

6.7 Communication and Church Models

Aim

To help students get an understanding of communication in the various models of the Church.

Materials Required

Pen and Paper

Procedure

Input based on lecture and discussion style

Input

Background: These models are based primarily on the work of Avery Dulles 'The Models of the Church.' Studying the Vatican II documents, primarily *Lumen Gentium*, who created these models of the Church. In social communication, we study how each of them brings an aspect of richness of the church. Thus the models complement, but not exclude each other.

a) The Institutional or Hierarchical Model:

'...is rather narrowly concerned with the authority of office and the obligatory character of official doctrine. It tends to view communication in the theological sense, as a descending process beginning from God and passing through the papal and Episcopal hierarchy to the other members of the Church...'

This model gives a clear visibility to the Church in the area of powers and functions: teaching, sanctifying and governing. It is characterized by clericalism, 'juridicalism', and triumphalism. Here the hierarchy is an authoritative teacher (ecclesia docens) while lay faithful are mere learners (ecclesia discens). The expressions of communication here are through the official documents, pastoral letters and announcements. In these church models use can be easily made of the modern means of social communication - radio, television, film, print and internet. It is stable, has strong organisational basis, collective resources and a wide audience. It appeals to the urban wealthy, who like order and brevity. The message can be pre-planned and packaged and can be delivered by any authority because it does not lend itself to adaptability.

The primary receivers are insiders, the church members. It has little to do with outsiders. The desired effect of this communication is a submission of the intellect to authority that commands respect.

Demerits

The Church here is clericalist, juricist and triumphalist, tending to exhibit superiority. Uniformity is the understanding of unity. There is no room for diversity. Church here is viewed like any well organised and structured multinational.

This model of communication is similar to what Eduardo Pedreira calls solipsist model of communication. Here, X who is knowledgeable gives a message to Y who is ignorant. X is superior; active in the communication link and has to improve skills, language, persuasive power and technology. Y on the other hand, is only passive, submissive and receptive.

Assessment

This model, according to Dulles is good for a balanced ecclesiology. Institution in itself is not bad. Efforts rather should be made to correct the imbalances of triumphalism, clericalism and juridicalism.

b) The Herald/Kerygmatic model

This model is traced to the protestant theologian Karl Barth and Catholic theologian Hans Kung though it has expressions in *Dei Verbum* and *Ad Gentes*: 'following the mandate of Jesus, the Church continues unceasingly to send heralds to proclaim the Gospel...' (114). The missionary kerygmatic mandate is the identity of the Church. The Church is the voice, the announcer and herald of the kingdom of God. Here, preaching the Word of God, not sacrament or hierarchy has pre-eminence.



The mode of communication is predominantly oral and electronic with the expected response of conversion to the glad tidings of salvation. Therefore, mass media with the possibility of reaching vast masses swiftly across time and space is preferred in this model. This is practised by many protestant churches who invest heavily in mass media equipments: microphones, PA systems, Radio and TV programs and tele-evangelism. This model is strongly rooted in the bible (life of the apostles/disciples in the Acts of the Apostles) and has a rich theology of the Word.

Demerits

It ignores the institutional and sacramental aspects of the Church. Since its' primary channel is mass media, communication tends to be non-dialogical, non-participatory, linear and one-way. There is fundamentalist interpretation of scriptures, which ignores religious pluralism, cultures and worldviews apart from Christianity. Messages are imported and delivered without care for adaptation (Inculturation).

Assessment

This model is good primarily for first evangelization, in places where the Good News has never been preached before. Thus as first evangelization, it can concentrate on the essentials: the good news of our salvation, which Christianity is basically all about.

But as the church grows, it has to sort of organise itself. And this is where institution and hierarch become important

c) The Sacramental model of the Church

Sacrament is commonly defined from its two aspects: outward visible sign and inward invisible grace. Traditionally we have seven sacraments, but theologians like Henry de Lubac see Jesus Christ, the Church and the whole universe as sacraments. The Church as sacrament is closely linked and flows from the sacramental symbolism of Christ. Christ is the supreme revelatory symbol, the living image of the invisible God. He in turn, communicates to us in who he is, what he says and what he does. The Church is the efficacious sign in which Christ continues to be present and active. She is the sign and instrument of the living presence of Christ.

Through this she becomes a 'kind of sacrament of intimate union with God and of unity of all humankind'. (LG 9, 48.; SC 26). In communication language, she is both sign and mystery of the saving grace of Christ and the medium of divine-human communications.

The communication concern here is to make visible, audible and relevant the revelation of God in the world. This is mostly carried out in the various liturgical celebrations in the various communities using sound, silence, gestures, symbols and a variety of signs and elements (vestments, fruits, oils, water etc). These celebrations help us to respond and participate in the Trinitarian self-communication. The signs and symbols of liturgy are means of being aware of God's communication and our response.

This model fits a well established church community, where the people do not have to do much on their own, because the sacred signs of the sacraments produce their saving effects, thanks to the power of Christ.' (117). The rich liturgy of this model has led to many other forms of expressions- art, architecture, drama, music, dance and poetry- each having their own communication value.

Demerits

Communication here is very ritualistic, repeating the same signs and words over and over again. Communication is not aimed at extending the message in space, but only to sustain a specified group.

Assessment

As a group grows, repeated actions help create a sense of identity and belonging. So a sacramental model, based on liturgical actions and celebrations can help them create this sense of belonging and identity. However care should be taken to personalize these rituals so that they do not just become monotonous, repetitive and boring.

d) Servant

The servant model "asserts that the Church should consider itself as part of the total human family, sharing the same concerns as the rest of men". The ministry of Jesus, the suffering servant of God who was certainly "a man for others", provides the template for this model: "just as Christ came into the world not to be served but to serve, so the Church, carrying on the mission of Christ, seeks to serve the world by fostering the brotherhood of all men". As "the Lord was the 'man for others,' so much the Church be 'the community for others' ". The strength of this model lies in its emphasis on serving others and not simply serving the Church's self-interests. However, its weaknesses are manifold, especially when this model is given pre-eminence over all other models.

First, authentic service includes the ministry of the word and sacrament. In the New Testament, the term *diakonia* "applies to all types of ministry – including the ministry of the word, of sacraments, and of temporal help. All offices in the Church are forms of *diakonia*, and thus the term, in biblical usage, cannot properly be used in opposition to preaching or worship". Second, the Church's service toward the world rarely bears much resemblance to that advocated by those who hold this model. "It would be surprising to find in the Bible any statement that the Church as such is called upon to perform *diakonia* towards the world. It would not have entered the mind of any New Testament writer to imagine that the



Church has a mandate to transform the existing social institutions, such as slavery, war, or the Roman rule over Palestine”. Finally, I think an emphasis on service alone may tend to dissolve too much of what is distinctive to Christianity.

e) **The model of Church as Family (of God)**

This is the unique contribution of Africans to ecclesiology. Before we get to the details of this, let us examine the African and Christian meaning of family.

The African understanding of family embraces multiple channels of kin relationships. Thus by itself, family is extended and even moves to the level of tribe, clan and blood relationship which matter a lot.

The Christian understanding of family moves from a strict blood relationship to a spiritual paternity of God. Here all who have been begotten by ‘water and the Spirit’ (baptism) form a bond of family, which is according to Ecclesia in Africa aimed at ‘avoiding all ethnocentrism and excessive particularism, trying instead to encourage reconciliation and true communion between different ethnic groups, favoring solidarity and the sharing of personnel and resources among the particular Churches, without undue ethnic considerations’.

The parish is the place which manifests the communion of various groups and movements, which find in it spiritual sustenance and material support. Priests and lay people will see to it that parish life is harmonious, expressing the Church as family, where all devote “themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).

This model highlights a decentralized structure where much takes place at the local levels: Right from the beginning, the synod fathers recognized that the Church as family cannot reach her full potential as Church unless she is divided into communities small enough to foster close human relationships (Ecclesia in Africa 89). Communication here centres on the strength of relationship among the members. Participation in the liturgies, sacraments and other activities of this community matters a lot. Communication is active at both the sender and receiver’s end. Just as in the human family, roles and duties are well spelt out and each has to contribute to keep the family going. Oral transmission is the norm of communication in this church model. Physical presence and interaction is paramount. There is also a sense of being accompanied and loved, with less emphasis on structure and hierarchy. A high concern for both the individual and common good exists and resources (human and financial) are committed in this area. Print media publications are used periodically, as well as video and film production.

Demerits

There is no concrete effort to reach outside the ‘family’. It cannot attend to the needs of urban heterogeneous population, which need mass appeal.

Assessment

This model is foundational to any group building. It meets the needs of a growing group, in the areas of belonging, intimacy, caring for and being cared for. Above all, these communities are to be committed to living Christ’s love for everybody, a love which transcends the limits of the natural solidarity of clans, tribes or other interest groups.

Diocesan Pastoral Communication Models by Institute for Pastoral Initiates of University of Dayton

These models were identified from a survey carried out by the above institute in 1996 among the dioceses of the USA.

1. The Absence Model: Here the diocese has no formal well-defined communications office or any formal communication initiative. There might be someone who speaks on behalf of the bishop to the media, but there is no communication plan in the diocese into which the local churches would fit. Pastoral communications knowledge and skills are not totally ignored, but only taken for granted. Periodically, public relations persons, with or without theological formation are hired to attend to the communications work of the diocese. At best, the primary or only means of communications outreach is a diocesan newspaper, bulletin, newsletter or news release.

Reflection: The lack of integrated interpersonal communication skills and infomedia resources and technology affects the local Church becoming an authentic community (*communio*). It is only when the Church shares and communicates effectively does the health of the entire community improve. This can be measured in the prayerfulness, morale, creativity and collaboration.

2. The Isolation Model: This is the situation in a diocese where the communications office works independently from other ministries of the diocese. The newspaper, radio and television production and distribution, public relations and media centres are separate entities by themselves. There is no collaboration or proactive synergistic support to or from other ministries. Every ministry is in its own little kingdom, and does not dare cross into another’s. This is lack of good stewardship for the scarce diocesan resources (personnel and finance).



Reflection: The current language of media is collaboration, cooperation and common vision. In our ever changing globalised world, if the Catholic Church is to make any impact, this model of communication should be discarded.

3. The Synthesis Model: this is where diocesan newspaper, radio, television, audio and video production and media centres work under one umbrella and director. There is constant collaboration among the various heads, and they share in one common vision of communication works for the diocese. They live a win-win situation. In this model, the scarce resources (personnel and financial) are used effectively.

Reflection: The reality of working with a plan and cooperating with each other is a step in the right direction. However, there is the tendency to be inward looking and not open to newness, exploration or new forms.

4. The Basic Collaborative Model: This involves a more comprehensive integrated interdisciplinary approach and understanding of pastoral communications and ministry. This is where the diocesan communications personnel actively approach the catechetical ministers, Catholic school personnel, justice and peace ministers and parish leaders on how to effectively support their ministry with the means of social communication.

Reflection: this shift, though expensive and time consuming in the long run, helps diocesan communications efforts. It works mostly in the mass media areas like the Internet where both intra-diocesan and inter-diocesan communications are made worldwide.

5. The Interdisciplinary Model: Here, Communications is central to the mission of the diocesan and there is a well defined pastoral communications plan being pursued. It even extends to inter-diocesan collaboration in pastoral communications in the areas of shared personnel, financial and technical expertise and programmes in a bid to proclaim the Gospel and address issues confronting the Church and society in a region.

Reflection: since it is expensive to set up and maintain pastoral communications initiatives, a shared attitude, even at inter-diocesan level help maintain these complex infomedia structures. However, more effective collaborative paradigms of pastoral communications are needed for the 21st century.

Review

The Church models bring an aspect of richness to the church. Thus the models complement, but not exclude each other. They include: The Institutional/Hierarchical Model, the Sacramental model of the Church, The Servant model, the Model of the Church as Family, and the Diocesan Pastoral Communication Models by the Institute for Pastoral Initiates of University of Dayton..

Relevant Skills

After studying the models of communication in the Church, identify the model that is used in the Church nearest to you. In what ways can it be improved?

Resources

‘Models of the Church’ by Avery Dulles

References

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