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Comments on Understanding God as a Medium: A Dialogue between Albert Camus and Marshall McLuhan

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This paper takes the stance that the God figure is a medium as much as a digital platform, device or other conduit of communication, as per Marshall McLuhan's famous aphorism and to reference Camus, that a certain absurdity is attached to the concept. If the god figure is a mere algorithm controlling an unquestioning flock, then further deconstruction of the concept as God as a medium leads to Camus' "philosophical suicide". The meaning of life is destabilized by the dissonant narratives of life and life after death/Heaven and the fear that life itself is without meaning – nothing matters

To address the first theory, when taking the God figure as a single invisible entity that nonetheless wields control over its acolytes, comparison may be made with the influential capabilities of a digital platform such as TikTok and those who slavishly follow without a thought to verification of facts. Social media indeed is a kind of religion, the faceless manipulator convincing the populace to forsake all others in its mission to enlarge the flock. McLuhan observed that the environment is shaped by technology, therefore the deity as a technological medium has the ability to influence the ground in which it exists. As an atheist forced to attend Catholic ritual, I remember well the uniformity of the congregation as they responded, parrot-like, to the Liturgy of the Eucharist, filing up to the altar for communion, mouths agape and eyes glazed. As a terrified 9 year old the musty smell of mothballs and old hymnals smacked of age-old power, compliance or punishment the only two choices.

The church and artifacts are secondary media, religious iconography created to send the message of “if/then” – if we follow instruction as set out in the mass then we go to heaven, the leap of faith resulting from the reveal of the absurdity of human existence and the philosophical scrambling mankind has to undertake in order to make sense of the senseless. The crucifix is a portable deity, ditto the bible, their presence in one’s home or vehicle a reminder that the medium of God is 24/7. We are willingly colluding with the broadcast by tuning in, conveniently ignoring the irrational – we are being controlled by an invisible medium in order to give meaning to the meaningless. Life is indeed absurd to the Christian who then seeks to eradicate that underlying suspicion by smothering it with dogma.

Camus’ stance on God and religion supports the theory of God as a medium in as much as the concept of God is a creation of a species acknowledging the futility of life and seeking a message to the contrary. If mankind accepts that its existence is merely to live and die without experiencing anything of note then posthumous meaning is provided by the concept of heaven – which can also be weaponized as a means to censor critical thinking and opposition to the slavish acceptance of the existence of a deity. The paper uses the character of Paneloux from Camus’ novel “The Plague” (1947) as an example of the punishment/rewards system so wielded by organized religion. The populace is manipulated into accepting that everything that occurs is directly connected to the messages from the God medium – we bring ill fate on ourselves (in this instance the plague) by living a sinner’s life. This lose-lose scenario is analogous to an online social media platform in as much as, we follow and comply with the rules yet the moment we oppose the dominant paradigm by questioning the veracity of the information or the credentials of the one speaking we are shunned.

As a medium, the God figure is not necessarily a soulless algorithm seeking to brainwash or subjugate but the argument for that is strong. In order to subscribe to a monotheistic religion, the devout must suspend their disbelief and surrender critical thought and by association, their freedom. If the programmers are the priests, clerics

and other proselytizers they themselves are associated media devices (as per Ong and orality as a medium). The medium is whatever or whomever the messenger decides to channel and the message itself can have positive or negative connotations depending on the program. The target audience would influence the script/interpretation of scripture. To take this as philosophical suicide is to travel back to Camus and his absurdist worldview; a lack of meaning begets the search for such and organized religion is happy to provide it (on their terms of course). Nature abhors a vacuum and organized religion fills the emptiness with a get out of jail free card, its medium is a conveniently unprovable deity. And for those of us who choose to reject spiritual slavery, this paper cleverly deconstructs the notion of faith as a tool of control via the oldest medium in the (Good) book.