, traditional forms of preaching and mentorship are being transferred into the popular audio format, yet the content, the doctrinal core of the conversation, and the educational character of the communication are not lost in the process. That is, by using contemporary media formats, religious organizations produce content that is not entertainment-oriented but rather aimed at reproducing religious discourse, forming and maintaining religious-confessional identity, in which media logic becomes a means of disseminating spiritual and practical information under conditions of the digital environment. Finnemann also draws attention to this, noting that if mediatization is conceived as a process governed by professionalism and commercial-competitive goals, then the internet cannot be included within it, since it does not encompass civic activities or the activities of public institutions [6, p. 73]. Religious communities are precisely among the latter, and therefore their digital communication is not reducible to an entertainment-consumerist logic. However, there is a risk of infotainment, whereby content produced by new media may combine information and entertainment in a way that can lead to the trivialization of the message [1, p. 11]. The boundary between educational and entertainment content is blurred, and its determination depends above all on whose logic of content production the message is subject to – that of the religious institution or that of the media platform.

It is worth noting here the aspect of the representation of the supernatural in religion and contemporary media. Before the Age of Enlightenment, the supernatural world, owing to religious conceptions, appeared as a real part of being, but with the development of science these cosmogonic ideas lost their authority. From the nineteenth century onward, belief in supernatural miracles turned into a means of entertainment, and the supernatural itself was repackaged as spectacular content for the skeptical yet curious urban public of that era [5, p. 39]. Contemporary media discourse now appears as a space of ambivalence, in which both religious and entertainment modes coexist, since digital media add interactivity and networked circulation.

The third aspect – media as environments – shows how media systems and institutions facilitate and structure human interaction and communication [12, p. 15]. Mediatization is considered in the context of historical change, with the contemporary stage characterized by a global, consumer-oriented style of communication.

The history of religion demonstrates fundamental changes with the emergence of various media technologies. With the emergence of the written tradition, we can trace certain shifts; the emergence of book printing became a precondition for the Reformation; the emergence of radio and television changed the character of missionary activity; the «electronic church», with formats such as televangelism, radio sermons, and live broadcasts of major church services, gained popularity. Of particular interest is the chapter «The Electronic Church and Its Audience» in William F. Fore's monograph Television and Religion: The Shaping of Faith, Values and Culture. In 1980, the researcher analyzed the innovations of electronic evangelists and expressed firm conviction that they could not be considered pastors. In response, he received nearly 500 letters, the majority of which expressed disagreement with him. Having studied the audience in demographic terms and the reasons why people preferred this particular format, he concluded that the electronic church does not constitute a serious institutional threat to mainstream churches, but rather maintains a relative connection to core theology, particularly in the spheres of mission, evangelization, and education [7]. It is a powerful tool for attracting an audience, yet it remains simply part of the entertainment television package with a religious orientation. New media substantially change the character of communication in the digital age, in which even such electronic media as radio and television are changing their broadcast formats to engage the audience. Knoblauch analyzed three events – the visits of Pope Benedict XVI to Berlin in 2011 and of Pope John Paul II to Berlin in 1996 and to Vienna in 1998 – in terms of how television channels organized their broadcasts. In the second case, the emphasis was on engaging the audience with the broadcast, in particular through more frequent close-up shots of people during the rituals. Unlike in the earlier era, mediatization and popularization could here be clearly traced, since when the head of the Catholic Church called for a minute of silence for the shared veneration of the great mystery, the believers gathered at the site actively reacted to the camera, ignoring their spiritual leader's request. The comparison revealed that during John Paul II's meeting in Vienna, believers' faces appeared in the broadcast with a frequency of 16 minutes per hour, whereas for Benedict XVI in Berlin this rose to 48 minutes; in the first meeting there was only a single audience reaction, while in the second there were 17 per hour [14, p. 149]. Based on a detailed study of audience engagement, the author distinguishes two styles of religious media communication – the «popular» style and the solemn style of the «high church.» The former corresponds to the media logic of «celebrity» coverage, while the latter represents properly religious communication. Whereas John Paul II's appearances were oriented toward emotionally captivating the audience with the performances not only of the Pope but also of the subjects of a highly artistic event, with a single unified reaction in the form of applause, Benedict XVI's appearances were marked by a diversity of ritual audience participation, a departure from the strictly «solemn» mass in favor of a «popular style.» In fact, the German scholar concludes, mass media become part of the religious event itself, since, on the one hand, they aim to transform it into a mediated event, while, on the other hand, they themselves become subordinated to its internal logic, becoming embedded in the structure of the ritual.

The second condition that new media create for the functioning of religious media discourse, in particular in postsecular society, is interactivity and networking. Already with the spread of

internet technology in the early 2000s, when there were only around 300 million users, religion became quite widespread on the network, with both traditional and new religious groups actively creating and disseminating their own content. The Canadian scholar of online religion and religion online, Christopher Helland, drawing on statistics showing that at the time there were almost three times more websites about God than about sex, explains this popularity by the technology's capacity to create a unique public space that participants can join without leaving their homes, and by its ability to blur the boundary between the traditional public space and private expressions of religious belief [9, p. 212]. The internet has opened up new possibilities for religious participation, which occurs, as we agree with him, in two forms – religion online (the application of traditional forms of presenting religion by means of new technologies), which is typically initiated by religious organizations seeking to update their activity in new formats; and online religion (the functioning of media discourse according to the principles of mass communication), which is marked by a lack of structure, openness, and non-hierarchy in the interaction between communicating subjects, and which operates outside religious structures [9, pp. 214-220]. What is unique is that in the second form, participants interact not with classical systems of religious belief but with those represented on the internet, establishing dialogue with other participants in the process. The transformation of religious beliefs through the lens of individual experience and convictions here receives responses from other participants who lack appropriate theological qualifications. It is precisely here that the interactive and networked character of mass communication manifests itself.

Networking is grounded in Manuel Castells's socio-philosophical ideas about a new stage of societal development, in which social relations are predominantly decentralized, organized in the form of flexible networks, with the production and exchange of information accordingly carried out through interconnected communicative structures. The American researcher Heidi Campbell, in a series of works devoted to the digitalization of religion, formulates the concept of networked religion as a media phenomenon whose nature is the network society and the socio-technical structures that support it. The presence of religion in the online environment is marked by the formation of technological structures and characteristics typical of this space: the flattening of traditional hierarchies, the encouragement of instantaneous communication and response, and the expansion of access to sacred or previously private information [3, p. 68]. Religious communities on social media act and interact according to different principles than communities formed by traditional institutions. Dominant here is the narrative of the «spiritual network,» proclaimed in the context of the concept of the social shaping of technology, with an emphasis on the need for the religious community's collective perception of new media, evaluating the internet as a means for spiritual encounters with fellow seekers of answers to religious questions. This narrative of shared experience proclaims that «the internet was created by God for a specific religious purpose, or is imbued with divine potential to facilitate spiritual encounters» [2, p. 15]. The uniqueness of such networked religion lies in its orientation toward the desire for freedom and spiritual experience, realized in dialogue with other users. In her study Cyberfaith: How Americans Pursue Religion Online, Elena Larsen proposed calling such users «religious surfers,» although this term did not gain wide currency in the scholarly literature. Based on sociological research current as of 2004, she concluded that religious surfers take their faith seriously in the offline world and use online tools to deepen their knowledge of their faith and to practice their religious duties [15, p. 19]. Scholars today largely observe the entrenchment of this type of communication, especially with the spread of social media. In their analysis of the advantages of discussing religious matters online, the Swiss scholars Becca Smith and Eszter Hargittai demonstrate that users generally prefer online communication for its asynchronicity, the possibility of maintaining distance, and the opportunities offered by social media (including anonymity and privacy) [21, p. 1848]. The researchers interviewed 45 individuals, and regarding the possibilities of social media they cite a quotation from a 37-year-old Christian minister respondent, who noted that for him online conversations about spirituality are among the best he has had, since it is a place where people feel most comfortable, leaving the longest comments, whereas expressions of spiritual content on Instagram tend to be

quick, short, and encouraging [21, p. 1843]. The authors, of course, also demonstrated the existence of opposing viewpoints among respondents who prefer offline communication on religious topics.

Networked religion has five features: networked community, narrative identities, shifting authority, convergent practice, and multisite reality. In the context of our study, we focus primarily on the feature of shifting authority, since its analysis makes it possible to reveal the grounds on which particular subjects are granted the right both to produce and to confer legitimacy on specific religious meanings and narratives in the media space. The American researcher Pauline Hope Cheong identifies three interpretive approaches to the question of authority: rupture and displacement, continuation and supplementation, and dialectics and paradox [4]. The first approach seeks to portray the internet as a decentralized space in which, under the influence of digital media technologies, religious authority is lost and traditional religious doctrines and domains are disrupted. Relations between religious authority and online media are characterized by chaos and/or a lack of connection; the church cedes its status as the «locus of theology» to the authority of the webpage, which allows any religious figures, even self-proclaimed ones, to offer their teachings to a mass audience – teachings that may run counter to traditional church positions or even constitute disinformation campaigns. The second – alternative – approach emphasizes the potential for restoring religious authority and legitimacy for activity in the religious sphere through new media. The third reveals the paradox of religious authority, which digital media technologies simultaneously weaken and strengthen. It seeks to apply contemporary media practices, thereby undergoing a renewal of users' understanding of religious authority, since a conflict is created through their mastery of these practices, while at the same time the latter serve as a platform for mutual adaptation, relieving tension [4, pp. 90–97]. Campbell proposes examining the shift in authority through a method of systemic analysis, treating religious discourse as a complex of spheres consisting of religious hierarchy, structure, ideology, and text. This makes it possible to determine exactly how the shift in authority occurs in the formation of religious media discourse in the digital age. At the level of hierarchy, one observes the emergence of new roles of religious authority on the internet, both from a technical standpoint (for example, the moderator) and from a personal standpoint – actors who take on the functions of opinion leaders. At the level of structure, a shift is observed from hierarchical organizational forms to networked, decentralized ones, which is reflected at the level of ideology, in which internet technologies promote the pluralization of opinions, ideas, and interpretations (which, in turn, contributes to the emergence of new ideas and interpretations that may also be controversial in character, contradicting traditional norms or corresponding to political circumstances). It is important to note that, despite the presence of such pluralism and the opportunities to obtain information about other religions, users belonging to specific confessions, on the contrary, use religious media discourse exclusively to exchange information predominantly with like-minded people. The Ukrainian philosopher and media scholar Olha Dobrodum points to a shift in the authority of the family, the loss of parents' monopoly in primary socialization and religious-spiritual upbringing, noting that a new media platform of religious socialization is now forming, in which «faith influencers» become authorities [25, p. 11]. This shift means that young people's primary religious (or anti-religious) conceptions are now largely formed in the networked environmen, where emotionality, sensationalism, and the ease of content transmission by these new, unqualified authorities – influencers – come to the fore.

Conclusions

The conducted study made it possible to conceptualize the specific features of the functioning of religious media discourse within the environment of new media and to distinguish six basic conditions that the digital media environment creates for its development in postsecular society: mediatization as the principle of subordinating religious communication to media logic; interactivity and networking; algorithmic visibility and personalization; transnational deterritorialized circulation of content; discursive construction and sacralization of the medium; and digital publicization of sacred practices. A detailed examination of the first two conditions demonstrated that the adaptation of religious content to the requirements of the media environment

– formatting, visuality, an orientation toward clickability, and subordination to algorithms – does not reduce religion to an entertainment or purely consumerist product, but rather gives rise to new forms of religious identity, communality, and communicative interaction, while preserving the sacred dimension of religious experience. The main result is the establishment of the fact that mediatization appears as a two-way process, in which religious institutions not only adapt to media logic but also selectively appropriate the language of media for their own doctrinal and educational needs, while networking transforms the very foundations of religious authority, bringing to the fore new actors of influence – moderators, opinion leaders, and «faith influencers». The significance of the results obtained lies in the proposal of an integral theoretical framework that combines the concept of postsecular society with theories of mediatization and makes it possible to describe the mutual influence of religion and media in the digital age without reducing this process in a simplified way to secularization or desecularization. At the same time, the study has certain limitations, since it is based predominantly on the Western European model of the relationship between the secular and the postsecular, and therefore the proposed system of conditions cannot be considered universal, as its manifestations correlate significantly with the specifics of national media systems, the role of religious institutions in a given society, and their readiness for innovation. The conclusions obtained can be applied to further research on the transformation of media communications, the public sphere, and religious socialization in the digital age, as well as to the analysis of the media activity of religious organizations. Promising directions for further research include the empirical study of the remaining identified conditions, a comparative analysis of the functioning of religious media discourse in different national contexts, and the study of the risks of infotainment and the trivialization of sacred content that accompany the digital publicization of religious practices.

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