

THE PROS AND CONS OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

To foster encounters between people through information-sharing, social communication is open to the Church's mission. Sadly, these encounters are confronted by debased use of communication-media which prevents effective communication. The researcher used Multimedia Theoretical Framework to assess the situation of the use of the means of Social Communication in the Mission of the Church in Nigeria. Through the qualitative method of study, it was discovered that despite the rich extant documents of the Church on effective use of the means of communication, there is a wrong understanding of communication, lack of will-power to incarnate media use into the Nigerian pastoral context and suspicion concerning the use of virtual reality. Engaging the media of communication, supporting the Directorate of Social Communications and establishing a National Pastoral Plan were recommended for efficient use of social communication in the mission of the Church in Nigeria. It concluded that shying away from engaging the media for the purposes of evangelisation amounts to playing the ostrich which has dire consequences.

Keywords: Church, Communication, Mission, Nigeria, Social.

Introduction

From telephone to the telegraph and radio of the twentieth century, the twenty-first century has ushered in a wide range of communication tools which place the entire globe within the range of messages which bridge cultural differences. In addition to cellular phones, voice mail and automatic dialling, the century has added the dimension of video and computerised data to the traditional voice phone making it a blend of telephone, television, computer and many more (Qubein,1997,p.135). These advances in technology are rethinking the way we communicate as well as the means of communication which we use daily. While this is operational in the secular sphere, it also affects the Church because without the society, there is no Church.

From *inter merifica* through *communio et progressio*, Social Communication has been employed in the Mission of the Church. Over the years, Social Communication has enabled the Church to enlarge the possibilities of encounters between people. Often times, these encounters which unfold through dialogue, mutual understanding and reconciliation disclose the great potentials which Social Communication offers. What is more, the avalanche of

opportunities the media of communication places at the disposal of the Church further reveals the importance of good communication in the salvific ministry. It has been argued that technology is a resource which the Church must wisely use to accomplish the Great Commission (Stetzer, 2014).

Perhaps due to its riches, the Church has always used the means of communication as a vehicle for transmitting her mission. This is borne out of the fact that she sees communication as a human achievement and potential that can be harnessed in furtherance of the gospel message. Of particular importance to new evangelisation is the spiritual significance of the means of communication. It serves the mission of the Church through evoking the power of words and gestures to resolve misunderstandings, heal memories, build bridges of peace and communication as well as touches the very fabric of human existence, which is the soul. Perhaps that is why John Paul II calls the media “the first *areopagus* of modern times” that is, the market place of ideas through which the questions about life and the existence of God are thematised and discussed (Communication for Pastoral Formation, 1999,p.131).

In the overall scheme of things, good communication through whatever medium brings about harmony in a world that is polarized by so many divisive commentaries on the social networks. In Nigeria, the new media platforms are daily offering the Church through young people avenues of bringing the good news to others. Many parishes, dioceses and sodalities have WhatsApp groups, Facebook Chat Groups, Instagram Accounts, and Twitter handles amongst other forms of new media which they use in reaching out to their members especially those who are unable to come to Church for serious reasons like sickness (Dyikuk, 2017, p.44). “All of this raises the very delicate issue of global governance. Technologically, we are living in a totally globalized world, so no matter where you are you receive the same e-mails and so on” (Allen, 2006).

This is aside from the various Social Communications’ Secretariats in every Archdiocese and Diocese which remains the image maker of the local Church. At the national level, the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) through the Directorate of Social Communications is the mouth-piece of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN). The body is at the fore front of making press releases on behalf of the Catholic Church in Nigeria and using both the print and electronic media to carry out the mission of the Church. It is to be seen whether the Church in Nigeria has exhausted the options at its disposal in using the media of communications to expand God’s kingdom.

Problem, Aim and Significance of the Study

Despite some of the enormous benefits which the media of social communications offers the Church in Nigeria, there is an apparent apathy in the embracing both the print and electronic media in the evangelisation process. Notable among the reasons is, first, the wrong understanding of communication. Before now, the belief that interpersonal communication was an absolute in terms of reaching out to the faithful was strong among the clergy. Traditional means of communication such as verbal communication through interpersonal and group communication sessions like preaching and catechesis (Ihejirika, 2010), talks and seminars were considered as sufficient means of fast-tracking the mission of the Church. Although *inter merifica* had opened the way for engaging the media of communication for evangelisation purposes, the slowness in embracing modern means of communication such as print, electronic and new media as a veritable compliment to interpersonal and group communication left the Church in Nigeria in the woods.

Second, the lack of will-power to incarnate the media into the Nigerian pastoral context is another sad reality that has remained a clog in the wheel of progress regarding using the means of communication in the mission of the Church in Nigeria. Using the means of social communication involves finances and infrastructure. Apparently, many dioceses are not willing to spend huge sums of money in employing the media to spread the gospel. This is where the Pentecostals are giving the Catholic Church a run for its money. Apart from the fact that they exploit the media for propaganda, they engage print, electronic and new media to not only bully the Catholic Church but counteract very good catholic teachings. The Catholic Church has lost some members, no thanks to televangelism.

Third, in a country where Pentecostal Spirituality is increasingly becoming attractive due to the media activities of jet-pastor's who flaunt their wealth and showcase a modern-Christianity which has zero tolerance for suffering or the Cross of Jesus, the Catholic Church has suffered a big blow. Someone rightly observes: "Across Nigeria, Catholic churches are increasingly competing for membership with other Christian denominations, particularly large charismatic Pentecostal churches. And a growing number of students in Nigeria choose to straddle Catholicism and Pentecostalism: They attend Mass while at home with their parents but are involved with Pentecostal movements on campus" (Unah, 2017).

Ihejirika (2009,p.19) concurs to the above summation when he noted that one of the defining characteristics of Pentecostal Christianity is the appropriation and use of modern media technologies as part of their religious ritual practice. The coldness in using the same platforms to either correct the anomaly or

preach the Christianity of the Cross as taught and lived by Jesus of Nazareth often results in mass exodus of youths from the Church.

Fourth, just like an erstwhile attitude of the Universal Church regarding politics, there has been “traditional suspicion” concerning the use of virtual reality for the gospel. This attitude has affected the way and manner the Church in Nigeria has approached the use of the means of communication in fulfilling the universal mission of the Church. Perhaps the question that needs to be asked is, will embracing virtual reality by the Church truncate interpersonal and group communication which aims at reaching out to others in a deep expression of love as expressed in the gospels? Well, the point has been made that the availability of state-of-the-art media platforms offers the Church veritable opportunities for using the media to its advantage. It is yet to be seen how the means of communication can be channels for fostering the Church’s mission in the Church in Nigeria.

The study aims at:

1. X-raying the pros and cons of social communication in the mission of the Church in Nigeria.
2. Highlighting why the Church in Nigeria has not fulfilled its mandate regarding the use of the means of communication for evangelisation.
3. Stating some of the dangers of the media which might affect the spread of the gospel.
4. Proposing the necessary steps required for engaging the means of communication in the mission of the Church.
5. Making a case for more research on what the Church stands to miss if it does not use print, electronic and new media for new evangelisation.

The significance of the study stems from the fact that we are in an era of e-governance. Since the demands of an e-world stare the Church in the face, it cannot be indifferent in exploiting every avenue Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) present towards the spread of the gospel. The paper is relevant because the signs of the time are both digitally compelling and technologically enticing. Since communication experts are calling people to develop new products and services to take advantage of new technologies (Qubein,1997,p.136) why should the Church stand aloof and watch?

Deconstruction of Concepts Social Communication

Social communication is the communication of and in human society which includes all ways and means of communicating within a community (Eilers, no date, p.1). For Guo and Sanchez, communication is the creation or

exchange of thoughts, ideas, emotions and understanding between sender(s) and receiver(s) (2005, p.83). Eilers quotes Giorgio Braga as opining that “social communication is the study of communicative processes within society” while insisting that it is concerned with the “interactions of human beings in their public expressions within a respective society or cultural group” (Eilers, unpublished article, no date, 1). The first step to communicate in a rapidly changing society and also improve skills is the awareness of the need to communicate (Maurus, 2010,p.10). Olusola (2013,p.6) agrees that communication goes beyond just passing of information when he noted that it involves the whole person and everything it takes to build a community of persons.

There is a difference between the word “communications” and “communication.” “The word communications, with “S” at the end is often used to indicate communication and mass media with developments in modern technologies” while communication without “S” at the end “...is a process of sharing between humans” (Scrapickal, 2012, p.15). As such, in the context of this paper, social communication embraces the means of communication which concerns all ways and possibilities by which people express, share and transmit messages or information of any kind (Communication for Pastoral Formation, 1999, p.107). This includes, print, electronic and new media platforms.

According to Atoyebi (2015, p.2) this confusion is rife in Church circles where some people think that being a communication expert is only about becoming an editor of the diocesan newspaper. He further argues that “it is rather, about offering systematic communication insight and coordinating the communication life of the Church towards building an authentic and a witnessing community” (Atoyebi, 2015, p.2). This means that communication is an art and a theological concept. This makes social communication the first course in the theological sciences (Dyikuk, 2018, p.65).

This further implies that the witnessing of priests, religious and the laity is also communication. Marshall McLuhan has reminded contemporary society of how word-centered and printed centered it tends to be instead of making channel, communication and communicator relate with the receiver (Ogwuche, 2014). As communicators, the people of God especially priests have a prophetic role to play in the society through the use of audio-visual aids and biblical literary devices at their disposal such as myths, poetry, hymns, parables, apocalypse, genealogies etcetera, to create spiritual consciousness among the people they are called to minister to.

Mission

In the context of this study, mission is understood as that sacred task entrusted to the Church by the Lord to preach, teach and sanctify the world. Mission takes its roots from the Great Commission Christ entrusted to his apostles and to the Church (Matthew 28:16-20). There are two types of mission: *mission ad intra* and *mission ad extra*. The former means mission within the church in terms of preaching and catechesis and engaging Pious Societies in various missionary enterprises, while the latter has to do with engaging in ecumenism with Christians of other faith and dialogue with Muslims.

Church

The Church is the mystical body of Christ. Established by Christ on the apostles (Matthew 16:18 & 18:18), the Church was born on the day of Pentecost. As the bride of Christ, the Church is identified by four marks namely: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. The Church is understood as an assembly of God's holy people which has a Local Ordinary (the bishop) who with his priests, religious and laity form the people of God under the visible leadership of the Supreme Pontiff.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Multimedia Theoretical Framework which involves the use of various media platforms to achieve a mission. The theory revolves around the questions of power, the nature of media influence, media-social relations and the media as a public space (Burton, 2011, p.50). Often, this has far reaching impacts in society. Adjudged as the best approach to any communication campaign exercise (Nwabueze, 2007,p.71), the Multimedia Theoretical Framework is based on the views of communication scholars like McLuhan and Walter Ong. The theory explores six different kinds of media which relate with different senses or aspects of the personality to reach different audiences. It is argued that not every aspect of a message can be communicated using one medium.

It has been established that different cultures are either more oral or visual. This is why different professions use different media. Different media activate different parts of the brain. While reading activates the eyes and analytic parts of the brain, oral communication activates the ears and the oral imagination. Reading involves "visual logic" and analytic thinking. More so, each medium has a different communicative function. An example, while radio involves interpersonal communication, reading has to do with being meditative.

Each medium catches the audience in a different life moment. Radio may catch people in the car. Each medium reaches different people who use that

medium more. Again, radio reaches young people better. Each medium has different genres and different genres reach different people (radio reaches music lovers or followers), (Musa, 2014). Based on this framework, this paper employs the use of 3 different multimedia approaches namely, print, electronic and new media platforms in furtherance of the mission of Christ on earth in the Nigerian pastoral context.

Literature Review and Discussion

Historical Sketch and Demographics of the Church in Nigeria

The Catholic faith came to Nigeria precisely Benin and Warri between the 15th and the 16th centuries through the Portuguese missionaries. According to Taiye (2016), the appearance of the Europeans among the natives of the Delta region in 1472 lasted for about three hundred years; that is till the close of the 18th century. Unfortunately, their missionary enterprise did not last long as it disappeared by the 17th century as it could not gain permanence in Benin, Warri, Bonny and Calabar. This was blamed on the overriding commercial interest rather than prominence of the gospel. But by the 16th century, the missionary enterprise gained more momentum.

In 1514, this positive development made Esigie (1504-1550), the Oba of Benin to send emissaries to king Manuel of Portugal asking for more priests to be sent to Benin. This saw new converts from African Traditional Religion embracing the Catholic faith like the Oba's son and other members of the king's cabinet who received baptism. Because the early missionaries attached great importance to both capacity building and infrastructural development, the neophytes started learning how to read and write as churches were being built. Among those who benefitted from the white man's way of life was Orhoghua, the Oba's successor (Taiye, 2016).

Through the Bishop of Sao Tome, Gasper Cao (1556-1565, 1571-1574), the faith was brought to Warri in the mid-sixteenth century as Augustinian priests were sent there. They not only built Santo Augustino but ensured that more missionaries were sent to Itsekiri land from Portugal. Towards the end of the 18th century, the missionary enterprise started dwindling because of the following reasons: Lacuna in posting of priests, lack of sufficient missionaries, paucity of funds to support the few missionaries who were on ground, language barrier, divided attention to other missions and distance from missionary operational ground. Also, the high rate of death due to malaria frustrated the mission of the Portuguese and later Italian priests who brought the faith to Nigeria (Taiye, 2016).

In Africa, Christianity has witnessed the most explosive growth. In the 20th century, Africa grew from a Catholic population of 1.9 million in 1900 to 130

million in 2000, a staggering growth rate of 6,708 percent (Allen, 2006). This growth is no less in Nigeria as the country has a vibrant clergy and an explosive laity. Appraising the Church in Nigeria, a keen observer noted that: "The Church in Nigeria is caring and consoling. It shapes consciences and offers a moral compass. But most importantly, for many of us the Church is home" (Ekeocha, 2017).

Like the proverbial mustard seed, the Catholic faith spread to different parts of the country. Today, the Catholic Church has 9 Archdioceses, 44 Dioceses, 2 Apostolic Vicariates, 1 Maronite Exache, 30 Male Religious Congregations and 51 Female Religious Congregations. This is in addition to 16 existing Major Seminaries and 10 degree awarding Institutions plus Veritas University Abuja which was established in November 2008 (Kaigama, 2017). In terms of growth, the Church has undergone tremendous spiritual and pastoral growth which includes, nine Ecclesiastical provinces, 55 Dioceses, a Basilica and a population of about 40 million faithful with numerous number of priests who are working in and outside the country (Anyanwu, 2017).

Global Perspectives of Social Communication in the Life of the Church

Globally, the Means of Social Communication have been used to advance the mission of the Church. This is because the Church has always believed that the work of evangelisation can be better harnessed through the available Means of Communication. It is a given that Social Communications facilitates the evangelisation process. According to *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, "Our century is characterized by the mass media or means of social communication, and the first proclamation, catechesis or the further deepening of faith cannot do without these means, as we have already emphasized" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, (EN) Apostolic Exhortation, Paul VI, 1975, No. 45).

Accordingly, the Means of communication are catalysts for reaching out to multitudes towards the expansion of the kingdom of God. Through the Means of communication, multitudes are reached and the kingdom of God grows. "When they are put at the service of the Gospel, they are capable of increasing almost indefinitely the area in which the Word of God is heard; they enable the Good News to reach millions of people. The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect. It is through them that she proclaims 'from the housetops' the message of which she is the depositary. In them she finds a modern and effective version of the pulpit. Thanks to them she succeeds in speaking to the multitudes" (EN, No. 45).

Various Pontiffs have maintained that through the Means of communication, dialogue between the men and women of our time can be fostered. Social

communication helps the Church to engage people in the dialogue of faith. Through them, she is able to engage men and women to appreciate their desires, their doubts, and hopes in order to build their faith. Pope Francis made this submission while addressing participants at the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications on 21/09/2013 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Conciliar Decree *Inter Mirifica*.

It is crucial to note that the means of communication have the power to checkmate the evils of disorientation and isolation which new technologies and social networks create in society. By this, a real presence that listens, converses, and encourages is established. According to Pope Francis, "Do not be afraid to be this presence, expressing your Christian identity as you become citizens of this environment. A Church that follows this path learns how to walk with everybody" (Francis, 2013).

In like manner, the Church has emphasized that the Means of Communication can help in rediscovering the beauty of faith. The Church is led to a deepening of faith and encounter with Christ (Francis, 2013) through social communication. This is because the world of social communication has become a "living environment" for many, a web where people communicate with each other, expanding the boundaries of their knowledge and relationships (Benedict XVI, 2013).

Local Perspectives of Engaging Social Communication in the Life of the Church in Nigeria

In his 2010 message during the 44th World Communications Day titled "The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word," Benedict XVI pointed out that the Church, especially priests, should put the media in the service of the word, employ audiovisual resources for dialogue and catechesis, introduce people to the church, build vast and real fellowships, open the doors of encounter, pursue truth and progress and ensure the common good. We shall highlight these in the light of what is being done by clerics to advance the course of the gospel through the means of communication:

Putting the Media at the Service of the Word

In Nigeria, priests, religious and laity understand that they standing at the threshold of a new era. This is why they are increasingly taking advantage of new technologies to create deeper forms of relationship across greater distances within Archdiocese and dioceses as well as provinces. Particularly, Pastors of souls are pastorally responding to the call of the universal Church in World Communications' Sunday Messages and Post-Conciliar documents on the Means of Communication by putting the media more effectively at the

service of the Word. In most parishes, the use of projectors is now common practice. For greater communication, most parishes are now using hi-tech microphone systems in contradistinction to the erstwhile “Catholic Microphone.”

Employing Audiovisual Resources for Dialogue and Catechesis

In line with the demands of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT), priests are reading the signs of the time in order to respond accordingly. This is why they are taking up the challenge to proclaim the Gospel through employing the latest generation of audiovisual resources (images, videos, animated features, blogs, websites) which, alongside traditional means, open up broad new vistas for dialogue, evangelization and catechesis. The Church in Nigeria has been a mother to other Christian groups. Many parishes are now using audiovisual materials and large screens to transmit mass live.

Introduce People to the Church

Aware of the positive impact of the Means of communication, priests are now introducing people to the life of the Church by helping them to discover the face of Christ through new communication technologies. Since their contemporaries are media savvy and are in touch with modern realities, pastors of souls are becoming interested in ICT and other related means of communication to advance the course of the gospel.

For instance, through various WhatsApp groups, Twitter Handles and Facebook Accounts, parishioners who are incommunicado as regards Church-attendance are reached out to. Parishes are taking advantage of these social media platforms to not only keep tabs with those who do not come to Church but also introduce neophytes into the Church.

Building Vast and Real Fellowships

Pastors of souls are using what the new media offers to facilitate far-reaching pastoral possibilities. They are also encouraging the faithful to embody the universality of the Church’s mission to build vast and real fellowships, testify in today’s world to the new life which comes from hearing the Gospel of Jesus and the eternal Son who came among us for our salvation.

In their effort to promote vast and real fellowships, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) has consistently encouraged dialogue between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. The viral pictures of their recent visit to the Sultan of Sokoto on September 7 during their first plenary which held at Pinnacle Guest Inn and Resort, Sokoto from September 6-14, 2018 tells the story more (Dyikuk, 2018).

Open Doors of Encounter

Aware of the indispensable role of Consecrated men and women working in the media, the Church in Nigeria has created platforms such as the Catholic Media Practitioners' Association of Nigeria (CAMPAN) and Catholic Artistes and Entertainers Association of Nigeria (CAEN) have a special responsibility for opening the door to new forms of encounter, maintaining the quality of human interaction, and showing concern for individuals and their genuine spiritual needs (Benedict XVI, 2010).

Pursue Truth and Progress

In order to promote truth and progress, the Catholic Television of Nigeria has embarked on programmes on AIT/CTV and NigComSat with the call on Priests and Religious to make themselves available by actively participating in these programmes (Catholic Directors of Communication, 2018). All media workers in the country are often charged to work together to ensure that the media of communication contributes to the pursuit of truth and the speeding up of progress (CP No. 13).

To further ensure that, SIGNIS-Nigeria. The Catholic Association for Communication constituting the Directorate of Social Communication at the National and Diocesan levels, Catholic Association of Media Practitioners of Nigeria, Catholic Artistes and Entertainers Association of Nigeria, Catholic ICT entrepreneurs and Catholic Communication Lecturers has been at the fore front of advancing the use of the Means of Communication for evangelisation purposes.

Ensure Common Good

The lay men and women who work in the media in Nigeria see their position as an opportunity to instruct the tastes and judgements of others especially the young and uneducated. They also use their profession to ensure that the total output of the media in terms of news, culture and entertainment makes for the common good (CP Nos. 15 & 16).

The Pros and Cons of Using the Means of Communication in the Mission of the Church in Nigeria

Modern media opens a vast array of opportunities for Christians to bond together and share ideas as members of one family especially through platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter by coming together to affect their lives (Olushola, 2015,p.698). This is why at the national level, apart from being a critical stakeholder in the pastoral and socio-economic development of country, the Church through the Directorate of Social Communications at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Abuja is at the fore front of promoting

the interest of the Church in public space as well as ensuring the unity and overall development of the country on behalf of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN). For instance, the Directorate of Social Communications publishes the National Directory of the Catholic Church in Nigeria which contains a comprehensive account of the progress being made by the Church in the country in spiritual and pastoral spheres. This is a confirmation of the CBCN as the symbol of the unity of the Catholic Church in Nigeria (Anyanwu, 2017). It also runs two websites, one belongs to CSN and the other, the CBCN which are used for the mission of the Church in Nigeria.

Being a Public Relations tool for the Church, the directory not only contains veritable information about the Church but it is a justification of the call to her by the universal Church to carry the mission within the country (*ad intra*) and outside the country (*ad extra*). Part of that mission is being the image-maker of the Church in Nigeria by coordinating the affairs of all Archdiocesan and Diocesan Offices of Social Communication and other Church organisations in the country (Anyanwu, 2017) through a process known as networking.

Importantly too, the 55 Dioceses in Nigeria have either a Directorate of Social Communications or a media outfit for the propagation of the faith and showcasing what the diocese does to the world. Most dioceses have newspapers Odenore (2015,p.724) which are Public Relations tool for information-sharing in and outside the diocese. The advent of new media has also afforded many dioceses the opportunity of establishing diocesan websites, Facebook Accounts, Twitter Handles, WhatsApp groups to mention just a few. These media are employed for the mission of the Church.

As part of fulfilling their baptismal calling in the secular space, there are a number of lay Catholic columnists in the Nigerian papers who use their wit and creative spirit in building a fan base of persons from various divides who read their articles. More often than not, they reflect their faith in their write-ups especially when it concerns sensitive issues of national importance which touch on their Catholic values. The critical role of the witness these laypersons offer the Church in the public space through the pen apostolate cannot be over emphasized. This can further be enriched (Odenore, 2015,p.724) to involve more lay people, priests and religious.

Despite the seeming plausible ways of engaging the means of communication for evangelisation, the Church in Nigeria has not lived up to its expectations in terms of maximizing the opportunities that these media offer. Olushola (2015, pp.691-692) and McQuail (2009, p.70) blame the situation on use of a linear, one-way and transmission model of communication which does not give way to the participatory model of communication. The communication

experts also mention use of Church owned media outfit to discredit other denominations as responsible for lack of effective use of the media in the mission of the Church in Nigeria. This is why the Catholic Church through its Secretariat and the Communication Directorate ought to trail the blaze in addressing the issue.

Little wonder, Odenore (2015,p.718) notes that although there is an increase in the coverage of religious functions for a fee, there is no discernible improvement in the quality of how the media reports religion. He further states that even though other denominations view the media as an indispensable tool for creating awareness about their activities, regrettably, the Catholic Church is more circumspect because it only allows for coverage of its activities but makes it difficult to access information about the inner workings of the Church.

The presence of the Catholic Church in the print media is low. Aside from theologians who write beautiful articles in diocesan newspapers, the presence of the Church in secular media is not encouraging. This makes the authoritative voice of the Church to be missing in the secular space. Theologians are more comfortable writing for Catholic newspapers, leaving lay persons with the task of engaging the secular print media in the pen apostolate (Odenore, 2015,p.724).

The Impact of Priests, Religious and Laity on the Use of the Media for Evangelisation

There are few Examples of Priests, Religious and laity who have used the Means of Communication for evangelisation globally and locally in Nigeria. In the 1950s, Archbishop Fulton Sheen's weekly television broadcasts about the Catholic faith drew audiences to the nascent medium. Also, Mother Angelica, an American Franciscan nun of the Poor Clare Nuns of Perpetual Adoration (P.C.P.A.), best known as a television personality and the founder of the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN), single-handedly made the Catholic-focused cable channel gain wide distribution in the United States of America and across the world.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI surprised the world in 2012 when he joined Twitter with the twitter handle @Pontifex. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications was the agency that provided the behind the scenes guidance for Church leadership in the use of the new medium of communication which led the Holy Father to the new and exciting platform of communication. Throughout his four years pontificate, Pope Francis has been very active in both broadcast and social media. The Pope who has given

several media interviews, is known to speak in “sound bite” style phrases, and has 6.65 million Twitter followers.

In the list is Bishop Robert Barron. Bishop Barron, the Auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles who was before his appointment to the episcopacy known in the media as Father Robert Barron is another media-savvy bishop whose public television series “Catholicism” as a priest drew wide acclaim.

One Prelate in Nigeria who has stood tall in engaging with the media is the Catholic Bishop of Sokoto Diocese, the Most Rev. Dr. Matthew Hassan Kukah. Bishop Kukah has engaged the media for more than three decades as an outspoken courageous social critic and contributed to nation building through several debates and public lectures within and outside the country. Like him, Fr. George Ehusani too through his Chapel of Lux Terra Leadership Foundation Abuja is able to reach out to large audiences on African Independent Television, AIT and YouTube.com by way of shared-homily.

Prominent lay faithful too have paid their dues to the Church in terms of giving it a voice on television. Chief Dokpesi the founder of DAAR Communications and owner of AIT, Raypower and Faaji FM offers the Church the opportunity of presenting faith-based programmes such as *The Light of the Nations*, *Oremus* and *Catholic Mass* on AIT.

Most recently Prince Robert-Joseph Soji Olagunji joined Dokpesi by founding Lumen Christi TV, a channel which is dedicated to the service of God and furtherance of the Gospel as well as giving hope to those whose faith seems dead. Although it is in its incubating stage the media is bulled to compete favourably with EWTN.

Improper Ways of Using the Media of Communication

There is a craze about making noise concerning little issues which are supposed to be normal. This mentality of exaggeration is often driven by half-truths as prevalent in politics. Sadly, this has crept into the Church. Some priests make noise in the media about some completed projects in the schools or parishes they run but upon a visit to such institutions or parishes, one will realise that the work is either not completed or haphazardly done. Anything that is built on propaganda does not last.

There is a growing trend of cult-personality or hero-worship among the clergy in our time. This worrisome because in a bid to showcase their talents, some clerics have gone beyond the line. The first attraction is being on television or

in the news – The quest for popularity like sugar water makes a person desire recognition at all cost and where it is not given, problems begin to crop up.

Cases abound where some people in the rank and file of the Church engage the media to get at the authority. To be sure, those who fight the hierarchy, fight themselves because they are part and parcel of the Church. The contestation about the Bishopric of Ahiara diocese is a case in point. It is now worrisome that pastors and priests openly attack the Church's hierarchy based on hierarchical or doctrinal issues (Dyikuk , 2017,p.44). Besides, putting oneself against the Church only makes one a victim. No sane person takes family feuds or squabbles to the media.

Granted that human beings are political animals, one of the ways priests and religious use the media of communication wrongly is through undertaking media activities for political ends such as campaigning or even persuading parishioners to vote for preferred candidates. It is worrisome that some priests and religious could spend their lives defending politicians on social media than defending the Church.

Despite the attendant good of using social communications, they can become a real nuisance when they are used all the time. Instead of busying themselves with the work God has called them to do, some priests sometimes over indulge in watching football, *Do Good, Tinsel* or *Big Brother Naija*; it is not unlikely to find pastors of souls at the confessional busy with *WhatsApp* or *Facebook* instead of facing the sacred task at hand. Certainly, this is not a good way of using the media of social communications.

More so, social communications sometimes give people a false impression of being social without actually going out to socialise. Family members or friends can be together but not in company because everybody is busy with his or her phone or iPad – Social media can kill relationships. It also gives some people a false impression that they have friends who may in the long run be unreal. It makes people develop friendship easily without actually making any effort to develop trust and build relationships.

Some people hide under the media to lie, defraud or tarnish the good reputation of others. Yahoo-yahoo boys and hackers are all over the place. Only cyber laws which criminalise such unsocial behaviour can curb the menace. Also, the addiction of taking pictures in a distracting manner during liturgical functions is a needless activity which needs to be discouraged.

Sexting is sending and receiving of sexually explicit messages, mostly between device phones (Keene, 2013, p.1). The term became popular in the

early 21st century. It is a portmanteau of sex and texting, where the latter is meant in the wide sense of sending a text possibly with unclad images (Edmond, 2010, 1). Sexting as a word was listed in the dictionary in August 2012. Cases abound where some young people blackmail their sexual partners and former partners by threatening to release private images of them (Van Hilten, 2015, p.1). The ugly scenario of some “men of God” posting indecent pictures or sharing same on social media with their friends lives much to be desired.

Another wrong way of using the media of social communication is through making use of iPads as Sacramentary in place of the prescribed liturgical books. The sad reality of some lay people demanding that priests hear their confessions on the phone is scandalous. The Church’s hierarchy has not yet approved such innovations into her liturgical life. As such, it is important to adhere strictly to the liturgical norms.

Towards an Effective Use of the Media of Communication

In a seminal study, Stetzer (2014) argues that technology enables communication, community and discipleship. On how technology enables communication, the author stresses that for instance, through Facebook and Twitter or through a church blog, we can easily communicate directly with the people in our congregation, throughout the day and week. This enables the congregation to easily have direct communication with other members and we can have communication with them on a broader or a clearer scale. Ongoing communication through technology helps the mission of the church.

Regarding how communication enables community, the scholar notes that technology allows for a greater sense of community that doesn’t demand proximity stressing that this is a big shift in how we interact, but we have to use it if we want to enable community for the sake of the mission of the church. As regards discipleship, the author discloses that technology enables members of a church and attendees to enhance their discipleship experience at church through by using an app which people can actually use in accessing the sermon outline and people use their phones or iPads to follow along and take notes (Stetzer, 2014).

In like manner, Bolu opines that ICT is a crucial strategy in the mission of the Church, because young people make up the lion share of church membership with some churches as high as seventy percent. The internet bandwidth is fast increasing in Nigeria with the huge quantity of terrestrial bandwidth flowing into the country which means that church leaders must not jettison on the use of the internet for church growth programmes, electronic mails, telephone and virtual learning environment for communication as well as the deployment of

church ICT infrastructure for church administration and human capital management (Bolu, 2012).

Most importantly, it is observed that: "Virtual learning programs and open access initiatives allow bible knowledge to spread beyond physical boundaries, thus, enhancing the church's important role in raising new generation of leaders with character" (Bolu, 2012). Perhaps that is why in his 2010 message for the 44th World Communications Day titled "The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word," Benedict XVI pointed out that the Church, especially priests, should be conscientious in the use of the media at the Service of the Word.

He also seized the opportunity to note that Consecrated men and women who are working in the media have a special responsibility for opening the door to new forms of encounter, maintaining the quality of human interaction, and showing concern for individuals and their genuine spiritual needs (Benedict XVI, 2010). This means that all media workers must work together to ensure that the media of communication do in fact contribute to the pursuit of truth and the speeding up of progress (CP No. 13). While this is a most urgent need, again, lay men and women who work in the media especially those who instruct the tastes and judgements of others as well as all who teach the young or the uneducated have an enormous responsibility of ensuring that the total output of the media in terms of news, culture and entertainment makes for the common good (CP Nos. 15 & 16).

Recommendations and Conclusion

Recommendations

(i) Engage the Media of Communication: Each diocese or ecclesiastical institution can do a lot by engaging both the traditional and new media like the local television and radio stations around. The presence of the Church needs to be felt more in the media. Liturgical Inculturation should be taken more seriously in terms of using proverbs for homilies or the use of vernacular in liturgical assemblies.

The establishment of the Centre for the Study of African Culture and Communication (CESACC) by the Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA), Port Harcourt, Nigeria, where students are taught how to engage the media of communication vis-à-vis trado-rural communication for the purpose of evangelisation and the common good is a groundbreaking achievement by the Catholic Bishops of the West African Sub-Region towards inculturating the faith. Also, the introduction of "Theological Chapter" by the same institution for students of the Faculty of Theology is a welcome development since it helps in achieving the purpose of Liturgical Inculturation.

For instance, parishes and deaneries as well as Departments of Ecclesiastical Institutes can create a Facebook or WhatsApp page; or better still, create a twitter handle wherein lay students as well as priests, and religious can access or share information. Kafanchan diocese has an active telegram through which the bishop and priests share information/homilies. The need for a diocesan or institutional website where basic information about the diocese or institute can be accessed is also expedient. Projectors and PowerPoint presentations could also be employed for lectures, conferences, homilies and catechesis in catholic schools and parishes.

(ii) Revamp the culture of bulletins, notice boards and suggestion box: The bulletin is a useful medium for the propagation of the faith. Aside from being the Public Relation's (PR) tool of an institution or a parish, the bulletin, if well handled, can be a source of income for any institution. Bulletins should be handled by a committee with a six-man editorial board comprising of the following: 1.The Editor; 2.The deputy Editor; 3.Computer layout/secretary; 4.The production manager and sales agent(s)/manager(s); 5.Treasure and 6.The Spiritual Director (preferably a priest).

Preferably, most of these people should be professionals working with the media. The bulletin should carry important news for the institution or parish. It should be handy, neat, well-edited, devoid of numerous and mundane adverts. It should also come out timely – by Friday or latest, Saturday morning, the Sunday-bulletin should be out (Dyikuk, 2011, p. 122). Also, bulletins or notice boards which carry announcements can reduce the amount of time spent on announcements in most of our institutions or parishes.

Against the popular notion that the suggestion box archaic, it is an ancient yet useful tool for feedback. The suggestion box creates avenue for people to express themselves about how they feel about their school or the Church – The suggestion box provides the room for reform and improvement.

(iii) Support the Directorate of Communication: The Directorate of Social Communication is the eye of the diocese and the main instrument of communication in the local church. Since the Communication Commission shares in transmitting the life and teachings of the Church as the image maker of the diocese, it must be supported by the bishop, priests and religious. More support is needed by the laity in cash and kind because running the office is capital intensive. Such supports could be through sponsorship of catholic programmes on TV and radio or placing advertisements in the diocesan newspaper.

(iv) Create Parish Communications Committee: It is essential for every parish in a diocese to establish Parish Communications Committee (PCC). This body is saddled with the responsibility of supplying the Diocesan Directorate of Social Communication with news and events from parishes - these persons are usually selected from each parish. On its part, the directorate ought to make it a point of duty to engage them in capacity building by way of media training in the area of news gathering, processing and dissemination.

(v) Develop a National or Diocesan Pastoral Plan for Social Communication: It is important for the Church in Nigeria to develop a pastoral plan which includes the vision, mission, strategy and paradigm of the Nigerian Church towards she is doing and she intends to do in the area of Social Communications. It is the responsibility of the Directorate of Social Communication at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) in conjunction with CESACC and the Association of Diocesan and Religious Directors of Social Communications of the Catholic Church in Nigeria to initiate and execute this National Pastoral Plan for Social Communications in Nigeria (NPPSCN) plan while stating the duration the pastoral plan will take. This NPPSCN should be replicated in every diocese with adaptations to the peculiar situation in that Local Church.

The *vision* states what the country or diocese intends to do, the *mission* indicates what the diocese is doing and the *strategy* has to do with how the things are to be done - the *paradigm* involves the model of communication the country or diocese will choose for itself. The ideal model of communication is the *participatory communication* which makes for both *Up-ward Flow* and *Down-ward Flow* of communication. *Up-ward Flow* of communication provides a leader with the opportunity to access information from employees in order to make decisions, identify problems, collect data, determine staff morale and reveal employee thoughts and feelings about the organisation (Enudu, 2004, p.70). Since it involves passing information from the laity to the Bishops, or from members of the laity and priests to the deans or consultants to the Bishop, it demands open door policy, counselling and participatory decision-making techniques.

Down-ward Flow communication involves passing information from superiors to subordinates which allows superiors to implement their decision in a way that it will influence employees who are lower in hierarchy (Enudu, 2004, p.69). For effective flow of information in the country or diocese, the hierarchy should create a way of making both priests and laity feel they are *in-group members* - people that are trusted and not *out-group members* - those who do not belong or cannot be trusted. This means that the Church at the National or Diocesan level must be a home for everyone.

(v) Create Feedback Mechanism: Most times, pastors of souls do not care to get feed-back from the flock concerning their homilies in particular and their ministry in general. The priest may be shouting, talking too fast or slowly; he might even be neglecting a particular topic or gender in his homilies. It is expedient that he asks for feedback from mature parishioners. It is important to consult mature people because sycophants are everywhere - They will sugar-quote everything and tell you what you want to hear except what you should hear, namely the truth. Feedback is meant to challenge you, make you sit up and above all, improve your output (Dyikuk, 2011, p.130).

(vi) Procure Good Public Address Systems: A good public address system is a sure aid to good communication - A bad one has a damaging impact on a speaker and his audience. No matter what it will cost, a school, parish or diocese should procure good public address systems. It is not an investment one would regret. It saves the speaker many things; his energy, shouting, panting, rattling, sweating and even embarrassment. Protestant and Pentecostal counterparts have given Catholics a run for their money in that regard (Dyikuk, 2011, pp.126-127).

We have seen that the Church in Nigeria is vibrant in terms of numbers and diversity. Ekeocha (2017) agrees no less when he observed: "I believe that it is because of this unflinching fidelity to the teachings of Christ that the Catholic Church in Africa has flourished, even in the midst of the most difficult tragedies, the most extreme conditions and a growing cultural imperialism from Western nations." Like Jesus told the rich young man, you lack one thing, what remains for Church in this clime is to embrace the beauty and variety the means of communication presents to continue the work of evangelisation.

Conclusion

We have seen that despite the beauty inherent in social communication as a tool for evangelisation, it has attendant dangers. The Church Fathers' caution is important: "Nevertheless the use of the means of social communication for evangelization presents a challenge: through them the evangelical message should reach vast numbers of people, but with the capacity of piercing the conscience of each individual, of implanting itself in his heart as though he were the only person being addressed, with all his most individual and personal qualities, and evoke an entirely personal adherence and commitment" (EN No.45).

The study has opined that while engaging the media of communication, priests, religious and laity ought not to forget the importance of interpersonal communication and witnessing. They are urged to be media savvy. However, they must not be known for *Facebook* without *Facing-God*; owning a *Gmail-account* without a *Guarded-moral*; operating *Yahoo* without *Yahweh* and accessing *Google* without the *Gospel*.

Pope Francis surmised that: "...priests [and religious] present in the world of digital communications should be less notable for their media savvy than for their priestly [or religious] heart, their closeness to Christ. This will not only enliven their pastoral outreach, but also will give a 'soul' to the fabric of communications that makes up the 'Web'" (Benedict XVI, 2010). This important call by the Pope also applies to members of the laity who use the means of communication more than priests and religious. For the Church in Nigeria to live up to its responsibility in the use of the means of communication, it must ensure objectivity (McQuail, 2009, p.200) in its gathering, processing and dissemination of information while fulfilling its missionary mandate. It is the opinion of this paper that the use of 3 different multimedia approaches namely, print, electronic and new media platforms in line with the theoretical framework would further harness the mission of Christ on earth in the Nigerian pastoral context.

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