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CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND PUBLIC AGENDA SETTING: CZECH CATOLIC CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES INTERVIEWS CONTENT ANALYSIS.

Catholic Church in the Czech Republic and Public Agenda Setting: Czech Catholic Church Representatives Interviews Content Analysis[1]

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Abstract:

In the following text, we talk about public agenda setting carried out by the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic. We start by analysing the relationship between the Church and the media and conclude the first part of the study by finding that media took over functions carried out, until present, exclusively by the Church. We then focus on the media and Church ability to set public agenda. In case of media, this function is extensively documented in contemporary literature. In case of Church, this field remains uninvestigated.
In the second part of the text, we introduce agenda-setting theoretical concepts and terms which we intend to apply to the case of the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic. We have chosen to use for our empirical analysis the method of semi-structured interviews. We collected four semi-structured interviews with informants from different
strata of the Church structure. We have focused our attention to the description of strategies that Czech Catholic Church uses to set public agenda. We conclude our text by describing three particular strategies that we have called: (1) *media strategy* because the Czech Catholic Church intends to set public agenda through the media agenda, (2) *vertical strategy* because the Czech Catholic Church intends to set policy agenda through laics active in the top of political hierarchy and (3) *horizontal strategy* because the Czech Catholic Church intends to set public agenda through interpersonal communication between laics and mass public.

Introduction

In this text, we attempt to find and analyse behaviour strategies the Czech Catholic Church chooses to set public agenda in the media. The article outlines a part of an ongoing research, the aim of which is to explore to what extent the Czech Catholic Church influences the public agenda. The research relates also to the theme of agenda "flow" through the media and to Church communities themselves.

We have chosen to address the above mentioned topic because we believe that interactions among religion, media and culture in the broadest sense of the term represent today an increasingly important element influencing the dynamics of the society. And we have decided to focus our research on the Catholic Church because it represents the most important religious institution in the Czech Republic. The study is furthermore based on the

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hypothesis that religions have been made a part of the consumer market, which is increasingly tied to the realm of media. We believe it would be inspiring to turn, within the Czech sociology, attention to relations between mass media and, in this particular case, the Catholic Church.

Theoretical Background

In nineteen eighties, Stewart Hoover published his pioneering study on religious communication and on the way religion influences the course of events via mass media. In addressing this issue, he treated a new phenomenon that was, at the time, considered to a large extent as "marginal". Today, the influence of mass media is so strong that no religion may afford to ignore it. The primacy of control over the problems of society the Church had developed and exercised for centuries has fallen apart as a result of activities carried out by the mass media. The Church is no longer the only institution able to define when, how and under what conditions a theme is up-to-date and interesting enough to make the public opinion address it [comp. Sumiala-Seppänen – Lundby – Salokangas 2006].

The Church made the first significant effort to respond to the situation as soon as during the Second Vatican Council. The Council took an explicit stand on the situation and expressed it in the *Decree on the Media of Social Communications* [*Inter mirifica* – 2002: 515–525].[3] In relation to this Decree released by the Second Vatican Council, the so called pastoral instructions were created, the aim of which it is to define, in a more detailed way, the relationship between the Church and the media, their primary aim being to put into practice postulated principles and guidelines.[4]

The "*Communio et progressio*" [1971] and "*Aetatis novae*" [1992] pastoral instructions represent key documents defining the foundations of the stand the Church takes in relation to the media. The principal difference between the two lies in the fact that the "*Communio et progresio*" instruction does not consider the influence exercised by the media

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[3] The basis on which the *Inter mirifika* (IM) decree shapes the Church attitude toward media is ambivalent from the very beginning. The Decree acknowledges the importance of media under the condition they target relevant groups and are used properly. At the same time, it observes that media can harm the human society and are able to do so relatively often [IM art. 2, 2002: 515]. This is why church is summoned to include mass media in its agenda (which is considered as its natural right). The church requests that the media respect the rules a moral order which it considers as objective[IM, art. 6, ibid: 518].

[4] Pastoral instructions demand a deeper reflexion of the relationship between the church and the media be made. This requirement has been formulated as a result of the fact that the *Inter Mirifica* decree treats the issue in quite a rigid way, considering the role church plays during the shaping of the world as exclusive. This fact has been brought into attention by church representatives themselves, soon after the Decree was signed by Paul VI. See, for example, Karel Rahner and his introductory note to the *Inter mirifika* Decree, included in the Czech translation of documentation on the Second Vatican Council [IM 2002: 511-512].

and their power as significantly substantial and, therefore, the status of the Church as threatened, meanwhile the "*Aetatis novae*" document considers the power hold by the media as overwhelming and further reflects the situation by saying that, as a result of activities carried out by the media, the Church has been fragmented into a global (media) Diaspora "mass-media at times exacerbate individual and social problems which stand in the way of [...] the integral development of the human person" [*Aetatis novae* 1992][5] and that it is not able to hold this development back.[6] As a result of this conviction, the authors of the Instruction redefine the basic outlines of intended relationship between the Church and the media. The document maintains the requirement of mutual respect between the Church and secular media (mainly with respect to the development of media policies). The most noticeable transformation of the perception of the situation, however, concerns the Church environment itself. In order to hold a dialogue with the modern world, the Church has to make an effort, according to "*Aetatis novae*", "to understand the media - their purposes [...],internal structures and modalities, forms and genres" [*Aetatis novae* 1992][7] and, at the same time to "offer support and encouragement to those involved in media work".[8]

Despite the fact that the Church has been striving to update its attitude toward public media, its interaction with them remains complicated. The Church continues to express, both in implicit and explicit way, its criticism concerning the media revolution[9]: individuals have been released from the influence of Church institutions or opposed to them [Große Kracht 1997]. It is not only the new global media age with its easiness to overcome both space and time distances that have challenged the position of the Church. Space traditionally occupied by the Church is also disturbed by other competing religious subjects who trespass it without giving the Church any chance to resist [Esterbauer 1998: 115–143]. It is turning out that the media assume, to a larger and larger extent, the functions carried out and claimed, until present, by religion or Church, such as omnipresence, indispensability, "omniscience", setting norms of behaviour, defining sanctions or structuring the everyday life [Günter 1998]. As a

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[5] http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_22021992_aetatis_en. html#SolidarSvilup [2nd semptember 2009]

[6] „Secularism, consumerism, materialism, dehumanisation, and lack of concern for the plight of the poor" are considered as main causes holding back integral human development. [Aetatis novae 1992: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_22021992_aetatis_en.h tml#SolidarSvilup [2nd semptember 2009]

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] McLuhan talks about the end or dissolution of the „Gutenberg Galaxy", which is characterised by linear intelligence of literary culture [McLuhann 1962: 253-264], and which is being replaced, step by step, by a new type of media tending to a configurative type of thinking [Bolz 1993: 422. quoted according to Vowe 2002: 193].

result of this development, the original "Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus" slogan is being transformed into "Extra Media nulla salus".

Agenda Setting[10] *–Terms*

The Agenda Setting Theory had been first introduced and developed within two distinct research traditions, independent of each other: mass communication research and political processes analysis. The mass communication research tradition emphasises mainly the aspect of shaping of public agenda as a result of media agenda. The political processes analysis tradition, on the other hand, concentrates on the study of the way political agenda is created.[11] "Issue" is the key term we have to introduce in order to explain how agenda setting works and what is the subject matter of agenda setting research. Cobb and Elder define an issue as a "conflict between two or more identifiable groups over procedural or substantive matters relating to the distribution of positions or resources" [1983: 32 quoted according to Dearing – Rogers 1996: 2].

Some research papers conceive an issue as a problem the public (or its members) are concerned by. It is, however, necessary to point out that not all *problems* become *issues*. An issue is created at the moment a problem is identified as public and its solution required. AT the end, all issues are controversies even though there might an opponent refusing to accept them may seemingly be absent. Three levels of controversy may be discerned: 1) whether the issue exists at all 2) whether it ought to be solved and 3) how it should be solved.

Besides, issues may be classified either as *conflicting* or *valence* [Dearing – Rogers 1996: 2–3]. In the case of conflicting issues, there is often a controversy about their very existence and about them deserving to be solved at all. On the other hand, existence or the need to find a solution of a valence issue is never challenged: the controversy, in this case, is solely about the way to solve it, or, eventually, about the amount of resources that ought to be

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[10] Public agenda is a term used as in frame of the agenda-setting theory. This theory defines three basic agenda types: *media, public and policy agenda.* For a detailed description of the three agenda types and their mutual relations see [Dearing – Rogers 1996: 5–6]. Abroad, all three agenda types have been subject to systematic research activities. A great attention has also been given to the way they influence each other. It is possible to distinguish between two scientific traditions: one treats issues related to political agenda shaping, the other public agenda setting [Rogers, Dearing, Bregman 1993: 76]. Within the context of Czech science, the agenda setting issues had not been addressed before 2000 [see, for example, Trampota 2006; Kalvas–Kreidl 2007; Trampota, Nečas 2007; Škodová 2007].

[11] Rogers, Dearing a Bregman [1993: 72)] point out that these traditions are based on different paradigms and related texts. The political process analysis is based on a book by Elmer E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People*. This author reasons that issue formulation represent an elemental instrument of power [Schattschneider 1960: 68]. Mass communication research (research of media impact), on the other hand, refers often to a book by Bernard Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy*, and to one of its ideas concerning the creation of public opinion: media do not necessarily have a capacity to form public opinion but they can succesfully bring up issues that the public will form its opinion about. [Cohen 1960: 13].

reserved to solve it.[12] It has been proven that valence issues have a greater capacity to (quickly) enter the media as well as public and policy agenda.[13] Other typologies exist, of course, see for example papers by Glick and Hutchison [Glick – Hutchinson 1999: 751].

The term *issue* defined and its typologies described, let's move along to the term *agenda*. There is an accord concerning its basic definition, on the basis of to which *agenda* is "a set of issues that are communicated in a hierarchy of importance at a point of time"[Dearing – Rogers 1996: 2]. Media agenda is conceived as problems organised according to their media coverage. Public agenda is then conceived as problems arranged according to the number of members of the public who consider it as important. And, finally, policy agenda is conceived as a set of currently handled political controversies.

The fact that public can't be considered as a homogenous group reflecting a specific problem and incorporating it into its agenda represents an important aspect of the agenda setting research. It has turned out it is possible to divide public into four categories interacting in various ways: *identification group* (people, very small in number, who raise the initial grievance and who try to convert the problem into an issue while receiving support form other members of public, *attentive public* (consist of approximately 10-15% of public who follow current events, are conversant with most of the issues appearing in the media and often have strong views on them[14], *attention groups* (that part of the public concentrating exclusively on particular issues but lacking knowledge about or interest in other ones and *mass public* (involved in issues very rarely and if, only for a short period of time. The probability this group becomes involved raises significantly in case of a dramatic event or scandal) [Cobb – Elder 1983: 104–108]. The typology Cobb and Elder introduced represents a functional and potent tool to analyse the topics and is able to help us better understand the way public agenda is set. Moreover, it helps us to see the significance of parameters occurring during the first phase, i.e. issue identification.

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[12] For the Czech Republic, the following example may be given: „To whom the Cathedral belongs" is a question that can serve as example of a *conflicting* issue. Church restitutions, on the other hand, represent a *valence issue*. It has turned out that a consensus concerning Church restitutions has been reached (they are neccessary) but a controversy remains concerning the designation of politicians who are to put the solution into practice or concerning the way and scope of financial compensations to Churches.

[13] Compare for example [Nelson 1991: 162].

[14] This part of public plays a key role in the process of issue introduction. Its characteristics resemble markedly Paul Lazarsfeld's model of opinion leaders, without the presumption, however, that this group represent an exclusive mediator of political information and issues between the media and the rest of public.

Methodology

We have based this paper on a qualitative empirical study carried out from January to June 2009, during which we had interviewed 4 Czech Catholic Church representatives. We have chosen our informants on the basis of the below described typology that we created in order to cover four distinct spheres (one informant per sphere). We have based our definition of " ideal informant type"on the following criteria: intensity of media's interest in the particular Church representative and the influence that he exercises both outward and inward the Catholic Church. We then defined four informant types and contacted accordingly relevant informants with whom we lead semi-structured interviews.[15]

We have chosen our informants according to the following criteria: (a) informant from the ranks of the highest Church hierarchy, and, at the same time, a personality well known by the media, often addressed by them to give his opinion, (b) informant from the ranks of the highest Church hierarchy but only rarely addressed by and appearing in the media, (c) informant from the lower or lowest ranks of the Church hierarchy who is, however, very well known by the media and often addressed by them to give his opinion, (d) informant from the middle/higher ranks of the Church hierarchy who is not sought by the mass media but who is potentially able to significantly influence a large group of (not only) religious people in their decision making.

We have focused our research centred around the "agenda-setting" concept on the way actors (Catholic Church in this particular case) themselves detect social problem(s) they could (should) bring to public attention. But before we start even considering whether the media let themes considered as social problem by the Church enter into their range of vision, we pose this question: does the Church try to identify potential social problems neglected, for some reason, by the public? If the answer is "yes", we continue asking: what way does the Church choose to draw the public's (as well as religious people's) attention to these problems and, eventually, what form does it choose to do so?

We have concentrated "only" on problems that the Church considers as important and that are endowed with the potential to become public issues. We would however like to mention another set of interesting questions that we have, this time, deliberately chosen to abandon. What mechanisms should the Church master in order to fulfil, in an adequate way, its mission, i.e. evangelization in post-industrial alias media society, which is daily choked up

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[15] Since we have not yet concluded our research we have decided to maintain our informants'anonymity. All information and quotes come from data we have collected while conducting the interviews and are recorded in interview transcripts.

by gigabytes of information? Is Church a successful establisher and defender of media zones it has acquired and which have remained its exclusive realm in which religious people can feel safe? Does the Church consider using the power of media according to the concept of "electronic churches"in the USA? Neither we address another question relevant for the Church itself, i.e. whether and how originate the creation of "sympathising" media that would participate in agenda setting and presenting of opinions on normative concepts related to a particular theological teaching?

We have conducted, with each informant separately, a semi-structured interview based on the following questions: (1) Can you see a social problem that the Church could (should) bring to public attention? (2) Do you think the Church has been trying to identify potential social problems that have been, until now, neglected by the public? If yes, what is the way it does so? (3) Has the Church been trying to bring public attention to these problems? If yes, what form, strategies and means does it choose to do so? (4) Has the Church been trying to draw the religious people's attention to these problems? If yes, what form, strategies and means does it select to do so? (5) Emancipation of the secular sphere from under the control of religious institutions and norms represents one of the key features of modern times. As a result of this, the Church no longer represents THE institution with a strong coercive potential and is rather becoming a community of religious people joining of their own free will. What do you thing about this? What conclusion do you draw from this with respect to activities carried out by the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic? (6) What do you think about activities the Church exercises within the civic society?

The last comment on methodology concerns our informants again. Informant No.1 represents the highest ranks of the Church hierarchy, i.e. he is a member of the Czech Bishops' Conference. We can definitely not say that this person is often invited by non religious media to comment on current affairs. We have conducted a semi-structured interview with him and used the interview transcription to carry out our analysis – see below.

Informant No. 2 represents another particular segment of the Catholic Church: he appears in the media quite often, actively commenting on current affairs but is not a member of neither highest nor middle ranks of the Church hierarchy. This means he is definitely not been granted a status of an official "spokesperson" of the Catholic Church. In frame of the Church hierarchy, he ranks among lower clergy. He very often appears in the media, commenting on current affairs (religious, ethical and social) from the Church's perspective. He is one of the most popular unofficial Church representatives and works also in academic

environment. We have sent him a questionnaire containing six questions listed above and received his written response via e-mail.

Informant No.3 represents a cross-section of the two parts of the Church hierarchy we mentioned while describing informants No.1 and 2. He works in academic environment and, at the same time, ranks among the higher spheres of the Church hierarchy. He has been actively involved in creation of pastoral strategies, which means besides others that he has been indirectly co creating religious people's attitudes. When it comes to his public exposure, we can say that he comments on current affairs to a rather moderate extent and if he does so, it is within the Church related media (e.g. Katolický týdeník, Perspektivy[16], etc.) only.

Informant No.4 is, like informant No.1, a member of the Czech Bishops' Conference. Besides, he is considered by the media as one of the most popular Catholic Church representatives. He could be seen as a merging personality, sought-after by the media and eminent member of Church establishment.

Analysis

Problems Our Informants Mentioned as Important

The space reserved to us taken into consideration we have concluded that it is not possible to present in this paper the comprehensive version of analysis of themes mentioned by individual informants. A part of such analysis, however, was published in the Czech language [Váně, Kalvas 2009]. The authors will be pleased to provide it to anyone who would be interested.

Let us then present our results in a condensed form. All four informants have settled on one theme: *human dignity*. Informant No.1 mentions it explicitly, emphasizes its importance and elaborates on its components (*abortions, euthanasia, prostitution, right to life, worthy late and final stages of life).* The other informants (No.2, 3 and 4) do not mention the problem of human dignity in an explicit way but cite such kind of problems that can be put under the same tag: *medical research ethics, solidarity with socially handicapped, media ethics* (informant No.2), *exploitation of foreign workers* (informant No.3)*, patient-physician relationship, observing Sundays, work conditions in supermarkets, gambling, household debts and human rights* (all informant No.4). According to what informant No.1 and informant No.4 said, it is clear that the problem of *human dignity* does not represent their personal standpoint only: they have often and into great detail referred to relevant Church documents

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[16] Catholic Weekly, Perspectives

and it was evident that their attitude with respect to these problems coincides with the Church official position.

The second problem informants (No. 1 and 2) commonly defined was *family*. The way they conceive the problem of *family* is closely related to the problem of *human dignity*. It would be possible to classify both of them under a common category *defence of marginalized groups*. Informants further cited other problems such as *ecumenical dialogue, generation gap* (informant No.2), *university reform* (informant No.3), *unemployment and schooling fees* i No.4) without, however, concurring on them.

Issue Identification and Formulation

Having analyzed material we gathered, we have found that the Czech Catholic Church has not developed a veritable strategy which would allow it to identify current issues. It has, however, formulated problems the solution of which it has strived to enforce and which it has pointed out. That's why we have decided to call those problems that have been on the Church agenda for a long time *long term agenda*. We have also found that the Czech Catholic Church has not developed tools enabling it to systematically update its agenda, enriching it by new problems. A question also remains what circumstances open the *windows of opportunity*[17] [Kingdon 1984], i.e. moments during which new problems break into the Church agenda. Let us now look closer at this problem, using information provided by our informants.

Informant No.1 is silent when it comes up to tools Church has to identify and formulate issues. Only informant No.3 directly addresses the theme of long term agenda formulation:

"On the global level, a number of issues are identified in texts elaborating social teachings of the Church. (see the Compendium[18]*). On the local level, it is the* Pokoj a Dobro *document[19]. "*

(Informant No. 3)

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[17] *Window of oportunity* refers to situations when changes are happenning of the way a particular problem is perceived. The *Window of opportunity,* however, opens only for a limited and short amount of time and under the following conditions: „(a)when a problem (b) converges with a solution in search of a problem (c) in a favourable political climate" (Kingdon 1984 – quoted according to Dearing, Rogers 1996: 74). The probability is very low that an issue reaches the implementation phases out of the „window of opportunity" moment. The window of opportunity may be opened for example during a political administration change, an extremely strong public opinion or exceptional events.

[18] „*Compendium*" stands for *Kompendium sociální nauky církve* (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church)* [2007]. The handbook comprises of an extensive number of texts relating not only to social encyclicals. It is, in fact, a comprehensive compilation of the catholic social teaching. It outlines catholic Church's attitudes toward the most important social domains, such as family, work, economic and political life of a society, international relations, environmnental protection, promotion of peace and role of the Church within the society.

[19] „Peace and Good". It is a letter related to social problems, issued by the Czech Bishop's Conference in 2000. The document tries to describe and tackle social problems in the Czech Republic. See http://tisk.cirkev.cz/dokumenty/pokoj-a-dobro.html. [2nd semptember 2009]

Two problems informants often cited are related to the above mentioned *Pokoj a Dobro* document: *human dignity and family.* A special chapter is reserved to family in the document. The problem of human dignity is then mentioned in its frame mainly in relation to economic transformation, critique of exclusive reliance on the market and critique of consumer society. Both problems are reflected, in a similar way, in the *Compendium*. Both of them are also treated in separate chapters of the immensely important document published by the Second Vatican Council, the *Gaudium et spes* constitution.

It has been turning out that our informants do reflect the existence of a long term Church agenda and that they spontaneously mention problems falling under it. Each informant has, by citing at least one problem, touched upon the long term Church agenda, informant No.1 even cited exclusively problems that are a part of it. The question remains how this long term Church agenda (expressed by the *Pokoj a dobro* letter) is set. Material we have gathered and analyzed does not say anything about the way the epistle was formulated and why particular problems have been incorporated into it.

The Czech Catholic Church has not yet been able to develop a well worked out mechanism enabling to systematically identify current problems. One of the highest authorities entitled to formulate Church agenda is the Czech Bishops'Conference (CBC). But material we have gathered does not show any evidence that such mechanism exist on the level of the Conference. We have asked informant No.4 what is the regular way the CBC formulates its statements. He says:

"Well, either someone says, on the bishop's conference that it'd be good to issue a statement so people give their opinions on the thing directly on the conference or the author sends it and whoever has comments (...) writes them down. (...) I prefer bishops to comment on affairs in their own dioceses. "
(Informant No.4)

As we can see, the way the CBC formulates current problems is quite random and its character corresponds rather to ad hoc reactions to situations. This means that current issues are usually set outside the influence of the Catholic Church. The fact that it is difficult to set current issues on a national level is a consequence of the Church organisation: bishops, being responsible for their individual dioceses, focus their attention primarily to their sphere of influence (dioceses). Statements representing attitudes of the CBC as a whole, (i.e. issue formulation) are formulated rather as the above mentioned ad hoc reactions or as repeated setting of issues listed on the long term agenda. Formulation of current problems is,

therefore, significantly influenced by individuals outside the highest ranks of the Church hierarchy. See the following quotations:

"As for activities carried out by individual Christians, I'd like to give the following examples of our educational process: some texts written by Jiri Zajic[20] and mainly the well known speech by prof. Petr Piťha[21] in Hradec Kralove. (…) Another interesting phenomenon, from this perspective, it the Christian Academy - not only because of Tomas Halik[22]. The Academy, on one hand, produces Christian ideas but it does not have a form of a Church. And it seems to be important not to have a form of Church if one wants to be accepted today. "
(Informant No.3)

"My experience [experience I have made with the Church's effort to identify potential social problems]*: Regular evening discussions (the so called "laboratories of dialogue" organised on the grounds of the Czech Christian Academy (CCA). During these evenings that had started several years ago, top experts in particular fields are discussing with the Church representatives (often Cardinal Vlk, often heads of other, non-catholic Churches, Jesuits' provincial, etc.) and theologists about important problems touching the entire society."*
(Informant No.2)

Who is important are individuals who have decided to publish a text concerning a particular problem (see Jiri Zajic, above) or deliver a speech (see Petr Pitha, above). It might be possible to see, behind the evening discussions and colloquiums organised by the CCA, a possible influence of a broader group of people, but let's analyze the situation more thoroughly.

An evening discussion is usually introduced by a colloquium presented by an invited guest. The following discussion is then led on the theme and content of the colloquium. Opinions expressed during the evening vary, of course, according to the spectrum of discussants (be them invited scholars, Church representatives, theologists or members of audience). The problem itself, though, brought to attention on the occasion of a special evening, does not come under control of the discussants: it is introduced by the colloquium (i.e. by the person delivering the speech). The speaker, then, is selected by a local CCA organisation (it is the CCA or a team of a few who are responsible for the selection).

We have described the functioning of the CCA discussion evenings in quite a detailed way in order to point out three facts: (1) CCA is an independent organisation, it does not rely on the Czech Catholic Church, neither is it its think-tank. It has not been created with this purpose neither has it actively been used so. (2) By explaining the way CCA and its discussion evenings function, we would like to prove that the problem postulated during a concrete discussion evening is brought to the public attention as a result of a few individual choices that, in no way, depend on the Czech Catholic Church. To illustrate this, let us give

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[20] Jiri Zajic, a Czech catholic educationalist and publicist, member of the Czech Television Council between 1992-2000.
[21] Petr Pitha, a catholic priest, university professor and ex minister of education of the Czech Republic (1992-1994).
[22] Tomas Halik is a catholic priest, univeristy professor and president of the CCA.

the following example: no document exists that would bind the CCA to elaborate the long-term Church agenda during the discussion evenings. (3) We'd like to show that a problem brought to attention to be discussed during a CCA discussion evening is usually identified as a result of an individual choice, not as a result of application of a systematic mechanism that would be under the Czech Catholic Church control.

We conclude that if the formulation of problems itself is not systematic, their adoption into the Church agenda is necessarily random as well. In the empirical material we gathered, we have found no mentions about how and whether at all the Church processes these random impulsions. It is possible that under certain conditions, that we have not yet been able to define, *windows of opportunity* open, through which new problems have a chance to break into the Church agenda. Material we have gathered lets us identify the type of problems that have a chance to break through and update the Church agenda. As an example, we can cite problems encountered by marginalized groups of population. The Gospel is/should be/will be/ought to be (all these variants were used in the interviews) an inspiration helping to formulate agenda.

"And this is what I say: we need to pay attention to this, who but us should do it, (...) we should become those the voice of whom no one hears, we should become guardians of those who have no other protection."
(Informant No.1)

"Whatever comes from the Gospel, whatever is acceptable for the media, we should definitely introduce. Of course, we have to introduce things that are not acceptable as well but we have to be aware that they will not be accepted at all or in a somehow modified way and that's where we have to ask ourselves: is it worth the price or not?"
 (Informant No.3)

The only sound conclusion we can make concerning the way Church agenda is updated is the one that, very probably, updates will be related to marginalized groups. This theme will probably become a key that will open the *window of opportunity* letting a problem break into the Church agenda. It is very probable that other keys exist that are able to open the windows of opportunity. But we have, in gathered material, no evidence of them.

In any case, the following relevant question ought to be asked: what is the way the already mentioned *long term agenda* is formulated? It has been turning out that in this respect, the following documents are considered as primarily important by the Czech Catholic Church: The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church,* the *Pokoj a Dobro* letter and documents issued by the Second Vatican Council. It is very probable that other documents play an important role in forming of long term Church agenda but our informants have not

mentioned them. The long term Church agenda formulation mechanism will yet have to be explored by another research.

Channels Used to Spread Issues

Before addressing individual agenda setting strategies we'd like to elaborate a bit on information channels mentioned by our informants. Let us see their list, divided into two groups: *Church* and *non-Church related* channels, the Church channels being the ones controlled by the Czech Catholic Church.

Informants list these Church related channels: sermons, Church media (*Proglas* radio, *Noe* TV, *Katolicky tydenik*, *Perspektivy* and *Universum* magazines, Czech Bishop's Conference internet pages as well as web pages administered by individual dioceses and pastoral letters. An interesting point we would like to bring to our readers' attention concerns pastoral letters. Informant No.2, on one hand, mentions pastoral letters as one of basic channels enabling the flow of issues but "*is critical when it comes to such practice*".

Under the term non-Church related channels we classify those ones that are not controlled by the Czech Catholic Church. According to material we have gathered, the following ones are considered as worth mentioning: blogs written by influential Catholic personalities, municipal papers, regional papers and the Czech Christian Academy (CCA), carrying out its activities across the country and providing space for regular discussion evenings, the so called laboratories of dialogue.

Well Informed Laity

Another element playing an important role in the agenda setting process has to be mentioned next to the above mentioned channels: well informed laity. All our informants mention this player (the fact that when asked to give their precise characteristic, they vary slightly, is of a minor importance). Our informants have, in principle, agreed certain diversification of tasks (informant No.3 talks about the "division of labour") is necessary.

Agenda is set by Church representatives as well as by well informed laity. But it is mainly the well informed laity who is assigned the task to be active in the public space and participate in the process of agenda (issue) setting. Laics should become active co-creators of media and public agenda and they should be granted assistance in order to be able to do so. According to informant No.1, laics should be "*educated by [catholic] movements and communities*." Informant No.3, on the other hand, feels sceptical about this kind of activities carried out by catholic movements and communities and about the way the movements are

able to target their activities. He believes that, when it comes to preparation of public agenda, it is contra productive or even impossible for the movements and communities to reach this particular goal. He believes that it is only possible to grant support and create good conditions for suitable candidates. This standpoint, expressed by informant No. 3, is, with no doubt, based on a different way of understanding who a well informed laic is.

All our informants emphasise the importance of well informed laity: they are well aware of the fact the Church, as an institution, has only limited possibilities to carry out activities within the public space. That is why they are persuaded individual members of the religious community are the ones able to influence public space in a lot more efficient and useful way. Our informants consider these people as an embodiment of a somehow universal medium able to influence things in many various situations and in various places. They probably influence also more important processes than agenda setting (which is the theme of this text).

If asked to define what well informed laity is, we could give the following definition: well informed laity is an interest group of people who are able to sensitively detect problems brought up by the Czech Bishop's Conference, able to embrace them and help proliferate them. These people may be active in politics (usually as members of the KDU-CSL) and introduce the Church themes directly into the political agenda (informant No.1). Or they may be journalists in various types of media, or, eventually, people invited by the media to express publicly their opinion. In both cases, they influence the form of the media agenda and issue framing (informant No.4). They may, further, influence their close social environment during everyday interactions (informant No.3), during discussions (informant No.2) and by participating in local cultural life (informant No.4).

Agenda Setting Strategies
Let us now describe several agenda setting strategies that have shaped up during the interviews with our informants. Informed laity plays an important role (both implicitly and explicitly) in all of them. The well informed laity strategy complements in a natural way all other Church agenda setting strategies within both the public opinion and political agenda.

Having analyzed the data we gathered, we have been able to identify three basic strategies ("media strategy", "horizontal strategy" and "vertical strategy"), some of which it is possible to diversify further. The media strategy, then, comprises of two important elements: (a) the "direct entry" strategy and the (b) "attractive personality" strategy.

When we looked closer at answers our respondents gave us we found out that, when it comes to agenda setting strategies, they agree on a single point: a need of effort to bring up a particular theme into the media agenda from where it would be transferred into the public agenda. At the same time, they are aware of the fact that this strategy is not very efficient when carried out by the Catholic Church. Despite this fact, they hope utilisation of internet, seen as a free and independent medium, could be much of a help.

"Yes, there is an effort to call public's attention to certain themes (see activities carried out by the Czech Bishop's Conference press centre as information provider). But the efficiency of this effort is small and depends on the media willingness to accept and use the provided information (...) but I can see a vast space of freedom, in which we can target some population strata only, that's true, but if it does, it is very efficient: and it is the internet. There is no selection [of themes] according to editors' wishing. In the media, they proceed, to certain extent, the same way everywhere, they use universal selection criteria. I do not see the internet as a panacea but still: it is something able to reach huge public and, in many respects, there is more hope to succeed via this medium than via all these printed media. Of course, one can not find out if he is not trying to convince the already convinced when he uses internet but let me rephrase: it would be a severe mistake to absent from this medium."
(Informant No.3)

Informant No. 1 says about the process of setting public agenda via media agenda:

"When it comes to media, we all know that, simply, media pick themes in a selective way (...) they pick the ones they are momentarily interested in, we will hardly break through. Yes, we do have our own media – Catholic Weekly *or* Proglas *radio or* Noe *TV but these are listened to or watched by those who are interested only."*
(Informant No.1)

Informant No.2 details another, apparently more efficient way to break through (we have called this the "attractive personality strategy". He refers to concrete catholic intellectuals who *"publish in non church related press and speak in the media."* He further mentions cases in which the media accost, of their own initiative, concrete Church representatives, seeking to know their attitudes concerning a current issue. This is where informant No.1 concurs informant No.4: the later equally emphasizes the role played by personalities attractive for the media. Such people have the chance to both influence the framing of current agenda and set the new one. The Church ought to support these personalities because they are the ones representing it, in an efficient way, within the public sphere.

"I think that, until now, things have worked via personalities, well, you can see it in other domains as well, (...), church will have to do the same thing, it will have to support these people by creating a good background for them (...) and then, let these personalities communicate what mission the Church has and what, possibly, a segment of religious people have in mind without being able to express it properly."
(Informant No.4)

Personal example is another tool used within this strategy: it can incite the public to follow it. By this, the particular issue becomes, with no doubt, stronger within the public sphere.

"Yes, it is my own initiative. (…) but when someone steps forward, I read it this way: maybe Inspire other ones and they will carry on and that's what I see as something that is feasible."
(Informant No.4)

This strategy is a bit fatalistic since the church plays, within it, only a service role: it can only search for and support suitable personalities. Our informants considered as unconceivable that the Church produces, via a well defined mechanism, such personalities. Informant No.3 expresses his doubt explicitly when he answers the following question we have asked him: is there a mechanism that would make it possible to train/produce large number of such personalities?

"No, this is not my style (…) you have to take into consideration that different people have different blessings (…) Christianity counts with different kinds of blessings, it's its very basic characteristic, it cannot educate people to one style of influence."
(Informant No. 3)

The "attractive personality strategy" is a way to mediate and transfer important issues from the Church into the media agenda. Media decide to contact a personality under the condition that he/she is attractive and original enough and that he/she is able to express his/her own, well comprehensible opinion instead of quoting documents issued by the Church. This originality, however, causes a certain tension between the Church as institution and the personality, mainly in cases when this personality represents higher ranks of the Church hierarchy. This tension may be reduced efficiently if the personality carefully separates his/her personal opinion from official standpoint without however calling them into question. Another tool may be used by the personality to maintain his/her position within the Church community. It is a careful check of what has been said. The checking may be carried out on a couple of levels: (a) systematic authorization of interviews, (b) refusal to be confronted with the Church official representatives, (c) refusal to comment on particular topics. Shall a personality maintain his/her media attractiveness despite him/her exercising such control, he/she needs to try to comply with their wishes as well. The above mentioned taken into consideration, we can sum up that *originality* and *willingness to comply with the media's wishes* makes a personality attractive for the media, meanwhile a careful and sensitive *differentiation* of one's opinion from the official standpoints and *checking* of the way provided information is presented protects the personality in Church environment.

"One has to show that he is able to think, there is a tension, I admit, because, on the other hand, one has to regard the people within [the Church] who decide whether I went too far or not. What I always try to do is to talk for myself, not for the Institution, even though I am its member. But this does not mean at all that I want to dissociate from it. (...) I just do not want to answer by saying, well, now, let me quote this document, and by describing the Church teaching. I respect the teaching but I do not consider it as appropriate to hide myself, from the very beginning, behind the teaching. (...) And I have been trying to have a good personal relationship with journalists, (...) And again I say I do not preach at them even though their questions are, time to time, evidently not well thought about or naive or it has already been said so many times. Secondly, I have to say, that there are themes that I do not talk about. I do not talk about financial compensations, I do not talk about the Cathedral because I have the impression that there are other voices that have already pronounced their opinion about it (...) sometimes they [journalists] were trying to confront me with someone else but I do not accept this because it is contra productive and I think that things should be tackled inside the organisation. (...) And about the authorization, I have to say that what happens sometimes is that I precise an expression but I do not do it the way of taking things out or saying, well, this is not what I want."
(Informant No.4)

Despite of the application of the *"willingness to comply with the media's wishes, separation and control"* approach applied while carrying out the "attractive personality" strategy informants have also cited examples of negative experience they have made with the media. As a result of this, media strategy is perceived with cautiousness and with the awareness that it has to be supplemented by another strategy relying on the laity. In frame of this strategy, informed laics help to form the public "from below". We have called this strategy as a "horizontal one" because, in this case, it the laics who are assigned the task to influence their "equals".

"Talk about this with religious laics and this way, in fact, push the theme forward to the society. We have to make the theme grow within the society."
(Informant No.1)

Informant No.3 does not explicitly mention any strategy he "prefers" but he says it is necessary to change the way the Church perceives itself in relation to the public. The group of religious people have been, in the Czech Republic, a minority for a long time. This fact taken into consideration, two positions have shaped up, which influence the way Church approaches agenda setting strategies.

"There are stereotypes in thinking that can live on for a long time or they might come back with the future generations. It is necessary to bring this fact up within the Church and explain what are the consequences. I think there is a problem because we do not understand things clearly. (...) in our country, I think there are two major problems: the way Christians (Church) learn to or succeed in understanding that they are no more the "socially excluded", which was the case during the totalitarian regime, or, on the other hand, the position of "socially privileged" – (Austro-Hungarian Empire), and live within a civil society, in which the Church is "only" one of a number of institutions, but still an original one, which does not lose its identity."

Informant No.3 tries so to recommend deeper integration into the civic society, which would enable the Church to be more effective while applying the *horizontal* public agenda setting approach.

When informants talk about strategies, their conception of *horizontal* strategy blends together with the one of *vertical* strategy. Informant No.1 combines the two while thinking about well informed laics-politicians who would be able to define problems within politics: i.e. they would influence the public from "above". Informant No.3, however, expresses his doubts about the vertical strategy. He argues with the idea that a strategy should exist that would target a concrete group of individuals, who would, consequently, set public agenda.

"I think that it is not possible to import a theme into a movement or group of people with well defined interests. The idea that a bishop assigns tasks to a group of people and keeps doing it, this will never work I think."
(Informant No.3)

Our informants often repeated the idea of political parties acting as mediators and propagators of themes formulated by the Church. Informant No.1, though, reflected a difficulty encountered in case only one political party is relied on. He says:

" Politics always bias things in a way and then some accept it and the others not. Because [politicians] see it and ask themselves what is behind it, we have to undermine this, knock down the chair from under them because their preferences could climb too high and that would be bad. So that's where people do not think in terms of what matters, they think in terms of a politicum."
(Informant No.1)

This is why the well informed laity strategy active within more political parties have been mentioned. But the realization of this strategy is more wishful thinking than something that is carried out in a systematic way. Informant No.1 believes that application of such plan would enable the Church themes become more a part of politics then before because they would vibrate through religious laics in several political parties.

Our informants have shown reluctance when asked what they think about such strategy in frame of which priests themselves would become a part of the political establishment and have the chance so to directly participate in the setting of agenda. Informants No. 1 and 3 favour and absolute political "impartiality" of priests. Informant No.2 shares this opinion, but, at the same time, he says:

"Priests should shun party related politics but I can picture a couple of educated theologists sittiing for example in the Senate where they could enrich discussions on laws. "
(Informant No. 2)

If we think this opinion through, it means that these individuals would become a sort of a transmission mechanism the Church could use to transfer its agenda directly into political agenda. By becoming law makers, educated theologists would not only set political agenda directly but they would also form policies designed to solve the public issues defined previously.

When it comes to the utilization of strategies we have described so far, informants do not prefer to use or propose to use them on a separate basis. On the contrary, they think about how to combine them. We'd like to illustrate this by describing two examples because the strategy to be used to transfer issues into public agenda turns out to be the most problematic moment.

Informant No. 1 says, on one hand, that strategy is needed

"*be attentive to it, (…) because who else is supposed to do it, (...) to protect those for whom no one never speaks.*" On the other hand, he says: "*and this is the problem we have identified, how should we address people? (...) we usually do not talk or think too much about strategies because we have so many small problems that we do not have time for these other matters, unfortunately. But we all feel this is an important thing, we all realize that this is wrong.*"

In case of informant No.1, we can very visibly see inconsistency of thinking concerning strategies. We had proven before that Informant No.1 is aware both horizontal and vertical strategies exist that could be applied in the agenda setting process. At the same time he admits fully that the practical implementation of the strategies fails. Let us see the reasons: first, it is the anticipation of not quite a positive relation between the media and the church and the fact that the Church is overloaded by everyday agenda, as a result of which it may not prepare systematically and carry out any strategies enabling to try set public agenda.

When asked about the form of the agenda setting strategy, Informant No.2 says:

 "*We have to be a lot better in entering into dialogue and into alliances with other segments of the civic society; we have to be able to better infiltrate into the media and the academic sphere. Only this is the way to consider [the Church] as a competent expert on ethical issues and to let it create environment in which a thirst for spiritual experience would be cultivated.*"

In other words, Informant No. 2 shortly describes three basic visions he considers as elemental strategies applicable as agenda setting means. The goal is, first of all, to firmly integrate the church into the civic society and become so to be able to set public agenda, via the *horizontal* strategy, in a more efficient way. The second, complementary, step, is to better

set media agenda that endowed with the capacity to set back the public agenda. And the third integral step is to concentration towards the academic sphere. This represents quite an arduous task: to create and develop the capability to set agenda accepted by opinion leaders who than set the public agenda via the *horizontal* agenda setting strategy.

Let us now comment on the hypothesis that in case the Church achieves the position of a "competent expert" it will have greater opportunities to define public issues. There are certain difficulties with the hypothesis because occupying the position of an expert does not necessarily mean occupying a position of the public agenda setter. It may happen that even if the Church plays the role of expert it stays a passive subject within the agenda setting process who is only given the chance to comment on issues set by other subjects. We do agree with the idea that the position of "ethical expert"potentially offers a chance to come up with a public issue but it is not enough. The position of "ethical expert" creates, with no doubt, a potential to control the *framing* of issues (or, eventually, "declass" them as unimportant) but does not, itself, say anything about how successful the person will be when trying to set the agenda.

Informant No.2 proposes a general strategy, i.e. becoming "competent expert"in the field of ethics. Informant believes, besides others, that the only, but at the same time the most important faculty the Church is endowed with, that might enable it set the agenda, is the "power of word". He says about this: "*I consider it a good thing that Church has no power except arguments. By it should use this power of word in a lot more efficient way, a lot more judiciously and in a lot more offensive way than until now.*"

According to what Informant No.2 says, it is evident that he has a clear idea what should be accomplished and in what way. Competency, judiciousness and offensive character: these are features that might help the Church recast its potential of "ethical expert" into an influential subject able to set agenda, control it and influence its framing.

Conclusion

We analyzed material we had gathered and identified three strategies enabling to transfer an issue from the church into the public agenda. If asked to describe these strategies by a single adjective, we would use the terms *media*, *vertical* and *horizontal* strategy.

The principle of the *media* strategy is to set the issue within the media agenda and transfer it afterwards into the public agenda. All our informants, however, have shown scepticism toward this strategy: they assess it as little efficient and insufficiently mastered. It is true that the Informant No.4 elaborates on this theme, coming up with the "*attractive*

personality" tactic, which is, according to him, a necessary complement of the *media* strategy but, along with other informants, mentions problems related to this strategy: (1) problems the church is striving to draw the attention to are not interesting enough for the mainstream media used by the broad (i.e. "not only the religious") public; (2) the Church has successfully been setting agenda in three media only while these are exclusively used by the religious public and which are probably used by broad public to minimum extent. We can therefore conclude that the Church is not able to successfully set agenda within those media that potentially have the power to set the public agenda. Informant No. 2 sees a possible improvement of this state by making the Church become a "*competent ethical questions expert*" and by making better its communication with the mainstream media.

The main features of the *vertical* strategy are an active participation of well informed laics in the highest spheres of politics. These people would then act as transmitters of issues formulated within the church agenda into the media and public agenda. This is how Informant No.3 conceives this strategy: he literally talks about the *"division of labour"between* the clerus, politicians and bureaucrats. In this perspective, the Church may be seen as an institution formulating issues, politicians as proponents who are able to push these issues into the political agenda and bureaucrats as administrators of policies who are to solve the issues defined. Informants see possible threats posed by this strategy: they arise from party politics and its particular functioning within the Czech republic. Informant No. 1 draws attention to the problem of relying on the only political party (he mentions, according to expectations, the KDU-CSL). According to him the KDU-CSL runs a risk that any motion it brings forward will be rejected by parties in opposition. According to Informant No.1, there is a possible solution: introduce the issue into the agenda of all parliamentary parties. He does not, however, say how to successfully reach this goal.

Horizontal strategy concerns again well informed laity and regular religious people who would be able to transfer issues from the church into public agenda. Church sets here agenda for a part of the public (laics represent here, in fact, the *attention group*) who progressively sets agenda for the *attentive public* where it will be spread into the *mass public*.

We have identified spots where problems might be transferred from the church into the public agenda: CCA discussion evenings (Informant No.2), internet (Informant No.3), religious movements (Informant No.1 cites, for example, the Focolare movement). The extent to which these kinds of transfers are successful depends largely on the choice of themes and problems the colloquiums, discussions and meeting will be about. More precisely said

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whether the Church will successfully choose such themes and problems that will be able to appeal to the *attentive public*.

Well informed laics and regular religious people introduce themes from the church agenda into public discourse also via everyday interpersonal communication with other members of public. In relation to this, informant No.3 draws attention to the danger of a kind of a self imposed seclusion of the religious public, which can be, on one hand a result of a feeling that religious people are socially excluded, or to the contrary, they belong to a kind of elite. As a result of these feelings, this particular issue transmission channel is restricted and could be completely closed. Informant No.2 sees a chance to make to horizontal strategy more efficient: to enter into dialogue and establish closer relationship of the Church with *"other elements of civic society."* How to theoretically explain the notion of efficiency present in this claim? In case other institutions of the civic society had a closer relationship with the church they could more probably accept issues from the Church agenda and communicate them further to the society.

Informant No.4 sees certain limits to this kind of interaction: he thinks that religious laics remain somehow passive and wait to be encouraged by Church leaders. He is also persuaded that "support granted to the Church within the civic society has been until now somehow awkward, more theoretical than practical."

Informant No.1 hopes that in case the Church establishes a closer relationship with other institutions of the civic society, there will be less "*politicking*" and a tendency will develop favouring finding practical solutions to problems. He literally says that the civic society creates a *"network of relationships (…) that can help it carry all the weak, disqualified, those who are living on the fringe, and those who are marginalized."* We can see an evident correlation between problems Informant No.1 mentions (they are all connected in a way to marginalization) and a promise of greater integration into the civic society. This greater integration, then, promises itself a better chance to solve problems the Church, according to our analysis, pays attention to and which form a part of its agenda. All four informants agree that the Church ought to integrate deeper into the civic society and see this as a great promise and an important step towards a more successful practice of bringing issues into public agenda.

We are not able to decide, at this moment, to what extent the strategies our informants talked about, are applied and successful: we will further concentrate our research on these topics.

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