

Theology and media studies: interdisciplinarity as a platform for joint reflection on the media

KEY WORDS

theology, media studies, methodology, interdisciplinarity, theology of mass media, cybertheology

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to gather discussions on two areas of science: theology and media studies in a comparative perspective. The authors analyse the methodological aspects of both areas of science and further argue that there is a common area of interest which includes research on media and communications. The scientific dialogue between theology and media studies is possible due to interdisciplinarity.

The emergence of media studies as an autonomous and separate scientific discipline constitutes an unquestionably positive element in the field of methodology and a step towards the further development of media research and analyses¹.

At the same time, it testifies to the progressive nature of Polish science in this area, to its multidimensionality and the broad *spectrum* of problems addressed by research on the media of social communication. It is also a proof of sensitivity to the cultural and civilisation changes which arise from the development of communication technologies and devices understood, of course, not as means of transport, but as tools of communication and dissemination of information and other media messages².

It is interesting and important to note and emphasise that media-related issues attract interest not only from linguists, political scientists, historians, sociologists, psychologists and

¹ See the work of the team established by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, concerning the scope of new disciplines, http://www.ck.gov.pl/images/PDF/praca_zespolu.pdf [accessed: 17 Oct. 2014], pp. 36-44.

² See T. Goban-Klas, *Nauki o mediach - baza czy nadbudowa teorii nauk społecznych?* [Media Sciences - the base or superstructure of social science theories?], <http://www.up.krakow.pl> [accessed: 20 Oct.2015].

philosophers, but also from theologians representing different scientific institutes in Poland³. In addition to offering study programmes in journalism, the institutes have also assembled scholars who conduct research on media transmissions in the light of, generally speaking, the current media doctrine of the Catholic Church. It is therefore necessary to precisely define the place and role of theology of the mass media within the system of both theology and media studies. For this reason, the present paper aims to compare the two areas of science: the field and discipline of theology and the discipline of media studies. The authors will analyse the methodological aspects of theological and media sciences. They believe that despite the apparent obstacles, those two disciplines share common interests, such as the media and communication. The platform for the scientific dialogue between theology and media studies will be provided by the well-understood interdisciplinarity, which is a feature shared by both theological and media sciences.

Media studies as a scientific discipline

On 8 August 2011, the Minister of Science and Higher Education issued the Ordinance on the Areas of Knowledge, Fields of Science and Art, Scientific and Artistic Disciplines. For the first time in the history of Polish science, media studies were listed as a scientific discipline assigned to the field and area of social sciences. The Ordinance was preceded by a long

³ They include: the staff of the Institute of Media Education and Journalism at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University (UKSW) in Warsaw (plus several researchers who formally do not belong to the Institute staff, but whose scientific interests include the relationship between theology, media and culture). The Institute of Media Education and Journalism consists of five Chairs: Chair of Theology of the Media of Social Communication (Head: Prof. UKSW Dr hab. Grzegorz Łęcicki), Chair of Media Education and Media Language (Head: Dr hab. Piotr Drzewiecki), Chair of Theory, Axiology and Law of the Media (Head: Prof. Dr hab. Krystyna Czuba), Chair of the Internet and Digital Communication (Head: Rev. Prof. UKSW Dr hab. Andrzej Adamski, since 2010 also Head of the Institute), and Chair of Public Relations and Marketing Communication (Head: Prof. UKSW Dr hab. Monika Przybysz). Outside the Institute, the theological and media issues are also researched by e.g.: Rev. Prof. Dr hab. Henryk Seweryniak, and Prof. UKSW Dr hab. Witold Kawecki). This type of scientific reflection is also undertaken at the Institute of Journalism and Social Communication at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Catholic University of Lublin (e.g.: Prof. Dr hab. Karol Klauza) and at the Chair of Modern Forms of Faith Transmission at the Institute of Pastoral Theology and Catechetics, the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Lublin (Head of the Chair: Rev. Prof. Dr hab. Tadeusz Zasępa). A mention should also be made of the Institute of Journalism at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the John Paul II University (UPJP2) in Krakow (Head of the Institute: Rev. Prof. UPJP2 Dr hab. Michał Drożdż). Among the theologians interested in media-related issues one should also mention Rev. Prof. UO Dr hab. Marek Lis from the Faculty of Theology of the University of Opole (UO), Rev. Prof. US Dr hab. Andrzej Draguła from the Faculty of Theology of the University of Szczecin (US), and Prof. UWM Dr hab. Katarzyna Parzych-Blakiewicz from the Faculty of Theology of the University of Warmia and Mazury (UWM). A wider panorama of scientific institutes and scholars engaged in media and theology research can be found in M. Laskowska, *Media i teologia. Kierunki badań teologicznych w ujęciu Magisterium Kościoła* [Media and theology. Directions of theological research according to the Magisterium of the Church], "Teologia Praktyczna" [Practical Theology] 2013, no.14, pp. 147-151.

debate in the Polish scientific circles, as many scholars researching various aspects of communication and mass media increasingly highlighted the need for distinguishing media studies as a separate discipline. Lively discussions took place concerning the name of the new discipline and its place in the system of sciences⁴. Even after issuing the above-mentioned Ordinance which legitimised the creation of the new discipline, its name and identity continued to be debated among media specialists. As suggested by Walery Pisarek, the scientific community accepted the name “media studies” without enthusiasm, pointing to the lack of direct references to social communication⁵. Undoubtedly, the methodological chaos was further aggravated by including another discipline in the list - cognitive science and social communication - whose scope of interest seems to partly overlap with media studies⁶.

The basic methodological guidelines for the discipline “media studies”, i.e. the subject matter, scope and objectives of research, specification of the research methods, relationships with new disciplines or scientific specialisations, are contained in the document published on the website of the Central Commission for Degrees and Titles, which constitutes an outcome of work of the special team set up by the Central Commission⁷. This is obviously just a starting point for further work and debates, as media scientists are now facing the task of defining the identity of their discipline and its methodological canons in more precise terms.

⁴ Cf. T. Goban-Klas, *Emergencja nowej dyscypliny: nauki o mediach i komunikacji społecznej* [Emergence of a new discipline: media and communication studies], an electronic document available on the website of the Chair of Communication and Social Media of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, <http://users.uj.edu.pl/~usgoban/files/emergencjanaukiomediach.pdf> [accessed: 17 Oct.2014]; idem, *Nauki o mediach i komunikacji społecznej jako nowa dyscyplina nauk humanistycznych* [Media and social communication studies as a new discipline of humanities], “*Studia Medioznawcze*” [Media studies] 2008, no. 2 (33). One of the earliest Polish texts addressing this issue is the paper by T. Goban-Klas entitled *Od wielo- do interdyscyplinarności (Z dziejów wiedzy o komunikowaniu)* [From multi- to interdisciplinarity (From the history of communication studies)], originally published in “*Studia Filozoficzne*” [Philosophical studies] in 1976, no.2 pp. 77-90, and then reprinted in a slightly abridged version and without footnotes in “*Studia Medioznawcze*” [Media studies] 2013, no.3 (54), pp. 11-22 on the occasion of the annual national conference held by the Institute of Journalism of the University of Warsaw, entitled “Identity of media studies”.

⁵ Cf. W. Pisarek, *Terminologia nauk o mediach* [Media studies terminology], „*Studia Medioznawcze*” [Media studies] 2013, no. 2 (53), p. 18.

⁶ The scientific discipline covers the following sub-disciplines: cyberculture, media education, social epistemology, cognitive science, cognitive theory of culture, intra- and intercultural communication, political communication, social communication, media studies, rhetoric, pragmatics and argumentation theory, theory of cognition. Cf. PhD studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Journalism - regulations regarding the conferment of the PhD degree, an electronic document on the website of the University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław <http://www.dladoktoranta.dsw.edu.pl/doktorat-z-nauk-o-poznaniu-i-komunikacji/przewody-doktorskie--wnsid/przewody-doktorskie-wnsid-regulamin-przeprowadzania-przewodow-doktorskich/> [accessed: 17 Oct. 2014].

⁷ See http://www.ck.gov.pl/images/PDF/praca_zespolu.pdf [accessed: 17 Oct. 2014], pp. 36-44.

The interdisciplinarity of media studies is indisputable. This is reflected both in the above-mentioned document and the discussion among media researchers which mainly takes place in the pages of the “Studia Medioznawcze” quarterly magazine and during scientific conferences in the series “Identity of media studies”, held by the Institute of Journalism of the University of Warsaw. The following researchers voiced their opinion in the discussion through their scientific papers published in the quarterly: Marek Jabłonowski, Tomasz Gackowski⁸, Maciej Mrozowski⁹, Tomasz Gackowski¹⁰, Wiesław Sonczyk¹¹, Walery Pisarek¹², Małgorzata Lisowska-Magdziarz¹³, Tomasz Goban-Klas¹⁴, Kazimierz Wolny-Zmorzyński and Andrzej Kozieł¹⁵, Michał Drożdż¹⁶, Jerzy Olędzki¹⁷, Teresa Sasińska-Klas¹⁸,

⁸ M. Jabłonowski, T. Gackowski, *Tożsamość nauk o mediach. Obszary, perspektywy, postulaty* [Identity of media studies. Fields, perspectives, postulates], „Studia Medioznawcze” [Media studies] 2012, no. 2 (49), pp. 15-23.

⁹ M. Mrozowski, *Tożsamość nauk o mediach. Przyczynek do dyskusji* [Identity of media studies. Contribution to the discussion], „Studia Medioznawcze” [Media studies] 2012, no. 2 (49), pp. 24-32.

¹⁰ T. Gackowski, *Konferencja: ‘Tożsamość nauk o mediach’ czyli medioznawczapolifonia starej-nowej dyscypliny naukowej* [The conference: “Identity of media studies”, i.e. the media studies polyphony of the old-new academic discipline], „Studia Medioznawcze” [Media studies] 2012, no. 3 (50), pp. 11-27.

¹¹ W. Sonczyk, *Tożsamość nauk o mediach (refleksje po konferencji)* [Identity of media studies (post-conference reflections)], „Studia Medioznawcze” [Media studies] 2012, no. 3 (50), pp. 28-39.

¹² W. Pisarek, *Terminologia nauk o mediach* [Media studies terminology], „Studia Medioznawcze” [Media studies] 2013, no. 2 (53), pp. 15-26.

¹³ M. Lisowska-Magdziarz, *Metodologia badań nad mediami - nurty, kierunki, koncepcje, nowe wyzwania* [Methodology of media studies- trends, directions, concepts, new challenges], „Studia Medioznawcze” [Media studies] 2013, no. 2 (53), pp. 27-42.

¹⁴ T. Goban-Klas, *Od wielo- do interdyscyplinarności (Z dziejów wiedzy o komunikowaniu)* [From multi- to interdisciplinarity (From the History of Communication Studies)], „Studia Medioznawcze” [Media studies] 2013, no. (54), pp. 11-22.

¹⁵ K. Wolny-Zmorzyński, A. Kozieł, *Genologia dziennikarska* [Journalistic genealogy], „Studia Medioznawcze” [Media studies], no. 3 (54), pp. 23-35.

¹⁶ M. Drożdż, *Etyczne aspekty mediów integralną częścią nauk o mediach* [Ethical aspects of media is an integral part of media studies], „Studia Medioznawcze” [Media studies] 2013, no. 4 (55), pp. 11-26.

¹⁷ J. Olędzki, *Public relations i marketing medialny: zarządzanie komunikacją i wizerunkiem w nauce o mediach* [Public relations and media marketing: managing image and communication in media studies], „Studia Medioznawcze” [Media studies] 2013, no. 4 (55), pp. 27-35.

¹⁸ T. Sasińska-Klas, *Swoistość zjawisk w komunikacji medialnej i problemy w ich badaniach empirycznych* [The specific nature of phenomena in media communication and problems with their empirical research], „Studia Medioznawcze” [Media studies] 2014, no. 1(56), pp. 13-21.

Tadeusz Kowalski¹⁹, Marek Jabłonowski and Wojciech Jakubowski²⁰, and Alicja Waszkiewicz-Raviv²¹.

The discussion is also held in other scientific journals, at scientific conferences devoted to the media, and during regular meetings of bodies responsible for journalism education in Poland (the most recent one took place at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań in spring 2015).

Polish media scientists seem to be unanimous in their view that interdisciplinarity is the only way in which media studies can properly develop and accomplish their goals and tasks²². They lie at the meeting point of three areas: social sciences, humanities and technical sciences. Undoubtedly, media studies are also increasingly influenced by the sphere of art. The progressing technologisation and computerisation of the world is accompanied by the growing influence of technical sciences, especially IT, cybernetics, electronics, electrotechnology and telecommunications, on media studies. Media studies cannot be unequivocally and arbitrarily classified into one area of science²³. Rather, it is an eclectic discipline which uses the methods and tools of other scientific disciplines, especially

¹⁹ T. Kowalski, *Ekonomiczne badania nad mediami jako element nauki o mediach* [Economic research on media as an element of media studies], „Studia Medioznawcze” [Media studies] 2014, no. 2 (57), pp. 15-36.

²⁰ M. Jabłonowski, W. Jakubowski, *Status teoretyczny nauk o mediach - kilka uwag do dyskusji* [Theoretical status of media studies – a few comments to the discussions], „Studia Medioznawcze” [Media studies] 2014, no. 4 (59), pp. 11-25.

²¹ A. Waszkiewicz-Raviv, *Edukacja medialna w świetle debaty nad tożsamością nauki o mediach. Dotychczasowe paradygmaty a neuropoznawcza ścieżka metodologiczna* [Media education in the debate on identity of media studies. Existing paradigms versus methodology of neurostudies], „Studia Medioznawcze” [Media studies] 2015, no. 3 (62), pp. 15-28.

²² This view has been expressed by, inter alia, T. Goban-Klas, “(...) not the Chinese Wall, but rather multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary cooperation is needed in order to conduct scientific studies on the media as the key element of our contemporaneity and future”, see T. Goban-Klas, *Od wielo- do interdyscyplinarności...*, op. cit., p. 11; M. Mrozowski, “(...) a distinct identity of *media studies* can only be shaped through interdisciplinary research programmes which will examine the media activities from a broad and multidimensional perspective, integrating various research communities. Without that, media studies will remain an eclectic and scattered sub-discipline that does not have any major impact on the overall development of science, let alone on the reality”, see M. Mrozowski, *Tożsamość nauk o mediach...*, op.cit., p. 27; W. Pisarek “Recognizing *media studies* as a separate discipline did not deprive media research and media studies of their interdisciplinary character. Media are the object of interest for various disciplines, and, what is more, in order to explore the various aspects of their social functioning one has to employ the research methods and techniques developed and used by other disciplines. Media studies should, with a due degree of criticism, appropriate the knowledge about media and their functioning which has been developed by other disciplines, and incorporate into its arsenal their less or more modified research tools,” see W. Pisarek, *Terminologia nauk o mediach*, op.cit., p. 22.

²³ Cf. M. Jabłonowski, T. Gackowski, *Tożsamość nauk o mediach. Obszary, perspektywy, postulaty* [Identity of media studies. Fields, perspectives, postulates], „Studia Medioznawcze” [Media studies] 2012, no. 2 (49), pp. 17-19.

sociology, cultural studies, economics, philosophy, anthropology and political science²⁴. Among the different aspects of the media investigated by the humanities, such as linguistic, literary, historical, cultural and anthropological aspects, consideration is also given to the theological aspect²⁵.

The previously quoted paper by Jabłonowski and Jakubowski provides, in a way, a summary and structure to the discussion so far. The authors propose four theses which serve as a springboard for further discussion: “firstly, media studies lie at the meeting point of humanities and social sciences [a two-area discipline]; secondly, its material object are the media of social communication, whereas its formal object is the sphere of social flow of information; thirdly, media studies are a discipline whose research field has not been precisely defined; fourthly, media studies are a discipline with a relatively low paradigmatic coherence”²⁶. Therefore, further discussion is necessary in order to answer the question whether media studies should rather be regarded as a three-area discipline (with its scope of research and impact including also technical sciences). In line with the OECD classification, it seems valid to identify, within the area of social sciences, a separate field of media and communications which includes media studies, cognitive studies, library science and information science²⁷. Moreover, it seems that the discipline “media studies” will officially acquire its full identity when, as has frequently been proposed, its name is changed into “media and social communication studies”, which should put an end to the competency dispute between media and cognitive scientists.

Scientificity and interdisciplinarity of theology

At this point, the question should be asked: can media studies and theology share common areas and objects of interest? In other words, can theology of the media of social communication be regarded as a sub-discipline of media studies and theology?

It might seem impossible to expect an affirmative answer to this question due to the numerous methodological obstacles. The difficulty here lies not so much in the fact that media

²⁴ Cf. A. Adamski, *Ksiądz profesor Antoni Lewek (1940-2010) i jego zasługi dla edukacji medialnej* [Reverend Professor Antoni Lewek (1940-2010) and his contribution to media education], „Biuletyn Edukacji Medialnej” [Media education bulletin] 2012, no. 1, pp. 118-128.

²⁵ Cf. M. Jabłonowski, W. Jakubowski, *Status teoretyczny nauk o mediach...*, op. cit., p. 15; A. Adamski, *Media w analogowym i cyfrowym świecie. Wpływ cyfrowej rewolucji na rekonfigurację komunikacji społecznej* [Media in the analogue and digital world. The impact of the digital revolution on reconfiguration of the social communication], Warszawa 2012, pp. 24-26.

²⁶ M. Jabłonowski, W. Jakubowski, *Status teoretyczny nauk o mediach...*, op. cit., p. 24.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

studies have been assigned to the area and field of social sciences, while theology belongs to the area of humanities and field of theological studies because interdisciplinarity, properly understood, can successfully deal with this problem. Another problem is the certain fuzziness of the term “theology”, as religiology lists many different types of theology, depending on religion or denomination. The Roman Catholic theology itself is not a doctrinal or methodological monolith. This, paradoxically, is a positive factor, a sign of development. The multitude of theological disciplines with their own formal objects and not fully defined boundaries is a situation analogous to that of other sciences where many philosophical, natural or humanistic disciplines are brought together under the collective term of philosophy, physics or humanities²⁸.

A greater difficulty arises from the specific nature of theology and the fact that it refers to the supernatural reality which is beyond the empirical cognition, whereas in media studies, empirical evidence is an important source and starting point for reflection. For this reason, theology is sometimes denied a place among scientific disciplines. This approach is, however, completely unjustified - theology has its place in the pantheon of scientific disciplines as a legitimate branch of science. A one-sided view of science and rationality reducing them merely to mathematics and experimental sciences, is too narrow and inadequate²⁹. Theology is a science which harmoniously unites reason and faith³⁰, it therefore “rightly belongs in the university and within the wide-ranging dialogue of sciences, not merely as a historical discipline and one of the human sciences, but precisely as theology, as inquiry into the rationality of faith”³¹. It has its own, specific method. What is more, it applies a methodologically structured approach and unambiguous language to justify faith, understood as the answer to the universal human need for discovering the sense of reality. It also meets

²⁸ Cf. A. Bronk, S. Majdański, *Teologia - próba metodologiczno-epistemologicznej charakterystyki* [On theology: some methodological and epistemological remarks], „Nauka” [Science] 2006, no.2, pp. 81-83.

²⁹ A. Bronk and S. Majdański note that “the first half of the 20th century saw a visibly growing interest in the scientific nature of theology inspired by the methodological and philosophical research on science, mainly neo-positivist provenance. It turned out that if theology is a science, its practice differs from the understanding of science according to the neo-positivist model, patterned upon natural sciences (physics). The 20th century development of the philosophy of science (‘new philosophy of science’) which questioned the existence of universal, timeless standards of scientificity led to the softening of the previous restrictive approach and widening of the boundaries of science”. Ibidem, p. 105.

³⁰ Cf. The International Theological Commission, *Teologia dzisiaj: perspektywy, zadania i kryteria* [Theology today: perspectives, principles and criteria], translated into Polish by Krzysztof Stopa, Kraków 2012, p. 67.

³¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Przemówienie na uniwersytecie w Ratyzbonie (Regensburg) [Lecture at the University of Regensburg], 12 Sep. 2006, translated into Polish by M. Górnicki, http://www.opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/benedykt_xvi/podroze/ben16-ratyzbona_12092006.html# [accessed: 17 Oct. 2014].

the elementary requirements of scientificity formulated in 1931 by Heinrich Scholz during his discussion with Karl Barth. Theology has its own, specific object, theological sentences are cognitive, and the accuracy of theological statements can be verified by referring to their implications for understanding the world, human nature and existence³².

Reason uses various methods which are adapted to the object of its inquiry. There is only one rationality, but it takes on many forms; similarly, science is multiform, since each science has its own object and specific method. The modern scientific reason carries in itself a question which points to a reality beyond reason and its methodological capabilities. Consequently, it has to adopt the rational structure of the matter and the correspondence between our spirit and the rational structures of nature as a fact on which its methodology should be based. The question why it has to be this way is a real question, and should be passed on by natural sciences to other methods and planes of thought: philosophy and theology³³. For those sciences “listening to the great experiences and insights of the religious traditions of humanity, and those of the Christian faith in particular, is a source of knowledge, and to ignore it would be an unacceptable restriction of our listening and responding”³⁴ since “a reason which is deaf to the divine and which relegates religion into the realm of subcultures is incapable of entering into the dialogue of cultures”³⁵. Faith and reason have to meet in a new way. Only then will reason reveal its wide horizons. This, however, is only possible if we overcome the tendency to limit reason to that which is empirically verifiable³⁶.

And this is where the concept of interdisciplinarity may prove useful again. This is the nature - as has already been demonstrated - of media studies. Likewise, theology is “a borderline discipline with its windows open to humanities - history, philosophy, linguistics, psychology, sociology, ethnology and the like”³⁷. Theologians themselves also increasingly recognise the need for an interdisciplinary approach in the practice of theology. Also in Poland, there is a growing understanding that interdisciplinarity is inscribed in the very nature

³² Cf. H. Seweryniak, K. Sitkowska, M. Robak, *Kultura-media-teologia. Metodyka pisania prac dyplomowych* [Culture-media-theology. Methodology of writing degree theses], Płock 2013, pp. 27-31.

³³ Cf. The International Theological Commission, *Teologia dzisiaj:*, op. cit., p. 67.

³⁴ Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Przemówienie na uniwersytecie w Ratyźbonie...*, op. cit.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ Cf. H. Seweryniak, *Teologie na 'progu domu'* [Theologies on “the doorstep”], “Kultura-Media-Teologia” [Culture-media-theology] 2010, no. 1, http://kmt.uksw.edu.pl/media/pdf/kmt_2010_1_seweryniak.pdf [accessed: 17 Oct. 2014], pp. 3612.

of theology, mainly due to the multitude and diversity of sources that it employs³⁸. An experienced theologian can discern *locus theologicus* in nearly every aspect of the surrounding reality. The above-quoted document of the International Theological Commission, drawn up under the auspices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, encourages interdisciplinary meetings and exchange between theologians, philosophers, natural scientists, historians, social scientists and others. This is because theology develops in cooperation with other sciences, while other sciences - through a fruitful dialogue with theology³⁹. For theology, dialogue and interdisciplinary cooperation seem to be essential in order to ensure and express its unity. The word “theology” used in the singular does not at all mean uniformity of styles and concepts, but rather indicates a joint search for the truth about God and the world, while all theological sub-disciplines, with their different sources, methods and objectives, are essentially united by the effort to get to know God and his salvation plan⁴⁰.

Media studies and theology: tasks and possibilities of cooperation

Finally, the question remains to be answered: what can theological reflection offer to media studies and in what areas can it prove useful? Which research problems and areas particularly require theological and media studies reflection, and simultaneously pose a challenge and a task for it?

According to the Decree on Priestly Formation, *Optatam totius*, produced by the Second Vatican Council, theology should “seek the solutions to human problems under the light of revelation, to apply the eternal truths of revelation to the changeable conditions of human affairs and to communicate them in a way suited to men of our day” (DPF 16). What do these words tell us about the objectives and place of media and communications theology? It seems that the above sentence refers precisely today, in the 21st century, in our mediatised society, to this young sub-discipline of theology.

It is worth noting that both religion and media are phenomena which are universal in scope. Both in the area of culture and media, two spheres come together: *sacrum* and *humanum*. Henryk Seweryniak is right when, speaking about the essence of media theology and its main objectives, he says that its principal goal is not to seek pastoral applications, or pass ethical judgements, but “rather to place the reality of culture and media in the light of the

³⁸ Cf. G. Strzelczyk, *Potrzeba interdyscyplinarności w polskiej teologii. Uwagi metodologiczne* [The need for interdisciplinarity in Polish theology. Methodological remarks], “Teologia w Polsce” [Theology in Poland] 2 (2008), no. 2, pp. 257-265, <http://www.dogmatyka.pl/TwP/index.php?numer=2,2> accessed: 02 Nov. 2015]

³⁹ Cf. The International Theological Commission, *Teologia dzisiaj:*, op. cit., p. 54.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 84 -85.

Divine Logos/Gospel (*sub ratione Dei*); to uncover whatever spiritual elements this reality hides; what answers it provides to the most profound human questions about the truth, good, beauty and meaning”⁴¹. How does this translate into actions? “To put it in practical terms - writes Krzysztof Marcyński - the idea is to solve the current human problems, meaning of life, suffering, death, loneliness, love in the context of the Gospel, using the latest Web 2.0 technologies and devices, and the modern media language”⁴². One cannot, however, as rightly noticed by Joseph Borg and Carl Mario Sultana, treat the media merely as an instrument in this process. The media themselves are not neutral in transmitting the Church’s teachings and contents related to faith; mediatization of the religious message affects its transmission and reception⁴³. The view of media neutrality and precedence of technology over content was also firmly rejected by Pope Benedict XVI in the Encyclical *Caritas in veritate* (no.73) in which he highlighted that “the meaning and purpose of the media must be sought within an anthropological perspective”. There are to have “a civilizing effect”. The mere fact that the media increase the possibilities of interconnection and dissemination of ideas is not sufficient to say that they fulfil their mission. The media will achieve this goal only when they are “inspired by charity and placed at the service of truth, of the good, and of natural and supernatural fraternity”, and when they “are used to promote universal participation in the common search for what is just”⁴⁴. Media are not just information vehicles and intermediaries, but they are also intended to encourage the user to engage in the mystery of the encounter between man and the Absolute⁴⁵.

In this context, it is worth taking a closer look at the objectives set for media theology by Seweryniak. This will involve answering the following questions: “How to assess the reality and richness of mass media in the perspective of God’s gift? How to understand -

⁴¹ H. Seweryniak, *Teologie na progę...*, op.cit., p. 18.

⁴² K. Marcyński, *Media - applied science dla wiary* [Media - applied science for the faith] [in:] *Media w transformacji* [Media in transformation], eds. A. Graczyk, K. Marcyński, M. Przybysz, Warszawa 2013, pp. 17-18.

⁴³ Cf. J. Borg, C.M. Sultana, *Communicating faith through the legacy media. Theological reflections and pastoral implication*, “Kultura-Media-Teologia” [Culture-media-theology] 2015, no. 20, http://kmt.uksw.edu.pl/media/pdf/kmt_2015_20_Borg_Sultana_1.pdf [accessed: 02 Nov. 2015], pp. 11-12.

⁴⁴ Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, The Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, Vatican 2009, no.73 For a broader analysis of the quoted fragment of the Encyclical see A. Adamski, *Media narzędziem humanizacji w świetle nr. 73. encykliki Benedykta XVI ‘Caritas in veritate’* [Media as a civilising tool in the light of no. 73 of Pope Benedict XVI’s Encyclical “Caritas in veritate”] [in:] *Człowiek w medialnym labiryncie* [Man in the media labyrinth], eds. M. Laskowska, K. Guzek, Warszawa 2011, pp. 163-174.

⁴⁵ Cf. K. Parzych-Blakiewicz, *Mass media jako ‘locus theologicus’* [Mass media as “locus theologicus”] [in:] *Media w transformacji* [Media in transformation], eds. A. Graczyk, K. Marcyński, M. Przybysz, Warszawa 2013, p. 388.

within the horizon of transcendence - the key notions in the world of new media, i.e. 'real world' and 'virtual world'? How to illuminate with the Divine light this diverse and complex discipline in which the truth about man is easily lost, but which simultaneously carries so many fascinating interpretations of man and our world? How to prevent discord between the Gospel and the media world? How to effectively use the media for evangelisation and catechisation? How to conduct an in-depth analysis of the sphere of values in network communication? How to use the tool to build the human family and strengthen the community of the Church? How to evaluate such phenomena as democratisation, globalisation, pluralism - an indisputable result of the manifold media activity? How to develop interdisciplinary scientific research in this field at the Catholic institutions of higher education?"⁴⁶.

An important element of media theology research is the reflection on the moral dimension of the activity and influence of the media. It must be preceded with the necessary reminder that, in the light of media theology, information is not a commodity but rather a common social good, and the access to information is one of the basic human rights. Similarly, in the dispute over the vision and axiology of the journalistic profession, media and communications theology firmly advocates that journalism should be recognised as service to the truth and society. Such a view precludes commercial treatment of journalism and reducing it to merely a business activity. According to this approach, media messages are intended to educate and mould the citizens⁴⁷.

Theological and media studies should also explore the digital reality. The reality is subjected to constant reflection, including the Pope's statements concerning the subject (Benedict XVI and his address on the World Communications Day!)⁴⁸ which inspired Antonio Spadaro to describe the Pope as "a theologian of digital communication"⁴⁹. The dynamic development of the Internet and digital media is not without consequence for the religiosity of both an individual person and entire communities. Internet studies can cover such categories and concepts as: religious Internet, Internet religiosity, online religion,

⁴⁶ H. Seweryniak, *Teologie na progę...*, op.cit., p. 17.

⁴⁷ See T. Kononiuk, a statement made in the debate "Media in the service of the society" on 9 January 2007 in the editorial office of "Przegląd Powszechny" [Universal review] <http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/prasa/media-w-sluzbie-spolnoczenstwu/k944k> [accessed: 02 Dec. 2015].

⁴⁸ For more on this subject see B. Bilicka, *Chrześcijański styl obecności na 'cyfrowym kontynencie' w orędziach Benedykta XVI* [Christian way of presence on the "digital continent" in the messages of Benedict XVI], "Forum Teologiczne" [Theological forum] 2015 (XVI), pp 139-151.

⁴⁹ Cf. A. Spadaro, *Benedetto XVI, teologo della comunicazione digitale*, entry on the blog "Cyberteologia.it" posted on 21 Feb. 2013, <http://www.cyberteologia.it/2013/02/benedetto-xvi-teologo-della-comunicazione-digitale/> [accessed: 27 Oct. 2015].

cyberreligion, e-religion, religion 2.0, mediatised religion, etc.⁵⁰ Mention should be made here of the scholarly contribution by Spadaro, including cybertheology which he considers to be “the intelligence of faith in the era of the Net” (in other words: reflection on the comprehensibility of faith in the light of the Internet logic)⁵¹. He points to the continuously growing and widening set of research questions in this field, e.g.: to the issue of online community, the possibility of receiving Sacraments online, issues relating to teaching the Gospel, Internet ethics, or, eventually, the theological challenge of “collective intelligence”.

Research on the relationship between the digital culture and Christian image of the world was undertaken by Katarzyna Sitkowska who points to the need for a dialogue between theology and digital culture and specifies the objectives of theology in the changing world. In her opinion, one of the key theological problems is the question “about the concept of God that is congruent with the modern manner of experiencing reality, and the role of Christ in a world determined by technology”⁵². Other unquestionably interesting research areas include: the relationships between the technological and metaphysical picture of the world, or between the digital culture and daily life practice⁵³. Another major challenge the Church has to face are the notions of time, space and communication which have been changing as a result of the global information infrastructure development⁵⁴.

Conclusion

Clearly, theology and media studies share many common areas of interest in their critical scientific reflection on the media of social communication. They can complement each other in the reflection and have a lot to offer to each other. This dialogue can develop in a fruitful and constructive manner in the field of the new scientific sub-discipline, situated at the

⁵⁰ Cf. Z. Hanas, *Internet religijny a religijność internetowa: eksploracja pola badawczego* [Religious Internet and Internet religiosity: exploring the research field] [in:] *Media w transformacji* [Media in transformation], eds. A. Gralczyk, K. Marcyński, M. Przybysz, Warszawa 2013, pp. 26-27.

⁵¹ Cf. A. Spadaro, *Cyberteologia. Chrześcijaństwo w dobie Internetu* [Cybertheology: Thinking about Christianity in the Era of the Web], translated by M. Masny, Kraków 2013, p. 44. He emphasises that cybertheology “is not (...) a sociological reflection on religiosity on the Web, but rather a fruit of faith which releases from itself a cognitive impulse in an era when the logic of the Net marks the way of thinking, knowing, communicating and living”. Ibidem, p. 46.

⁵² K. Sitkowska, *Współczesne interpretacje rzeczywistości w kontekście rozwoju kultury cyfrowej oraz ich wpływ na chrześcijański obraz świata* [Contemporary interpretations of the reality in the context of development of digital culture and their impact on the Christian world-view], Warszawa 2014, typescript in the library archive of the Faculty of Theology at Kardynał Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, p. 212.

⁵³ Cf. ibidem, pp. 227-260.

⁵⁴ Cf. K. Sitkowska, *Kościół wobec wyzwań nowych technologii* [Church in the face of challenges of new technologies], “Kultura-Media-Teologia” [Culture-Media-Theology] 2010, no. 2, http://kmt.uksw.edu.pl/media/pdf/kmt_2010_2_sitkowska.pdf [accessed: 02 Nov. 2015], pp. 87-98.

meeting point of theology and media studies: theology of the media of social communication (or, as has been suggested by the authors of this paper: media and communications theology). Its methodological assumptions will be presented in a separate paper published in the next issue of “Studia Medioznawcze”.