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PASTORAL COMMUNICATION IN THE COMMUNAL ASPECT

Summary

The article discusses the problem of new pastoral communication that, due to the changes taking place in the Church and in the world, should have a communal character. Nowadays, pastoral communication is a significant research area of Pastoral Theology whose aim is to study the life and activity of the modern Church. Today's Christians very often feel afraid and lost. For this reason, the teaching of the Gospel does not yield the expected fruit. This is why, the teaching of Christ should be proclaimed in the community in which the confused will experience love and find the meaning and purpose in their lives.

Keywords: pastoral communication, theory and practice of pastoral, community, religious transformation, loss, Christian maturity, love

KOMUNIKACJA PASTORALNA W ASPEKcie WSPÓLNOTOWYM

Streszczenie

Artykuł omawia problemy nowej komunikacji pastoralnej, która powinna mieć wymiar wspólnotowy. Komunikacja pastoralna jest dzisiaj znaczącym obszarem badań teologii pastoralnej, której celem jest poznanie życia i działalności współczesnego Kościoła. Współcześni chrześcijanie bardzo często są zalęknieni i zagubieni. Z tego powodu nauczanie Ewangelii nie przynosi spodziewanego owocu. Dlatego nauka Chrystusa powinna być głoszona we wspólnocie, w której ludzie doświadczą miłości i odnajdą sens i cel swojego życia.

Słowa kluczowe: komunikacja pastoralna, teoria i praktyka pastoralna, wspólnota, przemiany religijne, zagubienie, dojrzałość chrześcijańska, miłość

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INTRODUCTION

Today's world undergoes such fast changes that people live "on an ongoing basis" passing over even the most important events. Some even claim that the life of modern man can be referred to as "living on without history" because people live in the world of information, which is transmitted by means of more and more technically sophisticated communicators. Modern people, especially the young, and also priests, commonly use computers and mobile phones. The increased use of those tools results in the fact that modern man begins to spend more and more of his daily time on virtual communication. Hence, the question about the possible impact that this situation may exert on pastoral communication.

Pastoral communication falls into the scope of pastoral theology research which, being applied humanities, combines theological theory with the knowledge of man and the world. "Pastoral communication" is a complex term. It can be read as a specific definition in which the word "communication" is the defined term, i.e. *definiendum*, and the word "pastoral" plays the role of a defining term, i.e. *definiens*. The word: "pastoral", which defines "communication", explicitly refers to pastoral theology, whereas, the word "communication", as a proper name, points to a specific reality that directly refers to man as a person open to communicating (transmitting messages, exchanging information) with others and capable of establishing interpersonal relationships or participating in social activity (interaction).

1. COMMUNICATION PROCESS – TRANSMISSION OF INFORMATION

Communication may be defined as transmission of information through verbal or non-verbal means. Thus, apart from informing, communication can also consist in expressing emotions, motivating or demotivating (praise, criticism). Communication achieves its purpose when information is effectively transmitted from the sender to the receiver. Consequently, the basic condition of communication is that information should be conveyed in a way that is both understandable and effective. This is largely determined by the choice of suitable media (verbal, nonverbal message). In the communication process, distortion by external factors (communication noise) must also be avoided.

Communication has a dynamic character and it is always a process of exchange, which consists of 7 essential elements: 1) information sender, 2) encoding - conversion of information into a symbolic form, 3) information - encoded message, 4) channel - medium (verbal or non-verbal communication),² 5) decoding - understanding the content of the information, 6) receiver - recipient of the information,³ 7) feedback on the understanding of the received information.

² Knowledge of specific elements involved in nonverbal communication enables distinguishing their functions (Knapp and Hall 2000, 405; Borg 2007; Leathers 2007).

³ The addressee of an utterance is a person or a group of people (element of an information system) to which the sender addresses the message (*Słownik encyklopedyczny informacji* 2002, 16).

2. TERMINOLOGICAL EXPLANATION OF PASTORAL COMMUNICATION

Pastoral communication refers to the process of transmitting and receiving messages (information) concerning human relationship with God, with another person and with the world, as well as of establishing interpersonal relationships and cooperation in the ecclesial community and society. Man participates in pastoral communication as an individual, unique person having his Christian and life vocation. This two-dimensional vocation determines the way people communicate with God, and also affects the nature and methods of communicating with other people in the ecclesial community and society.

The present article reflects on the communal dimension of pastoral communication. The fundamental characteristic of the Church is its sense of community (*communio*), which has a universal (Catholic) dimension. As a community of believers, the Church of Christ is Catholic everywhere and at all times, not in the outer dimension of the organization, but because of the grace flowing from within. At the same time, it is a visible sign of the power of the Lord, who alone can bestow on the Church members unity beyond the different borders in which they operate (Ratzinger 1990, 19). Christ, through the Church, is always present among people. "We are all called to have fellowship with God in the fullness of life through faith and the sacraments. As a community remaining in communion with the living God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Church constitutes in Christ the «mystery» of the love of God present in the history of mankind" (II Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops 1985, 4). The purpose of the present reflection is to undertake an attempt at defining pastoral communication as an interaction leading to the creation of interpersonal relationships directed at establishing an ecclesial community and active participation in the human community.

The Polish word *komunikacja* (communication) etymologically derives from the Latin verb *communicare* (transmit, communicate),⁴ which means: "stand in a relationship to, be in a relationship with, participate in".⁵ The essence of communication is establishing a contact between a person and other people or with the world. Communication enables developing a network of social relationships, but communicating with others is also a manifestation of culture which, in a narrow sense of the term, consists exactly in communication. Language defined as a set of social norms enabling exchange of information is a manifestation of

⁴ "Communication, derived from Latin words *communicare* and *communicatio*, usually means a two-way flow of information" (*Komunikowanie się w marketingu* 2004, 17).

⁵ Until the sixteenth century the word *communicare* meant communion, participation, sharing. The Polish term *komunikowanie* (communicating) is a calque from the English "communication" and most often refers to mass communication, which is conditioned by technical means and socio-demographic factors. Mass communication uses media to deliver the same cultural content at the same time and to as many different audiences as possible. Mass communication is synonymous with communication *via* modern mass media. It may be more or less widespread depending on the size and social composition of recipients (*Encyklopedia socjologii* 1999, 40; McQuail 2007).

culture.⁶ Communication, therefore, refers directly and preeminently to man but, in an indirect way, it also concerns societies and cultures.

Communicating plays various functions. It is, first of all, transmission of information, but it can also come down to help in understanding oneself and others or in learning about the physical world and culture, to means of influencing others, creation of communal or social bonds, interaction and coordination of activities as well as gaining and sharing experience or social and cultural tradition. Communication is carried out at different levels and in various scopes from interpersonal communication, through group communication to global communication. Finally, the means, ways and methods of communication as well as its intensity and effectiveness may also differ (Golka 2008).

In order to define the notion of communication, it is necessary to take into account the Latin word *communio*, which means “mutual participation” or, in a wider sense, “community”. Thus, communicating, would mean creating interpersonal relationships and entering a community or society.⁷ The concept of communion reveals also some dynamism which may be expressed in such words as transmission, transfer, broadcasting and receiving.⁸

3. NEW PASTORAL THEORY AND PRACTICE

Man is called to pastoral communication, in other words, to establishing contact with God and conducting a dialogue with Him. However, the condition here is that man must realize his ability to be with God, to accept the invitation that God extends to him, to accept the principles of communicating with Him.⁹ This can be achieved through new pastoral theory and practice.

⁶ Linguists distinguish language as a system of signs from speaking, which is a personalized way of implementing this system (Saussure 2002).

⁷ The Latin word *communicare* came into use in this sense in the 14th century.

⁸ Taking into account Latin etymology, the word *communio* can in the first sense be associated with confirmation and consolidation, which is the result of unity and union of many, when they are and act together, as the prefix *cum* allows us to assume. On the other hand, in the second sense, the word *communio* indicates confirmation and strengthening, mutual affirmation as the property of the union in which people unite. In this first sense, the word *communio* indicates the adjective *communis*, where it refers rather to the effects of a certain attitude, the way of being and acting as the sole property of persons. However, it should be added that the word does not have an equivalent in Polish, so it is in a way untranslatable. The word *wspólnota* (community) does not strictly mean the same as *communio*, because it relates to the adjective *communis*. However, *communio* does not only mean the common thing and it does not only emphasize community as an effect, or even the expression of being and acting of people, but rather the very way of being and acting of these people. It is such a way that, by being and acting in mutual relation (i.e. not only by being and acting “together”), through this action and being, those people confirm and affirm one another (Wojtyła 1974, 353).

⁹ The Second Vatican Council provides a more precise definition: “The specific reason of human dignity is the vocation of man to share in the life of God. Man is invited from the very beginning to speak with God. Man lives only because God created him out of love and still preserves him through love, and man lives fully according to the truth when he voluntarily recognizes that love and entrusts himself to the Creator” (Vatican II 2002, 19).

In pastoral theology, which is applied science, theory and practice form a “bipolar unity”. Theological pastoral research is primarily concerned with creating such a theory that will help improve practice and achieve the final goals. In formulating theory, pastoral theology relies on theoretical (rational) knowledge as well as on practical knowledge gained from experience. The second objective of pastoral theology is to develop pastoral practice, i.e. pragmatic proposals for solving problems related with the life and work of the contemporary Church, as a saving community and human society, as well as its members. This part of pastoral theology can be called pastoral praxeology.¹⁰

Pastoral theology derives from the faith the principles and criteria for pastoral activity of the Church in history.¹¹ It also studies the ecclesiastical organization and practice in order to determine the methods, ways and means for carrying out the salvific mission and the complementary activity of the Church. Pastoral theology also serves to recognize, understand and solve the problems of Church members who carry out their Christian and existential vocation in the ecclesial community and in the world.¹²

Pastoral theory and practice is based on Christ’s teaching. What is permanent for the fact of being related to the revealed truths of faith, in relation to life takes on the characteristics of novelty in terms of value, attractiveness and the influence exerted on the person and his or her life. In other words, it is the evangelical teaching of life which decides on the novelty of the truths of faith, which are in a more and more perfect way acknowledged, experienced and used for the fulfillment of a person’s life vocation.

The pastoralist’s task is to seek, provide a term for and, in effect, enable the development of new relationships between members of the Church community and the transforming world in which new people live. Those new relationships cannot be limited to pastoral activities, therefore, it is necessary to develop new ways of fulfilling the Church’s extensive (complementary) functions, define the tasks of the

¹⁰ It can, therefore, be concluded that the goal of theological praxeological teachings is to improve the organization of pastoral activity. Organizational instruments and precise rules of their application are essential for effective operation. Organizational improvement can thus be compared to production of specific things or creation of facts.

¹¹ In pastoral theology, the concept of “history” refers primarily to contemporary times. Of course, what is happening now has its past, but also its future. Therefore, the context of history that John Paul II refers to means the world, but in a direct relationship with the Church which lives and works in it. The world has its history and the Church has its own tradition. These two realities are linked in the idea of history used in pastoral theology. Contextuality of history also refers to anthropology. The history of the Church and the history of the world begin in the act of creation. However, the mission of the Church is related to the Incarnation and Redemption, i.e. to the history of salvation. Therefore, history in pastoral theology means not only facts and events, but also the action of God who is the Lord of history (Jan Paweł II 1992, 57).

¹² According to Podgórecki, practical sciences are sets of general sentences that define how the states of things commissioned by recognized judgments can be realized on the basis of the relationship between facts. The purpose of practical sciences is to establish procedures for reaching certain states of things defined as desirable (Podgórecki 1962, 30-33).

new forms of the contemporary lay Catholic apostolate and use the opportunities for the realization of the ecclesial ministry provided by the contemporary pastoral communication. As a result, theology and pastoral communication begin to face new challenges. However, the essence of the new practical theology, must be the positive task of building, shaping, and supporting the various forms of the life and activity of the Church, which realizes itself in new, constantly evolving external conditions (Rak 1986, 109).

4. DEFINITION OF PASTORAL COMMUNICATION

W. Goddijn believes that pastoral theology “is the weakest link of theological sciences, insufficiently connected with the entirety of today’s humanistic knowledge, sociology or psychology” (Goddijn 1966, 205). In light of today’s significance and development of modern communication techniques, one must take into account the theory and practice of communication. It must be emphasized at the same time, that this is not a problem of present-day pastoral theology, since already the Council Fathers encouraged theologians to try to cooperate with experts in other branches of knowledge and to combine their efforts and share ideas with them (Vatican Council II 2002, 62). This is particularly important in pastoral work, in extensive activity, especially in the work of evangelization, apostolate and upbringing, since the proclamation of the Gospel and the testimony of faith should be adapted to the contemporary times. “Let the faithful live in close contact with other people of their time and try to grasp their way of thinking and feeling, which is reflected in their mental culture. Let them combine knowledge of new sciences and doctrines and recent inventions with the Christian custom and with education in Christian doctrine, so that the religious culture and spirituality go along with their knowledge of science and technical skills evolving every day, so that they can assess and explain all in a purely Christian spirit” (Vatican Council II 2002, 62).

Today, there is a need for pastoral communication, which would base on its own cognitive methods and, therefore, enable discovering, naming and interpreting the latest communication techniques that affect the lives of Christians and their pursuit of existential and Christian vocation. Pastoral communication would describe the very phenomenon of communication in connection with Christian experience, and its purpose would be to analyze the new ways of communication used by modern man and their influence on his life of faith.

Contemporary Christians have in their reach new ways and means of communication that can enrich him or her, but which can also have a negative impact on his or her person and life. The way of using modern means of communication largely determines their impact on human personality, general well-being, and on the quality of human life and worldview. They have a subjective (individual or social) or objective (ecclesial or secular) character. Inventive and wise relationships support integral development of man, whereas difficult and poor

relationships disintegrate man's personal development and lead to pathological neurological states. Anxiety, loss of self-confidence, inability to forgive oneself and others or a morbid sense of guilt often arise today to the level of insoluble problems. Negative effects of mass communication require finding aid measures, so pastoral communication should work closely with pastoral psychology.¹³

5. THE PURPOSE OF PASTORAL COMMUNICATION – FROM INDIVIDUALISM TO ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY

It is becoming a commonly shared view that, today, “we are witnessing an advent of a new culture which is largely influenced by mass media and whose characteristic features and content often contradict the Gospel and the dignity of the human person” (John Paul II 2003). Today's Christians find it most painful when faced with attempts to impose an anthropology deprived of God and Christ's Gospel. This type of thinking led to a situation in which man is regarded as “the absolute center of reality and is thus made to supplant God's place against the nature of things, at the same time, it is forgotten that it is not man who creates God, but God who creates man. Once God has been forgotten, man also has been abandoned, and it is not surprising, therefore, that this opened up a vast space for unhampered development of nihilism in philosophy, relativism in the sphere of cognition and morality, or pragmatism and even cynical hedonism in the structure of daily life” (John Paul II 2003, 9).

Various forms of alienation (from oneself, from one's own roots, culture, etc.) create confusion since people begin to “feel frustrated, uprooted, homeless, deprived of protection and hope, helpless and, therefore, lacking motivation; lonely at home, at school, at work, at university, in the city; lost in anonymity, isolation, marginalized, alienated. They feel that they do not belong anywhere, that they are misunderstood, betrayed, afflicted, deceived, alienated, meaningless, not listened to, not accepted, not treated seriously” (Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity, Secretariat for Unbelievers, Secretariat for Unbelievers, Pontifical Council for Cultural Affairs 1988, 18).

Upon analyzing the current situation, it might be concluded that the contemporary times and the challenges associated with them are a period of loss for man. A lot of people seem to be confused, anxious or uncertain and they lack hope. It must be also added that the same may be said about the spiritual state of many Christians as can be evidenced by the loss of Christian remembrance and heritage, the spread of practical agnosticism and religious indifference, which gives the impression that modern people live without any spiritual background,

¹³ M. Szentmártoni provides the following definition: “Pastoral psychology is a section of psychology and it explores the psychological processes that take place in pastoral situations” (Szentmártoni 1995,11). Pastoral psychology, as applied science, is referred to as pastoral counseling, which involves the use of personal or group relationships by priests to assist people in solving problems related with managing their own lives.

like heirs who have squandered heritage left them by history (John Paul II 2003, 7). This loss of Christian remembrance is bound with the fear of the future. The prospect of tomorrow is often colorless and uncertain, so man fears rather than desires the future.¹⁴ “The feeling of inner void affecting many people as well as loss of the meaning of life are among its disturbing symptoms. This existential torment is manifested in, for example, dramatic decline in birth rates, reduced number of vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life, difficulty in making definitive life decisions - if not direct resignation – also in marriage” (John Paul II 2003, 8).

Simultaneously, this lost man who has a social nature, feels a strong need to belong to a community (group). It is no wonder that people want to meet in friendly communities, in an evangelical and fraternal atmosphere that protects them from the anonymity of life in their environment, including parishes (Kalinowski 1988, 37). Consequently, it is appropriate to request that priests with greater concern seek such a model of community that would rely more on fraternity, be more “man-made” and respond to man’s needs (Słomińska 1986, 5-8).

Therefore, the parish understood as an “organic community” should offer celebrative, prayer or missionary communities, turned towards people and open to their needs. This last dimension of religious and ecclesial communities is of particular importance in modern times, where one can observe the development of new religious movements on the one hand, and on the other, of sects recruiting people in trouble. All religious and church groups, especially prayer groups, can provide a solution to the needs of those people who demand support. Such a prayer group endowed with the atmosphere of evangelical love, provides space not only for incarnation in the community but also in the mission of Christ, through which man becomes “a theological person” (Michalik 1992, 116-117).

6. FROM MATURE RELIGIOSITY TO COMMUNITY

In the light of pastoral communication, renewal of the Church and all initiatives which are aimed at fulfilling its mission should take into account one fundamental truth that every such action must be based “on a sound awareness of vocation and responsibility for this particular grace, one and unique, thanks to which every Christian in the fellowship of God’s people builds the Body of Christ. This principle, which is the central rule of all Christian *praxis*, i.e. apostolic and pastoral practice, the practice of inner life and social life, should be referred to all and to each in adequate proportion.” (John Paul II 1979, 21).

¹⁴ Confused man begins to believe that it is possible to satisfy the need of hope in a fleeting and transient way. And so, he identifies hope reduced to the realm of the earthly life and closed to transcendence, with, for example, the paradise promised by science and technology, or with various forms of messianism, with the hedonistic nature of consumerism, or the imaginary and artificial, provided by drugs, or with certain forms Millennialism, alluring Eastern philosophies, seeking esoteric forms of spirituality, with different New Age trends (John Paul II 2003, 10).

The Pope, therefore, sets out the main direction in pastoral activity. It consists in teaching all Christians responsibility for the Church, especially in its communal dimension. All Christians share in this responsibility a sense of fidelity to their vocation. Every “human” action can have a pastoral, apostolic, and evangelical dimension if it serves to build the body of Christ in the fellowship of God’s people.

Pastoral communication is involved in this task, imposing new demands on the Church, such as: creating, shaping and supporting the various forms of life and activity of its members. Communal pastoral communication is, however, especially needed by those who have lost the experience of God and do not understand what is happening around them, so they tend to adopt defensive attitudes in everyday life. This results in marked discrepancy between religiosity and life. Important life decisions are thus not ruled by conscience and moral principles, but they issue from the fear of the “new”. Most often, their problems remain unnoticed and neglected. It is assumed that every man can, according to his capabilities, define his world view and adapt his principles to the needs of the socio-cultural and religious transformations. Meanwhile, many people are unable to adapt to the new conditions and, without the help of other members of the ecclesial community, they are unable to find their place in the “new” Church and the “new” society. Thanks to the new pastoral communication, there is a chance to reach those people, help them to find God and bring them into the “new world” of common evangelical values.

CONCLUSION

Those who follow Pope Francis’ service to the Church, may note that he uses his own language in his teaching, but remains faithful to the doctrine and practice of the Church. And that is the basic truth about his pontificate. Profound and rapid cultural transformations require the Church members, particularly priests, to try to express the eternal truths in a language allowing people to perceive their constant novelty, since in the deposit of Christian doctrine, there is a difference between the essence and the way in which it is expressed (John XXIII 1962, 792). This recommendation put forward by his predecessor, was adopted by Francis: “Sometimes the faithful, listening to strictly orthodox language, derive something completely alien to the authentic Gospel of Jesus Christ, because of the language they use and understand. Cherishing a holy intention to convey to them the truth of God and man, we pass on to them sometimes a false god or human ideal, which is not really Christian. In this way, we remain faithful to some formulation, but we do not convey the essence of things. This is the most serious risk” (Francis 2013, 41). Therefore, it should be borne in mind that “expression of truth can take many forms. It is just renewal of the forms of expression that is necessary in order to convey the evangelic message in its unchanged sense to the contemporary man” (John Paul II 1995, 933). This task rests with all members of the Church of

Christ and, therefore, the new pastoral communication should have a very clear communal character so that the word of God proclaimed in the community would give rise to and strengthen the faith of modern Christians.

Evangelical love, especially love towards people who feel lost, is a prerequisite if pastoral communication is to have a communal character. "Such is the law of Christ. By His passion, He «truly bore our suffering and carried our sorrows», carrying those he loved and loving those he carried. Whoever, therefore, is hostile to a brother threatened by falling, who is afraid of all his tricks, he undoubtedly surrendered to the law of the devil and fulfilled it. Let us be patient for each other, full of fraternal love, be able to tolerate weakness, fight only the transgressions. Any way of life, whatever its external forms, is the more pleasing to God, the more it fosters the love of God, and because of God - the love of his neighbor. Only love should decide whether something should be done or abandoned, changed or not changed. Love is the principle of action and the goal to be pursued. Whatever you sincerely do for it and in accordance with it, it will never be wrong" (Sermon of Blessed Isaac, 160-161).

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