

Degrees of Intimacy in Modern Civilization: An Investigation of Fulton Sheen's Thesis on Radio, Television and Personal Appearance

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ABSTRACT

In whichever form of relationship, intimacy reveals communication and communion. When this communication is between a human being and an inanimate object, it sparks off less communion and more communication. When it concerns human persons in interpersonal relationship, it elicits both communication and communion. With this motivation in mind, the researcher embarked on a review-paper titled: "Degrees of Intimacy in Modern Civilization: An Investigation of Fulton Sheen Thesis on Radio, Television and Personal Appearance." Results of the qualitative study revealed that the author's views that radio, television and personal appearance are metaphors for degrees of intimacy namely, hearing, seeing and touching are apt. However, in the context of pastoral communication, the author did not highlight the contents of both radio and television and how they apply to communication. The study recommended further profound appreciation of Sheen's thesis and research about his involvement with the media. It concluded that if harnessed, the degrees of intimacy in modern civilization would foster greater communication between God and man and between human beings and the created order with all the advances in technology there are.

Keywords: Civilization, Fulton, Radio, Sheen, Television

INTRODUCTION

Communication is at the heart of every interaction (Nardelli, 2013). Be it intrapersonal or interpersonal communication, the levels of communication is characterized by some degree of interface. This is why the interaction that takes place between a human being and an inanimate object is described as extra-communication (Free BCom Notes, 2015). This kind of communication does not only underscore the various levels of communication there are but speaks to the heart of verbal or nonverbal communication. This is why communication experts do not take any kind of communication for granted (Bannister, 2018; Erdogan & Bauer, 2010). The current high premium placed on the various means of modern communication which characterise modern civilization tells the story more.

Indeed, from the end of the 20th to the early part of the 21st century, there have been explosions in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) leading to proliferation of media platforms. The avalanche of Media Corporations have further brought about more

social engagements and media convergence thus expanding the frontiers of sociability, education, trade, commerce and investments. To be precise, social media is now revolutionizing how companies communicate (Buyolo, 2018). It is interesting to look with hindsight how the media fared in yester years. This is where Fulton Sheen's thesis on the degrees of intimacy in modern civilization namely, radio, television and personal appearance come in as a huge resource for critical review in the light of modern media trends and pastoral communication.

Given the rise in media development and content (Kaul, 2012), the thoughts of yesterday such as Sheen's are crucial for media activities in the world today. Therefore, this study aims at:

- Doing a critical review of Fulton Sheen's timeless thesis on the degrees of intimacy in modern civilization;
- Investigation the pros and cons of his submission on radio, television and personal appearance;

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- Highlighting grew areas of modern media that fits Sheen's narrative;
- Putting forward other views in addition to the degrees of intimacy;
- Proposing further research into Sheen's involvement with the media.

This qualitative study employs the historical narrative which enables the researcher to rely on existing literature, particularly Fulton Sheen's works and commentaries for analyses, critique and recommendations.

CLARIFICATIONS

Modern Civilization

Modern civilization stands for the end of the 20th and the earliest part of the 21st centuries which ushered in explosions in radio and television productions as well as various interpersonal relationships and communication otherwise known as personal appearance.

Degrees of Intimacy

In this study, based on the explanation of Fulton Sheen, we would understand the degrees of intimacy in modern civilization as radio, television and personal appearance and demonstrate how they analogously relate to the trio of hearing, seeing and touching. Degrees of intimacy shall also be used to explore elements of pastoral communication such as hearing which represents the Old Testament and vision and touch which stands for New Testament perspectives of communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

Fulton Sheen: A Brief Biography

Fulton John Sheen also known as Bishop or Venerable Fulton J. Sheen was born on May 8, 1895 in El Paso, Illinois, United States of America. He attended St. Viator College, in Bourbonnais, Illinois, where he bagged B.A. in 1917 and M.A. in 1919 respectively. Many years later, he was ordained a Catholic priest. In 1920, he had a bachelor's degree in Canon Law from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C (Stefon, 2019).

He crowned his studies with a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium in 1923 and a Doctor of Sacred Theology from the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, Rome in 1924 in that order. Upon his graduation, he worked in London as a priest for a year after which he left

for Peoria, Illinois, in 1926 where he served as a parish priest. From that time to 1950, Sheen worked as a professor in the faculty of philosophy, Catholic University of America (Stefon, 2019). Between 1958 and 1966, Sheen was the National Director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith until his appointment as bishop of Rochester, New York. By 1969, he became the Archbishop of Newport, Wales. His fame reached the Vatican where he served Pope Paul VI as Assistant to the Pontifical Throne, a position he occupied for three years until his demise. Sheen died in New York on December 9, 1979 at the age of 84 due to heart problems. He was described by Pope Pius XII as "a prophet of the times" (TheFamousPeople.com, 2017). In 2012, he was made a venerable by Benedict XVI having lived a virtuous life. In the Catholic Church, this is a major requirement for canonization as a Saint. The prolific writer has more than 73 books to his credit (TheFamousPeople.com, 2017) among which are, *Communism and the Conscience of the West* (1948), *Way to Inner Peace* (1955), and *The Power of Love* (1965) to mention just a few (Stefon, 2019).

Sheen's Involvement with the Media: An Overview

Sheen was no novice to the media. He is widely recognised as one of the first televangelists in the Catholic Church (TheFamousPeople.com, 2017). This is because, from 1961 to 1969, he had a popular television programme titled, *The Bishop Fulton Sheen Show*. This he combined with writing of ingenious books and being a syndicated newspaper columnist. Often described as an American religious leader (Catholic priest), writer, televangelist, and radio presenter, Sheen displayed great teaching and oratory skills. He was such a humble man. Once he was asked about his successes and he said, "The Lord once used an ass to ride into Jerusalem. Now he uses an ass on TV" (Ku, 1994). It is interesting to note that Sheen's TV programmes were "more ecumenical and directed to Catholics, Protestants, Jews and all men of good will" (Ku, 1994).

This paved way for his involvement with the media and his rising popularity in radio in the early part of the 20th century. His talks attracted wide audiences. It would be recalled that in 1930, the 22-year radio career on the program *The Catholic Hour*, which he began had an estimated audience of four million listeners.

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This could be described as the height of his media career and popularity (Stefon, 2019). Even when he was made a titular bishop and served as auxiliary bishop of New York between 1951 and 1966), he had time to host a weekly television series titled, *Life Is Worth Living*. It is on record that the programme attracted about 30 million viewers. "On that show the bishop, often speaking without a script and appearing at his characteristic chalkboard, discussed practical matters of faith and sharply criticized communism" (Stefon, 2019).

In 1952, Sheen received the Emmy Award for the category of "Most Outstanding Television Personality" beating Lucille Ball, Jimmy Durante and Edward R. Murrow (Lynch, 1998). Accordingly, "After winning, he was featured on the covers of Time, TV Guide, Colliers, and Look" (Reeves, 2000). Reflecting on the legacies and the lessons of Fulton Sheen, Bishop Barron maintained that "Venerable Sheen is remembered as one of the greatest Catholic evangelists of the twentieth century. A master of both television and radio, [who] - shared the Gospel with millions using his unique blend of wit, humor, and insight" (Wordonfireshow.com, 2016).

The *Encyclopedia of World Biography* portrayed him as "one of the unlikeliest successful television personalities of the "Golden Age" in the 1950s" who was one of the most visible members of the Catholic Church "and an excellent ambassador for the church to the secular world" (Encyclopedia.com, 2019). About Sheen, Director Edward Stasheff remarked: "His whole technique was the magnetic effect of the way he looked into the camera. I hate to use a cliché, but the word is 'telegenic.' He was made for the medium" (Encyclopedia.com, 2019).

His speeches were recorded on reel-to-reel tape. This led to the establishment of "Ministr-O-Media" and the release of his speech on audio tape titled, "Renewal and Reconciliation." That is not all, within a short time, the "Ministr-O-Media" rose to becoming one of the biggest distributors of non-music tapes which generated a lot of income. While his autobiography titled, "Treasure in Clay: The Autobiography of Fulton J. Sheen" was posthumously published in 1980, other materials like his papers and TV programmes are kept at St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry in Rochester, New York for reading, reflection and action

(TheFamousPeople.com, 2017). To be sure, "he was the most popular public speaker in the Church, and arguably the best" (Reeves, 2000).

RADIO, TELEVISION AND PERSONAL APPEARANCE AS METAPHORS FOR DEGREES OF INTIMACY

In this book *Life is Worth Living*, Fulton Sheen proposes three degrees of intimacy which he argues are known to every human heart. He contends that these degrees of intimacy which are known to the human heart are either distant like echo or close enough to vibrate the human heart. As if moving from the known to the unknown, Sheen guides the reader through human contact to the degrees of intimacy in human civilization namely, radio, television and personal appearance. He maintains that each of these is friendly than the one which precedes it (Sheen, 2013,p.183). What is interesting in what the researcher prefers to refer to as his media-narration is his ability to ensure smooth transition from elements of human communication to crucial aspects of extra-communication. We shall highlight is take on radio, television and personal appearance thus:

Radio

Sheen submits that through the harnessing of light and sound, radio is the first degree of intimacy. He emphasised that sound does not travel very fast because in a certain temperature, its speed is about 1,200 feet per second. On the contrary, light travels about 186,000 miles a second.

He goes ahead to argue that when sound is amplified and dispatched with great speed of light, "one is able to talk in a few seconds to more people than Saint Paul addressed in all of his missionary journeys" (Sheen, 2013,p.183). This conclusion is appropriate because it reveals the impact of technological advancement on human endeavour.

It is interesting that as far back as that time, Sheen was able to allude to the fact that radio as a medium of communication has the widest outreach. This is a truism attested to by both scholars and media experts (Mathur, 1990 & Diamundialradio.org, 2019).

Another interesting part of his commentary on radio which is laced with analogies is his position that there is delayed feedback as far as radio is concerned because "the listener is unable to return the speech, nor is he ever able

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to talk back" (Sheen, 2013,p.183). Despite this challenge, Sheen makes the point that listeners who are unable to return a speech are compensated by what he describes as "the amazing power in the human wrist, which can shut off any programme it dislikes" (Sheen, 2013,p.183).

An important point to note in this submission is that the author under review touched on "Uses and gratification" – a media theory which demonstrates the power of the listener or viewer to change a channel or station of his or her choice if a programme does not satisfy his or her desire (David, 2016).

Finally, he recommends that those behind the radio ought to be discreet and subdued because: "when one sees the smile on the face, one knows that certain words are not to be taken too seriously. When the eye does not see, the ear is apt to be more sensible and critical" (Sheen, 2013,p.183).

Television

On television as a medium of communication, the scholar maintains that because it adds the dimension of seeing to that of hearing, TV satisfies one of the desires of the human nature for increased intimacy.

Using the analogy of a soldier in a camp who upon boasting about the beauty of the one he loves to his colleagues is left with the challenge of showing them her live picture, Sheen discloses that: "Television enables the audience to test the sincerity of the speaker by the manner in which he delivers his message" (Sheen, 2013,pp.183-184). He, however, notes that it is important to make due allowance for those behind the camera because the television-audience do not often realise that the speaker has multiple distractions such as camera, light, sound booms, engineers, technicians, directors and stagehands to contend with.

Commentating on the downside of television, the televangelist noted that using television comes with the test of sincerity. This is because it is difficult for the audience at home to know whether the speaker is sincere or not.

Whether he uses the teleprompter or he reads from cards, ascertaining the sincerity of those behind TV programmes is difficult. He, however, stated that one way the viewing audience at home can tell if the presenter is using a teleprompter is to check if his eyes are moving from left to right and if he is reading

from a card, they should check if his eyes are moving up and down (Sheen, 2013,p.184).

Personal Appearance

From man's use of radio and television which discloses extra-communication, Sheen catapults the discourse to interpersonal communication which he describes as "the most intimate form of audience relationship...[where] there is not only a positive communion of personality with personality but also an exchange of ideas which is the mark distinguishing man from beast" (Sheen, 2013,p.184).

He insists that personal appearance, that is, meeting a person and establishing communion with him surpasses hearing his voice on radio as well as seeing his other image on the screen. What is clear in this position is the indispensable place of interpersonal communication despite advances in technology. What is paramount here is the interface between extra-communication and interpersonal communication.

THREE DEGREES OF INTIMACY IN MODERN CIVILIZATION

It is instructive to note that Fulton Sheen further discloses that radio, television and personal appearance correspond to another trio intimacies, that is, hearing, seeing and touching:

Hearing

In an unprecedented exposé, the cerebral TV presenter stated that the first intimacy of the senses that corresponds to the radio is the intimacy of hearing.

To buttress the value of hearing, he emphasised that we may never know that someone loves us unless he told us. He argued that: "Speech is the summation of a soul: all that it has been, all that it is, and all that it will ever be" (Sheen, 2013,p.185). Giving concrete examples, Sheen contends that it is only when we hear someone speak that we can say he is learned, kind, cruel or humble. Noting that "the first language of love - is that of speech in one and hearing in another," (Sheen, 2013,p.185) he insists that character is revealed in great books of the past like those of Sophocles, Aristotle, Aquinas, Bonaventure, Bossuet to mention a few.

Seeing

From hearing, he moves to the sense of seeing. On the intimacy of love which he calls vision, Sheen states that, "the heart is never satisfied

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merely at hearing the words of the beloved or at reading his message.

It wants to see the words born on human lips, see the earnestness of a visage, the flash of an eye, and the sincerity of character in the expression of the face" (Sheen, 2013,p.185). Highlighting the import of images on the mind, the TV presenter surmised that: "Communion between persons begins to be intense and vibrating the moment the image of the other is impressed on the mind and carved into the heart" (Sheen, 2013,pp.185-186).

Touching

On the intimacy of touch, the author under consideration disclosed that it is an intimacy that is so deep, profound and personal. He states that "in the order of senses, touch is the high point of contact of personality with personality" (Sheen, 2013,p.186). He views the intimacy of touch as a privilege which is why people often seek permission before they touch others. He cites examples as a mother touching her child, a nurse, her sick patient, a husband welcoming his wife and a wife her husband to describe touch as "the crown of affection and the high point of fellow feeling of heart and heart" (Sheen, 2013,p.186).

IN SEARCH FOR PASTORAL COMMUNICATION IN SHEEN'S NARRATIVE

A striking dimension of Fulton Sheen's thesis is his linking of the intimacies of love and their analogies in radio, television and personal appearance with God's dealing with humanity. This is interesting because it brings to the fore the all-important elements of pastoral communication.

We shall now underscore God's contact with humanity and the communicative relationship which flows from it based on Sheen's assumptions that radio is Old Testament and television and personal appearance as Jesus revealed in the New Testament:

Old Testament

In his seminal submission, the scholar brings in the aspect of pastoral communication by referring to radio as Old Testament. He notes that "God has spoken! To find His speech we need to turn over the pages of the Old Testament; there is written the speech of God. The Old Testament is something like radio: a speech without vision" (Sheen, 2013,p.186). He goes ahead to give instances like the giving of

the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) which have since become the fabric of the world's civilization.

This implies that the Old Testament like the radio was about God's speech and invariably the speeches of the prophets and sages about the expected messiah that would come in Davidic form.

While the prophets from Moses through Malachi made noise about the future leader of Israel, what transpired in the old dispensation was basically voice without a corresponding vision of the actual person being expected. This leads us to vision.

New Testament

Sheen likens the New Testament to television. He argues that love wants to see that is why it is not satisfied with hearing the speeches of a beloved alone. He makes the point that "If God is to sound another intimacy of love, He must not only speak to men; He must be seen. Vision must be added to revelation.

This was done at the incarnation of the Son of God in the Person of Jesus Christ. God was seen - seen in the form of a Babe in fulfilment of a prophecy seven hundred years old that His name would be called Emmanuel: 'God with us.' Men saw Him in a thousand other ways" (Sheen, 2013,pp.187-188). In the New Testament times, Christ was seen, he was engaged with the children and stressed the need for humility.

Jesus as Perfect Communicator

The finest expression of pastoral communication is the assertion found in the *Pastoral Instruction on the Means of Social Communication* which states that through his incarnation, while he was on earth, Christ revealed Himself as the Perfect Communicator who totally identified himself with those who are expected to receive his communication, by giving his message in words and by the manner of his life and preaching the divine message out of the press of his people without fear or favour thus adjusting to his people's way of life (*Communio et Progressio*, 1971, no.11). The point is, although God's voice was heard and his person was made visible in Christ, he needed to explore another form of intimacy namely touch. That was displayed when the woman with the issue of blood touched him (Cf. Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34 & Luke 8:43-48) and when Mary of Magdala poured oil on his feet and wiped away the tears with her hair (Cf. Luke

7:36-50). He submits that: "The greatest of all touches was given by a man who doubted His Divinity" (Sheen, 2013,p.188). This led to Thomas' solemn profession of faith, "My Lord and My God" (John 20:28).

EYE OF FAITH AS "INTERNET"

The drama that ensued between Jesus and Thomas leads us to another dimension of intimacy beyond vision that is, the eye of faith which is the response of the heart that is more reliable and close than that which the eyes see and fingers feel (Sheen, 2013,p.188). The Scriptures insist that faith is unlimited; that it can move mountains and do all things (Matthew 17:20). Although Fulton Sheen did not factor in internet in his thesis, the researcher is of the opinion that the "eye of faith" can be likened to the internet because has limitless possibilities.

With various platforms such as blogs, podcasts and other networking sites, the internet daily offers limitless possibilities for social interaction, business and commerce, research and education, democracy and governance, culture and entertainment to mention just a few, to great number of audiences. Because it exists in virtual space, the internet allows a person to engage others even without seeing them. While this has advantages, it also has its down sides. This is why all internet users ought to exercise caution in using the modern means of communication.

Notwithstanding these challenges, in all her media-related documents, the Church has always maintained that the mission of proclaiming the Gospel of the Christ to the ends of the earth until the second coming of the Son of Man requires using the media (Paul VI, *Inter Mirifica* no.3; Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no.45; John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no.37; Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Communio et Progressio*, nos.126-134 & *Aetatis Novae*, no.11) of which internet is its newest and finest expression.

CRITIQUE AND CONCLUSION

Critique

While Sheen's analogy of radio is apt, he focused mainly on the technicality of light and sound as well as lack of instant feedback between a speaker and the audience. His views that the listener is at liberty to switch or change channel and that the speaker should be discreet are crucial. However, while he was

overwhelmed by the amazing power of radio and how the audience can assess the speaker, he did not say anything about the content of radio. One would have expected an insight on radio-content given his practical application of these degrees of intimacy to communication.

His views on television, especially the amazing power of combining sight and sound, are vital. It is true that television enables the audience to test the sincerity of the speaker. His disclosure that sometimes the audience may not be aware of the distractions the speaker faces is timely. Nevertheless, while he was carried away with technicalities, Sheen did not give insights about programming and timing. Although he was writing for a western audience, the author should have taken Africa into cognisance where deficit in power affects access to television.

The author's praise of personal appearance as the *sumum bonum* is commendable. By stating the important role of the interface between extra-communication and interpersonal communication, he leaves us with the impression that like science, communication is dynamic and ever expanding. Despite his seeming plausible articulation of personal appearance as the finest expression of communication, Sheen did not provide us with the requisite ethics of that kind of engagement. In both personal and interpersonal communication, there are tendencies of hurting others or breaking a promise. This could affect personal appearance as a way of communicating oneself to another.

While his views about hearing, seeing and touching are appropriate, he could not really blend New Testament and the Person of Jesus in the analogy of touch. One would have expected him to clarify "touch" as explaining the incarnation in the New Testament. Apparently, the present presentation of ideas by the author could be misleading as the uninitiated might be confused when they read his explanation of incarnation. This is why this researcher stretches the point on the "eye of faith" as an analogy for the internet.

By way of recommendation, the study advocates a profound appreciation of Sheen's thesis. The researcher acknowledges that this review-paper is not exhaustive about the subject matter. This is why it is necessary that further empirical research is carried out about Fulton Sheen's involvement with the media. In furtherance of educational advances especially in media

studies, paying close attention to the extant media-works of the author remains beneficial to both researchers and students of media.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, the author under consideration gradually guides readers from a secular discourse to one which ends with a divine reality. He captured this beautifully when he noted: "There is nothing more that God can do to exhaust the intimacies of love. He has spoken; he has been seen; and He has been touched. To each and every person in the world He has given at least one of these intimacies. He is heard in His scripture and by the invisible ear of the soul attentive to the whispering of His Church, which is growing in age and grace and wisdom through centuries" (Sheen, 2013,p.189). Apparently, Sheen drives his audience from a secular press to a divine press in communicative eldorado. Perhaps it is why this is was said of him: "He was truly a pioneer in Catholic media, and as Pope Francis urges us to venture out into the peripheries, and as Saint Pope John Paul II encouraged us to find new means to do so, we need only look to Fulton Sheen as the example" (The young Catholic woman.com, 2017).

We have seen how important it is to blend extra-communication with interpersonal communication. This is because, "The final intimacy of all is that touch reserved only for the chosen few who enjoy a communion with Him that is almost an interpretation of the Divine and the Human, an embrace of love when He who is the Divine Host comes into the human heart as its Guest. It does not require much time to make us saints. It requires only much love" (Sheen, 2013,p.189). From the investigation of Fulton Sheen's thesis on radio, television and personal appearance so far, it is safe to conclude that if the degrees of intimacy in modern civilization are further harnessed, the pastoral dimension of community would foster greater communication between God and man and between human beings and the created order with all the technologies there are.

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