



Igor V. Ponkin*, Viktor I. Slobodchikov**

(* director of the Institute of relations between the State and religious denominations and Law, Moscow; ** Head of the Scientific Field of the Institute for the Study of Childhood, Family, and Education of the Russian Academy of Education)

Evaluation of the exhibit "Amen" of Abel Azcona¹

SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. Object of the evaluation: description of the exhibit – 2. Main part. An evaluation - 2.1. Communicative technique of combining the sacred with the low and vulgar associated with homosexual acts and the corresponding semantics condemned in the traditional Catholic religion - 2.2. Communicative technique of metonymic replacement (substitution) of one sign with another - 3. Conclusions.

1 – Introduction. Object of the evaluation: description of the exhibit

The "Amen" ("Amén") exhibit by the "performance artist" Abel Azcona (hereinafter referred to as object, exhibit) was a composition made out of numerous Catholic consecrated hosts for the oblation (wafers) totaling 242, together letter by letter forming the easily readable word in Spanish "pederastia" – "pederasty" (with the size of the letters of about one meter high and the length of the entire word of several meters long). The total number of the consecrated hosts used in compilation of this inscription corresponded, as stated by Abel Azcona, to his personal visit of 242 Catholic worship services (masses), during which, by simulating his participation in the oblation, he received and collected those items (consecrated hosts) to carry out this action.

The named exhibit was displayed by Abel Azkona from November 20, 2015 to January 17, 2016 in the city of Pamplona (Spain) for public demonstration in the Serapio Esparza (formerly Conde de Rodezno) Square. The photographs of this exhibit since that time to the present have been publicly displayed on a variety of Internet resources and have been exhibited in at least one exhibition hall freely and openly to an unlimited number of people.

For the study, three photographs of the named object (exhibit) and its text description reflecting the shown in the photographs were presented.

¹ Article not peer evaluated.



1. Does the “Amen” exhibit by Abel Azcona have any features, properties, or expressive means which express and realize its focus on abasement of human dignity on the basis of one’s attitude to religion and insult to religious feelings of believers?

2. If so, then due to which techniques used in the exhibit, is the influence indicated in question No. 1 exercised through the public demonstration of the exhibit?

3. On the basis of the attitude to which religion (which religions) is the influence indicated in question No. 1 exercised?

The subject of the study is the content, semantic orientation, applied techniques, expressive means and other elements and features of the “Amen” exhibit which are important for answering the questions asked from the point of view of their psychological and legal and linguistic assessment in the framework of the questions put to the experts.

In the framework of the questions put, a complex psychological and legal and linguistic study of the presented images of the named exhibit was pursued. In the pursuit of the study, the methods of psychological and legal and linguistic analysis were used. In the framework of the psychological analysis pursued, the methods of psycho-semantic analysis, content analysis, and other methods were used. In the framework of the legal and linguistic analysis pursued, the methods of linguistic and semantic analysis, logical analysis, and other methods were used.

At the same time, the statements of the person stated (including the interviews) published in mass media and on the Internet resources were taken into account as the additional sources of information testifying the directivity of the idea of its author Abel Azkony implemented in the exhibit.

The study was pursued within the framework of the three questions put, taking into account that the second and the third questions were formulated with due regard and in case of a possible positive answer to the first question and have a clarifying additional character.

2 - Main part. An evaluation

The results of the study of the content and directivity of the “Amen” exhibit pursued give sufficient grounds to assert that there is a set of ideas and communication messages realized and expressed in the named exhibit as a whole, in its main content, as well as the presence of semantic links of the content and semantic directivity of this exhibit to Catholic Christianity and the most worshipped values of Christianity in general (the person of Jesus Christ).



The study of the object (exhibit) pursued allowed to identify the directivity of the influence of this object on the diabolic abasement of human dignity and the extremely painful insult to religious feelings of persons professing Catholic Christianity, to define and identify the following communicative techniques used in the object (exhibit) under study by means of which the specified negative psychological influence of the named object (exhibit) on the spectator (addressee) is realized and which ensure the directivity of the influence of this object stated above:

- 1) communicative technique of combining the sacred with the low and vulgar associated with homosexual acts and the corresponding semantics condemned in the traditional Catholic religion;
- 2) communicative technique of metonymic replacement (substitution) of one sign with another.

2.1 - Communicative technique of combining the sacred with the low and vulgar associated with homosexual acts and the corresponding semantics condemned in the traditional Catholic religion

Host – bread product baked of unleavened dough – the Eucharistic bread used in Western liturgical rituals in Latin Catholicism and in a number of Protestant churches; they distinguish consecrated host (as the image of the Body of Christ) and unconsecrated host². Consecrated host is an integral element of the Catholic religious ritual of the Eucharist (Holy Communion). Accordingly, host is an object of religious value in the consciousness and perception of Catholic believers; to them, consecrated hosts are objects of religious respect and reverence (unconsecrated hosts in religious perception of Catholic believers have somewhat lower religious value, but still act as an object of religious value)³. This is a fact and it does not require any

¹ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. – Moscow: Franciscan Printing Press, 2007. – Vol. 3. – P. 962. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 1: Aachen-Assize. – Moscow: Franciscan Printing Press, 2002. – P. 1395.

² Ref. regarding the volume and detailed specification of the direct objects of offence when committing acts aimed at insult to religious feelings of believers and at abasement of their human dignity: **I.V. PONKIN**, *Direct Objects of Offence when Committing Acts Aimed at Insult to Religious Feelings of Believers and at Abasement of Their Human Dignity*, in *Protection of Human Dignity of Believers: Examinations and Materials in Cases on Insult to Religious Feelings and Abasement of Human Dignity of Christian Believers* / Eds. I.V. Ponkin / Institute of State and Confessional Relations and Law. – Moscow: Buki Vedi, 2017. – 300 p. – P. 5–9. **I.V. PONKIN**, *Direct Objects of Offence at Committing of the Acts Oriented to an Insult of Religious Feelings of Believers and to Humiliation of their Human Dignity*, in *Forensic Research & Criminology International Journal*. – 2017. – Vol. 5. – № 5. **I.V. PONKIN**, *In merito alla tutela dei sentimenti religiosi e della dignità individuale dei credenti*, in *Diritto Penale Contemporaneo*. –



additional proof due to common knowledge. At the same time, the attitude to hosts of people who are not Catholic believers does not make any difference; the most important is the very fact of a special religious attitude towards them on the part of Catholic believers.

The combination (alignment) of objects religiously revered by Catholic believers (consecrated hosts) in the exhibit under study and the inscription “pederasty” (letter by letter composed of the consecrated hosts) realizes the communicative technique of combining the sacred with the low and vulgar because pederasty (homosexuality) is condemned by Catholicism due to spiritual and moral religious grounds⁴. At the same time the statements on the normality of homosexuality, its justification by individual Catholic (or other) religious leaders do not change the essence of the matter.

The fact that Abel Azkona, according to his own words, intentionally visited 242 Catholic worship services (masses), during which, by simulating his participation in the oblation, he was collecting (for quite a long time) the consecrated hosts in order to carry out this action, clearly indicates his direct intention to carry out these actions aimed at the creation and public demonstration of the exhibit under study.

2.2 - Communicative technique of metonymic replacement (substitution) of one sign with another

The named technique is realized (with a certain degree of coding of the communicative message) by the fact that the author of the object achieves (by inducing the action of the psychological mechanism of transfer) metonymic⁵ replacement (substitution) of the images and meanings of the consecrated host and the religious service in Catholicism on the images associated with pederastic relations, which in this case are positioned by the author of the exhibit, in essence, as some more valuable substance, since, as communicated by the exhibit, the image (that of pederasty) is integrally created by means of simultaneous use of the elements from 242 religious services of the Roman Catholic Church (i.e. the hosts in the exhibit are used as a means for the purpose of objectification, designation of pederasty). On

26 febbraio 2016.

⁴ Ref. regarding the right to critical estimation of homosexuality: **I.V. PONKINE, M.N.KOUZNETSOV, N.A. MIKHALEVA**, *Rapport. Sur le droit à l'appréciation critique et sur les restrictions légitimes de l'importunité de l'homosexualité*, in *Stato, Chiese e pluralismo confessionale*, Rivista telematica (www.statochiese.it) – 2011, ottobre.

⁵ **Metonymy** – communicative technique with which one character is replaced with another based on their similarity.



the whole, the content of the communicative message realized by the action under study, and the influence of the exhibit are the result of integration of the semantics formed by the words “indeed!”, “pederasty”, and the semantics of the images “Catholic faith”, “Holy Communion”, “Jesus Christ”.

The use of these very objects (the consecrated hosts) in the exhibit is aimed at abasement of human dignity and insult to religious feelings of Catholic believers through the deliberately false and offensive attribution to the Catholic religion, the

Roman Catholic Church, Catholic believers of a deliberately false, extremely negative, invective characteristic – attributing to them the socially and religiously (in Christianity) condemned inclination and involvement in homosexuality, putting the discrediting labels (in their own eyes) on them. At the same time the involvement of the Catholics in pederasty as a phenomenon comparable (through figurative means) to the sacrament of the Eucharist is attributed.

Thus, the object under study has an offensive potential and influence in relation to each Catholic believer, as the spectator is given a communicative message reducing, lithotizing⁶ the spiritual values of Catholicism, and therefore reducing the image of the Catholic faith and Catholic believers to the low level (homosexual relations). The influence of this technique is mostly manifested in relation to predominantly Catholic believers, since it is only and exclusively of them that the understanding of the meaning of the consecrated host mentioned above is characteristic (particularly in the Catholic tradition). Therefore, it is reasonable to assess the directivity of the object under study (its influence) as having extremely insulting, degrading influence (in terms of the technique described) both on the entire social group of Catholic believers and on each individual Catholic believer.

In addition to the directivity stated above, the object under study is aimed at derogatory devaluation, semantic lithotization, denigration (blackening), social discredit and forced desacralization of the image of Jesus Christ, which is sacred to Christians. Since the tasting of consecrated host (in the Catholic tradition) is perceived by Catholic believers as communion (as a religious ritual) to the Body of Jesus Christ, in the perception of Catholic believers, consecrated host is inseparably religiously connected with the image of Jesus Christ religiously revered by believers.

⁶ **Lithotization** – forced and deliberate belittling, lowering of the value and meaning of something. Lithoth – a technique of understatement, opposite to hyperbole, used to enhance the pictorial and expressive properties of speech.



The combination of the image of Jesus Christ (inseparably connected through the elements of the exhibit – consecrated hosts – with the religious ritual (sacrament) of the Eucharist, participating in which the Christian believers make communion (as a religious rite) to the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ), which is sacred to Christian believers, with the inscription “pederasty” is an extremely diabolic, sophisticated mockery of Christian believers, insult to their religious feelings and abasement of their human dignity, because the word “pederasty” revetted out of the numerous consecrated hosts (with the use of the technique of metonymic substitution) is directed at the combination of the image of Jesus Christ and the image of a pederast, the metonymic substitution of the first image with the second one of those stated.

In this sense, it is reasonable to homologate a significantly wider audience of addressees of the communicative messages realized by the exhibit under study –Christianity as a whole and every Christian believer irrespective of their confession.

Through the use of this technique, a false, insulting and blasphemous to Christians presentation that the Christian faith, its highest values are inherent in pederasty, is formed in the consciousness of the spectator (addressee).

At the same time, the influence of the exhibit exercised through the methods and techniques stated above is emphasized and enhanced with the use of “amen” lexeme as the name of the exhibit by Abel Azcona. The “amen” lexeme is a widespread and well-known liturgical acclamation (religiously inspired verbal formula, exclamation) in Christianity (not only Catholicism). The word “amen” (from Heb. – “verily, truly, worth”) with the meanings: “indeed”, “truly”, “let it be” expresses the affirmation of truth and verity; this word is usually used in the concluding (fulfillment) of prayers, as well as for the expression of assertion, approval or desire, confirmation of the communicative message or statement being true. The use of the religious acclamation “amen” in the title of the exhibit by Abel Azcona is intended to consolidate and articulate the confirmation of the negative communicative message transmitted by this exhibit.

Based on the communicative techniques identified and described above, through the use of which Abel Azkona exercises the negative psychological influence of the exhibit under study on the spectator (addressee), it is reasonable to determine **the main communicative purpose of this exhibit** – derogatory devaluation, lithotization and forced desacralization, derogatory discreditation of the Catholic faith, its objects of worship, including the image of Jesus Christ, sacred to all Christian believers, as a direct consequence – sophisticated and diabolic, painful



insult to religious feelings of Christian believers (above all – Catholics) and flagrant abasement of their human dignity.

Accordingly, such actions of Abel Azkony will be reasonably perceived by Christian believers primarily as deliberate, sophisticated and extremely humbling mockery of the religiously significant religious values (values of faith), including the image of Jesus Christ – the object of their religious worship, that is, as intentional mockery at Christian believers aimed at achieving an intense painful insult to their religious feelings and abasement of their human dignity.

The analysis of the content of the communicative message expressed in the object under study (including the semantic features of the communicative message, determining the ability to adequately interpret the content of the communicative intent of the addresser of this communicative message) and the analysis of the pragmatic relevance of the object (both public, including cultural, value, and usefulness of the information embedded in the communicative message) allows to draw the conclusions: 1) on the absence of pragmatic relevance of the communicative message embedded in the object under study, since the intentional insult of a big social group done through its public demonstration cannot have any social value (neither cultural, including artistic, nor practical) and 2) the conclusion that the communicative message is quite fully informative, since the communicative intentions of the addresser of this communicative message (the author of the object under study) are quite clear, can be clearly detected and clarified through the identification and analysis of the techniques implemented in the object under study.

There are no reasons to consider the exhibit under study such produced in the genre of satire in this case.

3 - Conclusions

There are necessary and sufficient grounds to evaluate the “Amen” exhibit by Abel Azcona as such aimed at humiliating abasement of human dignity of Catholic believers and that of Christian believers in general, and at insult to their religious feelings.

The techniques, expressive means, features and properties of an exhibit used in the exhibit studied, by means of which the abasement of human dignity on the basis of the attitude to religion and the insult to religious feelings of believers is caused, are shown above in the text of the conclusion.

The addressee of the public demonstration of the exhibit is, firstly, the Catholic believers, and secondly, in terms of the ongoing mocking



blackening (denigration) of the image of Jesus Christ, it is reasonable to say that the addressees of the influence are Christian believers in general, regardless of their religious affiliation. It should also be noted that the subsequent public presentation, reproduction (including publication) of the photographs and video-fixations of the exhibit stated is an independent action representing extremely diabolic, sophisticated, derogatory mockery at the believers, insult to their religious feelings and abasement of their human dignity.