

Summary

Paul M. Zulehner: Taking Action Instead of Complaining

In his article „Taking Action Instead of Complaining“, the Viennese pastoral theologian Paul M. Zulehner deals with the results of a recent long-term study about the development of the main Churches in Germany. For the Churches, the study reveals unpleasant trends which indicate far-reaching changes in they way faith and religious traditions are handed down. This applies in particular to religious communication in families. Zulehner denies that these changes can be traced back to an all-embracing and irreversible process of secularisation. In contrast to the idea of a supposed increasing loss of religion – a trend still common in the 70's – the author sees signs for a re-discovery of spirituality. In his opinion, this spiritual development challenges the confessional churches and also offers undreamed-of possibilities. Zulehner predicts that a decline of the Churches will not be the case. However, they will have the chance to attain a new social structure. According to the results of the long-term study, vivid and extensive pastoral concepts are needed going along with the ability of flexible balances: balances between a service rendered and community church, balances between personal and media communication, balances between spirituality and solidarity as well as tradition and innovation. Finally, Zulehner pleads for an offensive pastoral change. Entrepreneurial ambitions and the willingness to expose oneself will lead the Churches to a new self-confidence. Thus, they will be able to develop new missionary strength resulting in an expert communicative offensive of the Churches.

Renate Köcher: Problems and Chances of Religious Communication – Insights from the Allensbach Long-Term Study

Currently, the population's fields of interest are decreasing. Prospects are becoming pragmatic and less open for essential questions than in recent years. Nowadays, less attention is paid to nearly all topics related to world-view, faith, ethics, and the Church. In the nineties, the number of Catholics interested in questions of faith and the meaning of life fell from 50 to 36 per cent while those interested in opinions on current issues dropped from 53 to 31 per cent. The interest in ecumenical issues has halved. Consequently, the Church faces the challenge to increase

people's interest in ideological and ethical questions. The Church must assert itself and these issues in the pressure of competition of attracting people's attention.

In this process, not only communication via modern media plays an important role but also permanent interpersonal communication and face to face conversations. Multi media generally does not replace interpersonal communication, and, equally, secular and church offers in the media scene do not replace personal conversations about questions of faith and the meaning of life. A great deal of information on the institution is conveyed and perceived by means of media. Nevertheless, personal conversations dealing with matters of faith remain the most important form of communication. A clear division between information on the institution and interpersonal communication about religious issues was shown in a representative study which examined the significance of mass communication as a source of information and personally passed on information about various topics amongst Catholics.

According to these findings, the Church cannot replace interpersonal communication by means of media. Both forms, although having different functions, must exist side by side, and both must be increased in their usage. Long-term studies have proved that the intensity of communication in parishes and other Christian institutions has declined. Neither by means of media or interpersonal communication is the younger generation, in particular, reached satisfactorily. Thus, it is the aim to especially address young people and to raise their interest in the meaning of life, questions of faith, and the Church. This is one of the greatest challenges both Churches must face.

Rüdiger Schulz: Trendmonitor: Religious Communication 2000 – Concentrating on People's Reality of Life

In 1994/95 two extensive studies, namely „Prospects of Bishopric Magazines“ and „Prospects of Religious Literature“, were conducted. In the autumn of 1999, important data gained in the two former studies was updated in a representative survey amongst 2189 Catholics aged 16 and onwards. The recent poll additionally asked questions about interpersonal communication with pastoral workers, active parishioners as well as the family and circle of friends. Furthermore, questions about religious or church participation in radio, TV and internet were included.

The survey proves that ties to the Church or Religion have continued to decline in recent years. As a result, the situation of denominational mass communication in Germany has become increasingly difficult.

Most Catholics state that the secular media sufficiently meets their needs for religious and church information and communication. They demand no further information and reports about church events and church development. However, it is worth mentioning that additional information and communication is wanted about topics concerning answers to the meaning of life and counselling. The usability of information is especially in demand nowadays.

If church magazines do not concentrate on people's reality of life, their questions, hopes and fears, they will not succeed in winning new readers in addition to the dwindling numbers of believers and those strongly attached to the Church. In order to address a greater number of people, well-tried means must be consolidated while new means must be developed.

The upcoming of religious literature gives reason to hope. The acceptance and image of religious books have been improved and central religious topics have been elaborated on due to a wider range of religious literature. These offers now also include books on counselling, meditation, and the meaning of life.

More consistent and strategic use must be made of the possibilities of catching people's attention by surprise with the help of secular media, for example by broadcasting „Words of the Day“ on radio. Therefore, co-operation with secular media must be sought and intensified by all means. Additionally, unconventional methods such as the free distribution of magazines and leaflets to Catholic homes must be tested.

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