THE NEW COMMUNICATIONS EMERGING IN THE CHURCH

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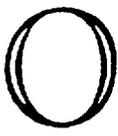
OVER THE LAST one hundred and fifty years the rise of the mass popular media and a free, pluralist pattern of public communication have had a profound influence on the way the Church communicates internally and externally. This, in turn, has brought great changes in our personal and collective expression of faith and in our forms of contemporary spirituality.

Christianity is pre-eminently a religion of communication, placing central emphasis on a divine revelation, on the Incarnation and a Church that is continually becoming incarnate in different cultures, on the mandate of proclaiming the Word of God, on the formal ecclesial community as the context of faith development, on the key role of written scriptures, and on the teaching of a tradition to succeeding generations. The vitality of the Church has depended very much on adapting its gospel witness to the forms of communication of a particular era.

The motivating source of change is often the sense of 'crisis' in the Church, the awareness that its style of communication and communicating symbols are no longer a religious inspiration to people and that Christians are sinking into worldly secularism or are being drawn into other religious or ideological movements. Two major responses of christian communities to crisis are an *intensification of internal communication* bringing members back into a union of faith and the *generation of new religious symbols* that express the cultural and religious spirit of the time. These symbols are the new communicative language both for the internal communication of the Church and for projecting a dramatic witness of the gospel to the larger society.

Jay Dolan, in *Catholic revivalism: the american experience 1830–1900*,[1] Jonathan Sperber, in *Popular Catholicism in nineteenth-century Germany*,[2]

and others have shown how the Church of the last century—in the face of rapid industrialization, great migrations of rural peasants, the liberal political movements following the American and French Revolutions and new populist styles of communication—began religious revitalizations based on the popular religious communication of the parish mission.[3] This new strategy of religious communication was closely linked with nineteenth-century conceptions of church and parish organization, with models of ministry and spirituality and with the neo-scholastic theological language of the period.

In the mid-twentieth century, with the rise of a more open, mobile society and a deepening sense of crisis of faith, the Church is again seeking new forms of communication. The major decrees of the Second Vatican Council virtually all deal with aspects of the Church's communication in a post-industrial, post-european culture. The decree on 'The Church in the Modern World', which many consider the *leitmotiv* of the Council, is concerned with a society dominated by a pluralist, secular, mass-mediated pattern of communication. Other decrees of central pastoral importance deal with liturgical language and the communicative structure of the Church. For the first time there is a major reflection on the mass media and the use of media in the Church. Subsequent encyclicals, such as 'On Evangelization in the Modern World' (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*), have presented a new theology of communicating the gospel in diverse cultures.

Where the Church of the mid-twentieth century is characterized by significant revitalization, new patterns of communication appear to be at the heart of this. Ivan Vallier, in *The Church, modernization and social control in Latin America*,[4] describes how the sense of crisis in the latin american Church in the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties led to a new communicative relationship with latin american society. This, in turn, was related to an intensification of the Church's internal communication (for example, the frequent, important meetings of Bishops, at one level, and basic christian communities, on another level), new forms of pastoral communication such as group communication and popular radio (the Church in Latin America has more than three hundred and fifty radio stations), and new contextual theological languages such as liberation theology.[5]

How does the Church change its communication?

When the Church enters a revitalization movement, one can detect at least five major dimensions of change in its styles and strategies of communication:

1   *Change in the communicative relationship of the Church to the wider society around it.*

    Christians inevitably have some role and responsibility in the changes taking place in their societies. Christian communities must seek to maintain a distinct evangelical cultural identity within a 'world' often hostile to gospel values, but at the same time must become incarnate in the secular, socio-political 'project' of society so as to make a christian contribution to this historical development. In communication terms, the corporate actions of the Church and actions of individuals associated with the Church become a public communicative symbol, a *social dramaturgy* defining for Christians the value of their own identity for that culture but also projecting a living gospel witness to the larger society.

2   *Adapting the religious language and the cultural logic of theological argument so that it is intelligible and reasonable in terms of the dominant philosophical, scientific, literary-artistic and socio-political expression of the period.*

    This means discovering a form of religious discourse which is true to the paradoxical logic and language of the gospel, but which also gives transcendent, religious meaning to the search for the meaning of human existence embodied in the world-view and ethos of a particular culture. The emergence of religious symbolism and theological method consonant with the cultural context provides new theologies of communication embedded in all areas of theology but especially in the 'general apologetics' or fundamental theology of the period.

3   *Developing a style of popular religious communication, largely within the christian community, which incorporates contemporary forms of communication and religious expression.*

    This is not just use of media, but a sacred, religious communication event—somewhat apart from everyday pragmatic existence—which brings together believers and interested non-believers to search for the 'ultimate' meaning of everyday aspirations and problems in the light of the gospel and christian theology, to come into contact with the deeper threads of

personal histories and emotions, and to become conscious of the action of God's Spirit in one's life. In short, it is an event of prayerful communication within the christian community that provides an experience of personal healing and ordering, conversion of life, deeper union with God through Christ and a stronger integration within the community of believers.

4 *New models of Church, especially new forms of local christian community.*
    The new organization of human interaction in christian communities permits the use of emerging styles of popular religious communication and extends these styles to modes of liturgical worship, catechetical instruction, governance, decision-taking and ways of bringing together the different charisms into a solidary, mutually supportive union. The new styles of popular religious communication find their most characteristic expression in 'peak' communication events such as the parish mission (in former times), various forms of encounter, cursillos, retreats, etc., but this is deepened and continued through a more formal organization of the christian community.

5 *New role models for ministry, especially priestly ministry.*
    All forms of ministry tend to adapt to new patterns of communication, but the leadership and apostolic initiative of priests and bishops will influence the degree to which the styles of communication are actually practised and encouraged. Of crucial importance is the formation of future leadership in the Church in the new theologies of communication and in the new communication skills implied in the new forms of religious communication.

It is evident that all of these aspects of the Church's communication are interrelated and that together they form a general style and strategy of communication characteristic of a particular cultural period. It is also evident, however, that something of the past is always carried over. The pace and forms of communication vary greatly in today's international, multi-cultural Church. With these provisos, the following pages will attempt to trace the emergence of typical new forms of communication out of the pre-Vatican II Church.

I THE CHURCH ADOPTS A NEW SOCIAL DRAMATURGY IN A PLURALIST, MASS-MEDIATED CULTURE

The social dramaturgy of the Church in the pre-Vatican II period:
the Church as a perfect and holy subculture in a corrupt secular society

Until the end of the eighteenth century and much later in countries where the Church formed an overwhelming majority, the Church could hope to control the flow of information and its own image in the public culture through a privileged relation with the state and through alliances with governing elites. *Cujus regio, ejus religio* was the guiding formula. The spread of the principles of the liberal society in the eighteenth century brought an increasingly pluralistic and secular public culture to elite political and intellectual circles, but the provincial towns and rural peasant villages remained largely a closed, traditional world.

In the nineteenth century, pluralism and the free marketplace of ideas began to spread among the popular classes. Industrialization drew millions of rural peasants into huge urban concentrations in Europe and America. Small farmers and artisans were mobilized into a disciplined work-force in factories and formal bureaucracies. Children and youth were socialized into the liberal, democratic industrial society through universal, compulsory education. As people of all classes and regions were brought into a single national and international system, the mass popular media appeared on the scene providing a common informational and cultural forum for all.

Many observers point to the creation of the cheap, daily press—the 'penny newspaper'—in the eighteen-thirties (and in the new cities of the United States) as the beginning of the institution of the mass media.[6] The roots are as old as the invention of the printing press, but prior to the eighteen-thirties newspapers were primarily commercial gazettes and the partisan instruments of political parties. Even with subsidies from sponsoring political or religious groups, the small circulation made them relatively expensive. Some countries, such as Britain, increased the cost with a newspaper tax, in part to prevent the spread of revolutionary ideas among a potentially volatile working class. The 'penny newspaper' aimed at mass circulation by using the 'impartial' subsidy of advertising and reducing the cost to the buying power of even the poorest. As new communication technologies were introduced, the same principles of mass-marketing were applied to

recorded sound, film, radio and television. The characteristics of the mass popular media were to have profound implications for the communicative relationship of the Church with the wider society.

1 The mass media avoided alienating potential users by remaining ostensibly a-political and a-confessional, thereby becoming a neutral, 'secular' forum for all ideas. Newspapers, especially, aimed to present 'objective facts', allowing readers of all persuasions to make their private decisions on the basis of the facts and their personal interests. On the democratic, liberal principle that more information means more equitable and more legitimate public decisions, the media took every newsworthy event to be made public, investigated, explained, analyzed, debated and decided upon before the whole nation. The media defended the legitimacy of their own privileged freedom by presenting themselves as the defenders of the public interest and the iconoclastic critic of the arrogant, powerful and aristocratic. In this 'marketplace of ideas', what the majority would 'buy' gained the stamp of truth and moral approval. News, the ebb and flow of public opinion and fashion began to crowd out other forms of traditional authority as the basis of forming personal and public value commitments. If any religious group or other movement wished to 'sell' their ideas, they had to learn the social dramaturgy of the free, neutral mass media without appearing to be crude, manipulative propaganda.

2 The new media left behind the learned, didactic style and adapted to the newspaper or other format the enjoyable, easily understood popular forms of oral, face-to-face *entertainment*. People have always entertained themselves by exchanging town gossip about sensational crimes, disasters, the spectacular activities of the wealthy and aristocratic, major public debates and the battles of war. This became the 'news' of the popular press. All genres of popular story-telling—from heroic adventures to ghost stories—became newspaper short stories, serialized novels or format of film, radio and television. Similarly, sports, humour, advice on folk medicine and other forms of entertainment were adapted to media formats.

Industrialization brought a sharp demarcation of life into periods of highly mobilized work and evenings, week-ends or holiday periods of leisure. Leisure was the time one could do

what one liked and think one's own thoughts. With increasing standards of living, there has been greater emphasis on consumption and leisure as the more fully human, free and subjectively expressive area of life. Since the mass media became defined as entertainment and a major leisure-time activity, they have provided a time when people could leave behind work and pragmatic concerns, allow their imaginations to roam free, reflect on alternative worlds presented by the media, and search for their own personal meaning of life. The vivid combination of music, dramatic dialogue and visual images in cinema, television and rock music have attuned imaginations to the subjectively expressive, the ecstatic and the exotic experience.[7]

The mass media—even news—are essentially a story-telling, narrative discourse built around the classical structure of folk tale and myth. The media sweep up new information and organize it within the frame of a suspenseful plot, clearly delineated heroes and villains and hopeful outcomes.[8] People come to the media with worries, questions and confusion in the back of their minds; the media present ordered formats of meaning which leave us reassured about the ultimate orderly meaning of the world. Popular moralistic and religious symbolism and popular conceptions of the meaning of life have always been profoundly influenced by folk-tale and myth. Today, the popular religious imagination draws much of its symbolism from the mass media.

3   Every society finds a way to repeat and reaffirm its mythical conceptions of history that give the society a collective sense of destiny, and today we do this largely through the mass media. But the media can fill newspaper and broadcasting space and hold audiences only if they present continually new information, new songs, new jokes and a new twist on old plots. Thus, we are bombarded with new scientific information and with new world-views of foreign cultures or our own exotic subcultures. The traditional wisdom is constantly being questioned and lifetime beliefs and commitments become increasingly difficult before so many alternative meanings of life.

The full implications of a pluralist, mass-mediated culture have unfolded slowly over the last one hundred and fifty years, but the initial shock and hostility of the Church to the new socio-cultural

reality is vividly reflected in a paragraph of the encyclical, *Mirari Vos*, published by Pope Gregory XVI on August 15, 1832:

> Here belongs that vile and never sufficiently execrated and detestable freedom of the press for the diffusion of all sorts of writings: a freedom which, with so much insistence, they dare to demand and promote. We are horrified, venerable brothers, contemplating what monstrosities of doctrine, or better, what monstrosities of error are everywhere disseminated in a great multitude of books, pamphlets, written documents—small certainly in their size but enormous in their malice—from which goes out over the face of the earth that curse which we lament.[9]

The attempts of the Church to control the mass media or forbid the faithful to use the media were ultimately a self-defeating social dramaturgy, because they justified the accusations of liberal intellectuals and politicians that the Church was an obscurantist, inquisitorial foe of human freedom and creativity. Gradually throughout the nineteenth century the Church developed a new strategy of relationship with modern culture: forming a parallel catholic subculture in which Catholics could live a catholic version of modernity.[10] The Church fostered a separate structure of schools, labour unions, political parties, youth movements and other occupational and age organizations. Along with this, the Church established its own 'good' media, and monitored the use of the popular media by the faithful—especially in seminaries and religious houses—with a Legion of Decency or other rating systems. The hostility of liberal, anti-clerical or protestant elites to the participation of Catholics in many areas of public life reinforced the tendency simply to ignore the society as a whole except where it touched on catholic interests.

In the face of the attractive modernity of the liberal society with its appeal for free exploration of new ideas and quick response to new styles of life, the Church developed a social dramaturgy presenting itself as a more perfect subsociety upholding traditional order, preserving the timeless wisdom of the past and maintaining the institutions of family and community. The thomistic revival sought to organize all human knowledge as a logically interrelated system of eternal verities in contrast with the shifting hypotheses and agnosticism of pragmatic empirical positivism. Catholic social teaching provided harmonious, certain answers to all human and

social problems in contrast to endless interest-group debate and revolutionary agitation. The identification of Catholicism with a european tradition of high culture, of harmonious form in art and literature, tended to brand the popular, mass-mediated culture as vulgar, tainted with licentiousness and unworthy of serious consideration. The waves of prestigious converts confirmed a theology of culture which viewed catholic culture as the reflection of the supernatural in history and the secular as the reflection of unredeemed nature.

The Church commits itself to the development of the whole of society

In the period after World War II, new theologies of culture saw God's redeeming action not as something above the secular process of historical evolution but working through the process of secular socio-economic-political development. Many also began to see expressions of secular, popular culture in film, novels and television as sources of the religious imagination in contemporary culture.

The Second Vatican Council encouraged a new social dramaturgy: the fullest involvement of Christians in the human and social development of the larger society. The Church accepted the fact of a pluralist society and proposed that Catholics join forces with other religious and secular groups in the difficult public search and struggle for a more just and human order for all people, Catholics and non-Catholics alike. The Church also accepted the fact of a mass-mediated culture and sought to build a social dramaturgy based on gospel witness but working through a free, public, secular mass communications that the Church itself does not control. Instead of a sectarian, triumphalist image, the Church entered the public debate making the paradox of its powerlessness, simplicity and commitment to the poor the basis of socio-ethical witness in an affluent, consumer-oriented society. Instead of dependence on its own catholic political parties and other alliances with powerful elites, the Church makes a radical affirmation of the dignity and freedom of the person in a society which exalts the impersonal capitalistic efficiency of the multinational corporation or the impersonal rationalism of state bureaucracy.[11]

This social dramaturgy is anchored in a type of faith-reflection which takes as its starting-point not just catholic tradition but a prayerful analysis of God's redeeming action revealed in the contemporary efforts to build a more human and just order in

society. The christian community attempts to identify those sym-
bols and actions in the culture which seem close to the way Christ
would act in this situation. Being a 'good Catholic' does not mean
passing into a separate catholic culture or trying to straddle a
dichotomy of ritual devotion and secular life activities, but becom-
ing immersed in the culture and living out the meaning of the
gospel in that culture. These actions are often assumed with full
consciousness of their potential symbolic and dramatic significance
in a mass-mediated culture, but in a culture accustomed to the
technique of propaganda, advertising and public relations, the
paradox of the gospel and transcendence is most often revealed in
the symbols of utterly selfless and disinterested love such as a
Mother Teresa or an Archbishop Romero.

The most important presence of the Church in the media is not
necessarily the media that the Church itself produces, but the role
that religious faith and Catholicism are given in the folk-tale,
narrative discourse of mass media which reproduce the myths,
world views and values of the culture. The Church's use of the
media for explicitly religious messages has an important part to
play, but it is usually 'narrowcasting', followed by an audience of
convinced Christians for their own religious inspiration or for the
internal communication of the Church.

Today, the major pastoral statements of the Church such as the
documents of Medellín and Puebla in Latin America or the
statements of the bishops in the United States on peace and the
economy attempt to offer socio-ethical leadership for the whole of
society and call Christians to express their faith not simply by
building up the institutional structure of the Church but by working
to realize the highest socio-cultural-political ideals of the country
or region. The preparation of these statements often invites the
whole christian community to articulate its integration of faith and
life, and the deliberations are often carried out in the full glare of
the mass media.

II NEW THEOLOGIES OF COMMUNICATION BASED
ON LOCAL CULTURAL SYMBOLISM

*The neo-scholastic theology of communication: the Church as universal,
authoritative teacher*

The neo-scholastic general apologetic and ecclesiology were con-
sonant with the dominant conceptions of communication, a culture
extolling rational positivism, and the Church's social dramaturgy

of a holy subculture. At the heart of the neo-scholastic theological synthesis was the model of Church as the authoritative teacher established by Christ to communicate the divine truths entrusted to it in apostolic times. People might attain some knowledge of the ultimate meaning of life by reason alone, but complete and unerring wisdom was to be found in the doctrine of the Church. The divine knowledge is made known by means of words and intelligible concepts—not, for example, in imaginative, emotional experience—and this knowledge is summarized in clear, concise written formulas in the bible or in the teaching of the Church. The act of faith necessary for salvation is an assent to these divinely revealed propositions communicated by hearing.[12] These propositions were considered to be above history and cultural contexts and to be universally and univocally applicable as a guide to faith and morals in all cultural and historical contexts.

As Dulles points out, the neo-scholastic theology of revelation was a powerful base for the solidarity of the Church and an aggressive preaching of the Word of God.[13] The acceptance of the propositional formulas encouraged loyalty to foundational documents and traditions of the Church, and was a clear indicator of the uniqueness and superiority of Catholicism in all cultural contexts. Catholics had a sense of world-wide common identity and there was a clear distinction of believers and non-believers. Evangelization and conversion were simplified because people knew exactly what to believe. With the certitude that the formulas of doctrine are of divine origin and necessary for salvation, the Church had strong motivation to proclaim, teach and use the media as instruments and to send missionaries to all parts of the world.

The conception of the Church as authoritative teacher fitted the rhetorical, didactic views of communication and the definition of the media as the sacred trust of an elite to inform, teach and instil good tastes of entertainment. Popular views attributed to the media an almost unlimited power to change attitudes.[14] Backed by the new behavioural psychology and methods of public opinion surveys, governments and corporations were attracted to the use of media for propaganda, advertising and directive education. The Churches, too, saw the media as a powerful means of proselytization.

Symbolic discourse and local theologies as a more appropriate language of religious communication

The reasons for the breakdown of the neo-scholastic theologies of communication are complex, but central to the process were

the biblical and historical studies which argued that the exact written formulas of doctrine were not in themselves identical with divine knowledge but also reflected the literary genres, historical circumstances and cultural context of the time.[15] Although the insistence on the clear, concise, conceptual nature of doctrine may have responded to the rationalism of the nineteenth century, it became clear that the communicative discourse of the bible and religion in general rests more on the connotative, evocative power of imagery, symbols, parable and myth. The assent of faith is rarely a purely intellectual process or a simple acceptance of authoritative teaching on the basis of supernatural signs. Underlying the inspiration of faith is an intuitive, imaginative convergence of meaning which is motivated by religious symbols and which organises the meaning of individual lives and whole cultures around ultimate meaning and mystery.[16]

More recent theologies of revelation suggest that the most characteristic and appropriate expression of religious experience is symbolic language.[17] The multifaceted, connotative nature of symbols brings together in a unified pattern of meaning a wide range of human knowledge and experience: analytic science and philosophy, the literary imagination, the subconscious and every-day common-sense solutions. Symbolism is also an intentional language which holds out an ideal to be attained and which admits the role of values, emotional motivation and a gradual search for ultimate, all-encompassing meaning. The emphasis on the symbolic, imaginative dimension in religious discourse points up the importance of mythic conceptions of history, narrative, parable, paradox and ritual for the organization of meaning in the assent of faith. This has brought out the importance for religious communication of symbolism in liturgical worship, in religious art and in music. It also became apparent that many of the symbols of the religious imagination have their origin in contemporary poetry, novels, film and in more popular arts such as television.[18] This builds a bridge between theology and mass-mediated culture.

Many leaders in the Church were also concerned that the pastoral communication implicit in the neo-scholastic theology of revelation and ecclesiology reduced the mysteries of the faith to formulas to be accepted and memorized in rote fashion. The great liturgical and biblical symbols did not play a role in the religious experience of Catholics as it had in the lives of early Christians.

Most Catholics built their religiosity around the popular devotions to Mary, the Sacred Heart and various saints.

Already in the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties the liturgical and biblical movements encouraged the laity toward a spirituality centred around the great mysteries of the history of salvation celebrated in the liturgical year. Homiletics and catechetics gradually began to shift from instruction and exhortation regarding the doctrinal and moralistic formulas of Church teaching to reflection on the meaning of the biblical passages in one's daily life. This kind of pastoral communication did not provide explicit formulas for belief but allowed the Word of God to suggest how to live a christian life in particular contexts.

This, combined with group discussion methods such as the 'see, judge and act' approach of Catholic Action, encouraged Catholics to take as the starting point, not the received theology, but their socio-cultural context and to ask how the group could give witness to the gospel and reproduce the actions of Christ in this context.[19] The success of this method encouraged the development of small face-to-face groups under the parish-level organisation, especially in Africa, Asia and India where the Church had a strong movement of evangelization or re-evangelization as in the case of Latin America.

These groups tended to develop their own theological analysis of the evil inherent in their context, the theological explanation of the apostolic actions of the group, and the conceptions of their action in terms of biblical symbols such as the Kingdom or the primitive community of Christians. Priests and theologians working with these groups began to articulate and systematize these local theologies, and their experience convinced them this was a more appropriate theological method because it linked faith and life.

Theology has always had its roots in popular religiosity, but a number of factors tended to elevate the practice of basic christian communities to the level of a new method of developing theological language and a new pattern of communication in the Church.[20] The Second Vatican Council encouraged greater participation of the laity and an expression of faith in terms of action in the secular world. Biblical and historical studies showed that the doctrinal formulas of the Church had also evolved out of the historical contexts of christian communities. In the climate of the national independence movements of former colonial dependencies after World War II, the Church recognized the importance of respecting

local cultures and encouraging indigenous religious expressions adapted to the local language and culture. In summary, the Church has begun to recognize the origins of theological language and religious symbolism in local christian communities and the articulation of these local theologies by professional theologians and episcopal conferences.

III A NEW FORMAT OF POPULAR RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION: EXPRESSIVE, PARTICIPATORY ENCOUNTER IN SMALL GROUPS

The revitalization movements of the Catholic Church from 1830 to approximately 1950 were carried out very largely through the conversion experience of the parish missions.[21] The mission was often the means of bringing into the nineteenth-century pattern of parish organization the peasant immigrants scattered in new industrial centres and across the frontiers of new lands. In a period when effective communication meant great oratory, the missioners learned to use dramatic rhetorical techniques to cause a profound response of emotion and conviction. The content of the central sermons of the mission—an adaptation of the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius—were an important factor in establishing the belief system and religious practice of the period. This meant strong adherence to codes of morality, regular confession and communion, acceptance of the authority of the Church and involvement in devotional organizations.

After World War II, the attractiveness of this communication format and form of religious discourse suddenly fell off. The religious faith and practice of older people whose religious identity had been formed by this type of popular religious communication continued on, but it made little sense to a younger generation born into a new cultural context.

The Catholic Church is still searching for an effective form of religious communication attuned to the changes which have followed the Second Vatican Council. But where there has been religious revitalization, it has often occurred in the context of smaller groups using a participatory, expressive style of communication. In some parts of the world, this is demonstrated in the spread of prayer groups, the charismatic renewal, bible discussion groups, the meetings of religious activists seeking social change and various types of basic christian communities. In some cases religious renewal has been through the highly expressive *cursillo de*

Cristiandad, marriage encounter, forms of youth encounter, marriage preparation encounters, or through groups of people with special problems such as alcoholism, mental illness or adaptation to the divorced state.

In all of these more recent forms of religious communication there are a number of common elements: an open, intimate expression of personal religious experience and of affective prayer; an accepting, healing and integrating response from other members of the group; a non-directive, 'animator' style of group leadership, providing little content but encouraging expressive participation; a more informal para-liturgical or sacramental celebration, intending truly to 'celebrate' the sense of unity found in each other, in the experience of the action of the Holy Spirit and in the presence of Christ; an attempt to link the expressions of faith and biblical reflection to actions of service in the community or family.

In some cases, this style of religious communication has been strongly influenced by Freire's dialogical, 'consciousness-raising' form of group discussion. In this, participants are encouraged to become aware of their unthinking dependency on the cultural environment and to see themselves as active participants in the creation of culture and history. 'Group media' such as audio-visuals, which reflect the cultural environment or introduce a theme, are often used as the 'text' around which the discussion of the socio-cultural environment is developed. In contexts of great social inequalities, the aim is awareness of the imposition of cultural patterns by powerful elites. Since the media are perceived as having such an important role in the creation of culture, participants are encouraged to be active in gaining access to the media or in creating their own 'popular media'. In more affluent societies where many people are heavy users of television, 'media education'—raising consciousness of the influence of advertising and the media in general on cultural and religious values—is increasingly important.[22]

Many of the more traditional forms of pastoral communication have been influenced by this more participatory, dialogical and expressive style. The Sunday liturgies encourage participation and even dialogue. Instead of preached retreats, we have one-to-one guided retreats or group retreats with dialogue and intimate revelation of one's spiritual life. Catechetics, too, use largely discussion group methods and employ media as basis for reflection

rather than an aid to the traditional, directive, teacher-centred methods.

It is significant that the most successful (in terms of audiences) religious use of the mass media also incorporates this style of popular religious communication. The programming of the evangelical fundamentalist television stars is transferred directly from the context of the charismatic 'tent revival' with its dramatic personal witnessing, accounts of conversion, healings and congregational music. Even more important than the broadcasts is the encouragement of letter correspondence, reading of dramatic letters and massive computerized response to letters. Many programmes have a direct telephone counselling service, pilgrimages to the broadcasting station and a flourishing service of books and pamphlets.[23]

One of the most effective catholic uses of media is the 'popular radio' model in Latin America and in the Philippines. These radio stations have gained large audiences in a largely catholic population by becoming the 'voice of the voiceless' and encouraging many kinds of direct participation. Different groups in the audience—labour unions, peasant organisations, youth groups, lay leaders of basic christian communities—are given time slots and allowed to produce their own programmes. Many stations use neighbourhood reporters who supply 'alternative' information regarding injustices and problems of the poor which would not ordinarily be broadcast through more official or commercial channels.

Underlying this trend toward more dialogical, expressive styles of communication is the rise of what Bernice Martin has called 'the expressive culture', especially since the countercultural movements of the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies.[24] In Martin's view the increasing use of the mass media, most notably rock music and television, accustomed people to a more imaginative, emotional, freer type of culture. At the same time, the decline of the importance of the extended family and local community in mass, urban society has led people to search for community and more intimate expression in a religious context.

IV   A COMMUNITARIAN ECCLESIAL STRUCTURE

As Dulles suggests in his *Models of the Church*, there has always been a variety of organizational patterns, ecclesiologies and symbolic images of Church present in the Church simultaneously. In different historical circumstances, one model or set of models of

Church tends to be more dominant and this model of Church is closely associated with changing styles of communication in the culture and in the Church itself.[25]

In the post-reformation period and especially in the nineteenth century the Church felt itself to be in a state of siege, and the response was to seek a solidarity in a more centralized, clerically dominated control. The Church also entered into a very zealous missionary phase. The pattern of communication was the didactic, 'broadcasting' model which emphasized the sending of messages in order to gain specific effects in relatively passive receivers.

Following the Second Vatican Council, a more participatory, dialogical and horizontal type of communication began to develop within the Church. This is evidenced, for example, in the increased role of episcopal collegiality, the importance of regional or national episcopal conferences, collective pastoral planning among clergy and lay leaders, parish councils, a more participatory liturgy, and consultations with the clergy and laity in the preparation of pastoral policy statements. This changing pattern of communication is related to the way different classical models and symbolic images of Church are expressed in ecclesiology and in the practice of the Church.

In the conception of the Church as Mystical Communion, there is in contemporary ecclesiologies a strong emphasis on rich and satisfying primary relationships founded on mutual understanding and love. The model of mutual interdependence of the members of the Church is that of sharing the charismatic gifts of the Spirit. The union of the Church is that of a great community made up of many interlocking communities. In terms of contemporary science of communications, the model of communication is ritual communion in which all members of the society participate in creating, celebrating, transforming their collective destiny.

In the contemporary practice and consciousness of Catholics, the model of Church as sacramental sign of the saving presence and action of Christ is particularly important. Today, many feel that the Church is a real sign of the love of Christ only if there is a living experience of love and mutual support in the small Christian communities where there is face-to-face interaction. The witness of love among Christians is a far more effective form of evangelization than aggressive proselytization or logical, intellectual arguments. People will be attracted to the Church (or back to the Church) if they can experience the healing, expressive love and

human support that an impersonal society does not offer. Indeed, many are distrustful of the use of mass media, especially a proselytization type of broadcast, because they feel that the mass media are manipulative. Forms of small group communication are much more true to the spirit of the gospel. The inclination toward a type of witnessing that leaves people free has left the Church today full of doubt about how it should communicate the Word of God to non-believers and carry on missionary activity.

The Second Vatican Council emphasized that the Church is in the world not to be served but to serve; the model of Church as servant to the development of the society around it is now one of the dominant images. The ecclesiological method typical of this model of Servant Church is, according to Dulles, secular-dialogic:

> secular, because the Church takes the world as a properly theological locus, and seeks to discern the signs of the time; dialogic, because it seeks to operate on the frontier between the contemporary world and the Christian tradition (including the Bible), rather than simply applying the latter as a measure of the former.[26]

There are two dimensions of communication implied in this model: the continuing collective discernment among Christians regarding the cultural values and societal projects of the changing historical context—a discernment typical of the recent pastoral letters of the bishops; secondly, the dialogue of the Church and the secular, pluralist, mass-mediated culture through types of social dramaturgy. As Dulles noted in his essay, 'The Church is Communication', the secular-dialogic ecclesiology is particularly attuned to the mass media of today.[27]

Finally, the institutional model of Church is today experienced less as a hierarchical monarchy and more as a formal organization or bureaucracy. The institutional dimension of the Church is governed by the principles of organizational communication, but the more crucial problems are ones of freedom of public debate and articulation of public opinion within this organisational structure.

V   A NEW PRIESTLY IDENTITY: FASHIONING SYMBOLS OF FAITH

Although the new forms of religious communication and ecclesial organization emphasize a ministering *community* and a variety of ministries, the priestly role remains central both in the formation

of christian community and in the communication of the Church. The identity of the priest centres on making Christ present in the christian community through the ministry of the word, the liturgy and sacraments and Christ-like love in pastoral activities. Priestly identity is essentially communicating Christ. The particular style of priestly communication, however, is related to the contemporary forms of religious communication.

The nineteenth-century religious revival movements tended to replace a popular cultural Catholicism with one of more formal belief and practice. The priest assumed a central role as teacher and administrator in the parish, directing many aspects of popular religious culture such as pilgrimages formerly under the initiative of the laity. The priest was given a fund of unchanging doctrine in the seminary and with this, through a lifetime, he instructed the faithful and answered all questions of faith and morals.

In the period around the Second World War, the Church in some european countries began to experience a widespread crisis of the nineteenth-century forms of popular Catholicism. Much of the early response focussed precisely on the identity of the priest as communicator. Experiments such as the french priest-worker movement encouraged the priest to be more sensitive to the not-so-orthodox religious experiences of the laity and to develop a new language and symbolism more closely related to the diverse occupational or class-based subcultures. In the nineteen-fifties many young priests and lay leaders began to be interested in a more participatory liturgy, the introduction of group animation methods, a lay-oriented theology—all of which implied a different communication style on the part of the priest. The Second Vatican Council indirectly and hesitatingly encouraged many aims of these movements. But, given the fact that the priest had occupied such a rigidly central and directive role in the life of the Church, what ensued was often wholesale confusion regarding the identity of the priest in the Church and the role of the priest as communicator.

In a recent article in a series discussing the seminary and the identity of the priest in the United States, Robert Leavitt points out that since the Second Vatican Council the identity of the priest as cultic leader and teacher has languished.[28] The pastoral ideal of service, popular as a priestly model in the nineteen-seventies, simply overburdened the priest with additional tasks of counselling and social work and led away from basic forms of ministry in the christian community. Leavitt notes the model of priest as leader

and co-ordinator of charisms in the life of the community, but
suggests that what is essential in this leadership is spiritual vision.

Spiritual vision, for Leavitt, is the ability to identify and to
articulate with the christian community images of hope which are
capable of galvanising the spiritual imagination and motivation of
a group. Leavitt would highlight, in the contemporary identity of
the priest, the Ministry of the Word. By this he means

> the spiritual art of fashioning new metaphors of faith that are both
> faithful to divine revelation and practically meaningful for this
> group of Christians. The priest does this by simultaneous attention
> to God's Word and our human experience, and by the continuing
> effort to put into new words what both teach us.[29]

John Shea observes that when people are trying to make sense
out of their lives, especially in moments of crisis that shatter a
routine pattern of meaning, they search for a motivating ideal and
a symbolism which will bring the history of their lives back into
focus.[30] These are moments when individuals and communities
are especially open to the grace that links their lives to ultimate
meaning and mystery. Often, however, they do not find in the
inherited language of the Church the symbolism which is
sufficiently close to contemporary culture and the particularities of
their experience. Shea suggests that to bridge the chasm between
the inherited language and contemporary religious experience, we
need to fashion 'rope ladders' of intermediate cultural symbols
which are both experiential and christian in meaning.

The priest does not invent religious symbols in an intentional
manner; these symbols emerge out of the experience of the individ-
ual and communal search for meaning to guide a course of action.
The priest is sacramental in that he makes the saving action of
Christ present in the midst of people's attempts to build individual
and collective histories. But, to be a sacrament in this broad sense,
the outward sign must be intelligible in terms of the culture of
that people. This requires of the priest inculturation, that is, an
insertion into communication networks of the culture to grasp the
source of information, symbols and meaning in people's lives.

If the preparation of the priest in the past meant providing a
fund of sound doctrine with which to give more formal guidance
to people already filled with a catholic culture, today the prep-
aration of the priest must stress a deep personal experience of the

saving action of Christ and a cultivated sensitivity to the cultural symbols of a given community. In our contemporary mass-mediated culture, this means, above all, a sensitivity to the symbols, myths and folk-tale plots of the mass media which are such an important source for the religious imagination today.

Conclusion

These reflections have attempted to detect in more systematic form the manifestations of a new communications emerging in the Church. The new styles and strategies of communication are rarely the result of the conscious planning of a small group of experts, but are the responses of Christians all over the world. At the same time, new formats and approaches to communicating the gospel never develop without a great deal of analysis and consensus building, especially among the leaders of the Church. Jay Dolan, in his study of the parish mission format of popular religious communication in the United States, notes that from 1829 to 1900 there were thirty-five major conciliar meetings of bishops—in spite of the difficult transportation of a sprawling frontier society.[31] Once it was discovered that the parish mission was a good form of reviving the faith and creating a structure of parish communities, religious congregations put their most able people to work in this and new religious congregations were formed for this purpose. There was an outpouring of manuals on how to give parish missions effectively. Seminaries began to focus theological formation and training in communication skills on abilities in popular preaching.

As the Church searches for a new communications today, we can expect a similar intensification of analysis and planning. Again, we will find a focussing of priorities and the preparation of apostolic personnel in the direction of the new context of communication.

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