

# Interactive Communication in the Church

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On a foggy morning in Berlin a taxi dropped me at the Brandenburg Gate. Tears came to my eyes as I felt *communion* with people who had struggled to *participate*, to unite. I had been part of it through the mass media.

For many, the fall of the Berlin Wall remains a symbol of hope and enormous challenge. If this happened so quickly and dramatically – in Berlin and, later, in Moscow and the Middle East – then barriers can be minimized between local, regional, national, and global communities.

Unity in diversity is a challenge for churches and society in a postmodern world.

In *Lumen gentium*, the Second Vatican Council referred to a multiplicity of "the abilities, the resources, and customs of peoples," saying "each part contributes its own gifts to other parts and to the whole Church."<sup>1</sup> At the historical moment of the Council, we were called to communion and community,

The ideas that follow are an attempt to reflect on aspects of communication and the theology of *communio*. Specific questions guide our study:

1. What forms of participatory communications are emerging in churches? What is the role of authority in such forums?
2. How do we encourage collaboration – called "animating forms of cooperation" by the theologian Hermann Pottmeyer?<sup>2</sup>
3. Must participatory freedom lead to polarization and, in reaction, central control?
4. Can new communication and collaborative theories help churches become vital communities, to reanimate an apparent diminution of faith in some modern societies?

## I. Conceptual Framework

It is helpful to make some comments about the analytical perspective employed here. This is clearly an interdisciplinary investigation. Theology, specifically ecclesiology, and communication studies are involved in this inquiry, and the communication ideas will involve both theoretical reflections and practical guidelines.

Applicable too are insights from social theory and from the field of organizational communication since it is a challenge to coordinate dialogical responses within Church structures. Much study is required concerning the process and interrelatedness of those communicating.

Two theologians have noted that Vatican II should be considered "transitional" – a work in progress. Pottmeyer called the Council "an act of setting out... not as a single, once-and-for-all step, but as an example of a passage to be made over and over again, in every moment, the signs of which must be read in the light of the Gospel."<sup>3</sup> In a similar

vein, Walter Kasper noted that "today there is not yet any way which leads fundamentally beyond the Council.... It is not only that we do not have the presuppositions and the preliminary work. We have not as yet nearly exhausted the potentialities of the last Council."<sup>4</sup>

I will draw substantially here from my own research on collaborative systems theory – reflections on cooperative strategies in a media/information world. These ideas supply a framework for analysis that can aid us in our understanding of emerging realities of communication and Church. Hopefully, such a framework will enable others to offer additional organizing principles, thus encouraging both unity and diversity.

We need to explore specific topics:

- . **participatory components of *communio* ecclesiology**
- . **emerging communication theories of discourse**
- . **how these two areas converge and interact in participatory communications**
- . **practical applications and case study examples: collaborative communications; the implications of freedom and autonomy; new roles for laity**
- . **specific suggestions and goals for the future**

Loneragan reminds us in *Method in Theology* that "A community... is an achievement of common meaning."<sup>5</sup> And we must recall the practical advice of Dulles, in 1971, in a prophetic document: "The Church cannot wall itself up in a cultural ghetto at a time when humanity as a whole is passing into the electronic age."<sup>6</sup>

## II. Participatory Components of *Communio* Ecclesiology

There is a distinction, of course, between ecclesiology – the aspect of theology that examines the nature and mission of the Church – and what the Church is in practice. It is clear that historical diversity and the development of ecclesiology permit a richness in the Church's own self-understanding.

In the last century the Church was presented as a full and perfect society, on the same level as the state; at the same time, emphasis was placed on the hierarchical and juridical aspects of the Church as institution. Later the theme of the Mystical Body was stressed, integrating previous concepts of Church.

Various aspects of the Church's nature and mission have been made more understandable by the models of Church proposed by Avery Dulles.<sup>7</sup> The first model mentioned, the Church as institution, places exclusive emphasis on the hierarchical structure. This model notes that the Church descends from God through its hierarchy to others. The faithful are asked to assent to this and subordinate themselves. The hierarchy represent authoritative teachers (*ecclesia docens*), and the people are learners (*ecclesia discens*). This was the view of Church emphasized when the Second Vatican Council began.

Dulles identifies and explores other images of Church, including the Church as Herald (to proclaim its message), as Sacrament (Church as sign, personal witness) and the secular-dialogic metaphor.<sup>8</sup> In another work Dulles speaks of Discipleship as an appropriate image of Church.<sup>9</sup>

A clearly distinct model is the Church as *communio* – a fellowship animated by the Spirit. No one metaphor contains the totality of the Church's nature and each contributes to our understanding. Obviously different individuals will tend toward various aspects of Church. We should note that each model of Church has a different image and seems to have its own style of communication appropriate to it.

In the document *Lumen gentium* the Council sets forth the Church's revised understanding of her own nature. Dulles notes that *Lumen gentium*, "because of its central importance and its wealth of doctrine, probably deserves to be called the most imposing achievement of Vatican II."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the very *process* of developing *Lumen gentium* is an example of a participatory forum. As Dulles notes: "The successive drafts of the Constitution, compared with one another, strikingly reveal the tremendous development in self-understanding of the Church which resulted from the *dialogue* within the Council."<sup>11</sup> (Emphasis added) The institutional and *communio* models of Church had supporters within the Council. Some tension between these diverse ecclesiologies continues as a result of Council efforts to express the nature of church. The Church, organic and graced, is – in the last analysis – a mystery because it is an embodiment of the essential mystery of God Incarnate.

Several participatory concepts do emerge in *Lumen gentium*, including a creative view of laity roles and the principle of bishops' collegiality. Both provide a balance to the earlier heavy emphasis on papal power and authority. The new self-understanding was based upon biblical scholarship and a reconnection with early Church history and practice.

Most consider graced this bold new direction in the Church's self-understanding and participatory vision. On the practical level, however, it did require compromise as the dialogue at the Council proceeded. As a result, several ecclesiologies exist side by side in Council documents; this has made subsequent application of Council teaching somewhat complicated and even contentious.

Pottmeyer notes: "The active reception of the Council's first steps toward a new ecclesial self-understanding is... a task that will take decades.... Would it not have been inherently contradictory to give a fixed legal formulation to what was in fact the expression of a desire for transition and mobility?"<sup>12</sup> Much participatory development has occurred since the Council; understandably, it has not been easy.

### *Shared Responsibility*

The Council challenged *all* Church members to accept responsibility as a community specifically called – participating actively in the Church's life and mission by virtue of their sacramental entrance into the community. Kasper notes that this marked the end of a pattern of a welfare Church.

In hardly any sector since the Council have things moved so much as here.... Stimulated by the Council, bodies of common responsibility have

come into being on all levels of the church's life: parish councils, diocesan councils, diocesan synods, episcopal synods. Lay interest, and the preparedness of lay people to take a share of responsibility, is perhaps the most valuable and most important contribution of the post-conciliar period.<sup>13</sup>

It is helpful to look briefly at the issue of "democracy" in the Church. Rahner notes:

... many structures and institutions may be built into the Church which give the people of the Church a more active role than that which they have previously had in the life of the Church itself. In other words... these new structures and institutions may signify 'democratic' rights within the Church. In fact many changes in this direction have in practice already been achieved within the Church, even though we may hold the opinion that still more changes of the same kind will have to take place in the future.<sup>14</sup>

Schillebeeckx gives extensive treatment to this issue in a chapter entitled "Towards Democratic Rule of the Church as a Community of God."<sup>15</sup> This work explores the impact of various historical developments: bishops as feudal princes; the Enlightenment; the French Revolution; bourgeois religion; and the Council's final "break with its feudal past."<sup>16</sup>

The co-responsibility of all believers for the church... essentially includes the participation of all believers in decisions relating to church government (however this may be organized in practice). Vatican II also gave at least some institutional encouragement towards making this universal participation possible: the Roman synods, the national councils, the episcopal conferences, the councils of priests, the diocesan and parish councils of lay believers and the frameworks of many organizations.<sup>17</sup>

Schillebeeckx notes the danger of over-emphasizing "our one-sidedly technological consumer society" and urges "the interplay of official teaching authority and the teaching authority of believers and their theologians (always in some tension)."<sup>18</sup>

Obviously, the Church is not free to disregard Scripture and tradition; and it retains divine guidance. Kasper also notes that the term "'People of God' does not mean a political association of people or 'ordinary, simple people,' as distinct from the establishment.... It means the organic and structured whole of the church, the people gathered round their bishop, and attached to their shepherd, as Cyprian put it."<sup>19</sup>

### **III. An "Open Systems" View of Church**

Many would agree on the concept of shared responsibility in the Church. The tensions arise when it is worked out in practice. Much of the difficulty relates to communication patterns and practices.

Another issue is the need to develop and build a theory of subsidiarity; it is not just a question of Rome implementing it. What is required is the *institutionalization* of subsidiarity. This needs to be developed organically, not simply from the top down, or one contradicts the principle of subsidiarity. These are some of the specific tasks when integrating practical applications of authority and co-responsibility in churches today.

Many of these issues are worked out at the local level. Thus, the Church at the parish and diocesan level is the focus of much current ecclesial inquiry and theological reflection. Joseph Komonchak notes reasons for the shift to the local Church. These include "... the revalidation of the bishop's role; the importance of regional episcopal collegiality; ecumenical reflection on the differences compatible with unity; challenges of inculturation;... (the need for) genuine community in a world of increased anonymity and bureaucracy..."<sup>20</sup>

The Church also exists in a society of advancing scientific inquiry. From an organizational or institutional viewpoint, it is helpful to examine the impact of one scientific perspective – systems theory.

Everett and Rekha Rogers have analyzed organizational communication. One can trace the history of organizational behavior studies from early "scientific management" days through the discovery of "human relations. Rogers notes the emergence of "a more eclectic and encompassing viewpoint" in the 1960s and 1970s – "the systems school."<sup>21</sup> Based on general systems theory, this viewpoint "conceptualizes an organization as a system of interrelated components, and stresses the orchestration of these parts as the key to maximizing performance.... This intellectual viewpoint has been the single most influential theory in contemporary scientific thought, especially in the social sciences."<sup>22</sup>

These theorists conceive of a system as a set of *interdependent* parts. Communication is one essential element of any system – linking the parts (subsystems) and facilitating their interdependence. The focus on *interaction* is very significant; the increasing interactivity of communication technologies, discussed below, parallels the emphasis on interactivity in systems theory. This theme of interdependence is reflected also, of course, in the ecclesiology of *communio*.

In describing an "open system" approach Rogers explains:

A system is a set of units that has some degree of structure, and that is differentiated from the environment by a boundary. The system's boundary is defined by communication flows... any system that does not input matter, energy, and information from its environment will soon run down and eventually cease to exist... an *open system* continuously exchanges information with its environment.<sup>23</sup>

Research within organizations indicates that "the more turbulent environments require a more differentiated and decentralized organizational structure."<sup>24</sup> This may have interesting ramifications for churches today.

I have seen two interesting applications of systems concepts to ecclesiology and church governance. The first is a study of ecclesial cybernetics by Patrick Granfield.<sup>25</sup> This author uses case study analysis (of slavery, birth control, ecumenism, and celibacy) to examine concepts of democratic (interactive) communication, noting implications for ecclesiology.

In citing institutional conditions for improved church communication and responsive decision-making, Granfield lists:

- .. small communities fostering religious commitment;**
- .. the principle of pluralism;**
- .. greater local autonomy and flexibility;**
- .. credible study commissions; and**
- .. broad participation in the selection of leadership**

Another study uses a systems approach to analyze shared responsibility in the educational system of the Church.<sup>26</sup> Olin J. Murdick has designed a systems approach "reality grid." In the Murdick model, specific operational components – such as goals, policies, programs, and governance – move through systematic stages. This significant study provided much of the theoretical foundation for the development of participatory school boards for Catholic schools in the United States. Murdick's concept of the School Board as "the voice of the community" is almost a metaphor for other participatory forums within the Church.

The challenge is to respect the role of *authority* while facilitating dialogue. The sensitive leader knows that participation permits both information-sharing and human affirmation. We have reviewed the ecclesiology of *communio* and the significance of systems theory in the institutional Church. It is important to understand that – in parallel with these – dynamic developments have occurred in the field of communication.

#### **IV. The Role of the Message and Stories in Our Lives**

When we review human history and communication roles within it, we move back before the time of complex structures when oral cultures were smaller and communal. Linking these groups required communication channels, both oral and written. These patterns were present in both Judaic and early Christian communities or churches. Leaders emerged; however, much interaction occurred among local people because there were not complex infrastructures above them or easy access to other groups. The storyteller represented data storage – like computer memory of today.

When the technology of print emerged in medieval Europe an upheaval occurred that eventually fractured the local and regional loyalties of feudal society. Other factors include the Reformation, the ascendancy of the arts, the Enlightenment, and the concept of absolutism – the idea that power could be centralized in a king or a state. Meanwhile, trade routes provided financial and communications infrastructures; later the Industrial Revolution and nation-state concept added complexities making communication channels more difficult to analyze.

This brings us quickly up to modern history, but it is here that we must function. And it is in this context that the Church must discern how communication theory and tools can infuse its unique mission and service to others.

Complicating and enriching this modern context is the growth of natural sciences and social sciences. Included are varied specifics such as: economic theory; psychiatry; systems analysis; the growth of bureaucracies; the science of management; the development of the democratic ideal; striving for universal education; personalism

(fulfilling the earlier promise of the Enlightenment); the rise and fall of colonialism; and modern liberation movements. It is no wonder all this seems impossible to control or understand! The fact is that "control" – at least "centralized control" – is much more difficult, if not completely impossible, in the light of the above developments and the advances of mass communication systems.

Two additional factors should be mentioned. At least in the United States, pressure groups have focused enormous energies, funds, and communication manipulation into special-interest arenas, causing the noted consultant Peter Drucker and others to speak of "gridlock" when describing it. In addition, communication/information overload is tending to induce fear and anxiety; this breeds conflict.

Where does hope reside? Why should one trust in "animating forms of cooperation," as Pottmeyer uses the term above? Advances in communication theories help somewhat. Specialists in communication are more sophisticated in tracking information flows between individuals, among groups, and within organizations and societal structures. New communication theories arise, like the "public sphere" model discussed below. And information *technologies* can provide enabling infrastructures – electronic highways which parallel the trade routes, railroads, and canals of previous ages.

In a 1989 conference of theologians and communication scholars held in Rome, some efforts were made to link the ecclesial concept of *communio* with communication sciences. One participant, Ricardo Antoncich, noted that theology (as reflection about the faith of the Church), should enter into dialogue with other forms of thought that rationally explain the life of the human being in the world. He noted: "Methodologically, the contribution of communication to ecclesiology does not refer exclusively to the analysis of how the Church lives its internal or external communication; rather it refers to the total contribution that communication sciences offer to the understanding of the human person, the world, and history."<sup>27</sup>

Hermann Pottmeyer, another participant, offered a corresponding model of communication/*communio*. He spoke of *communio* as a leitmotif – a norm or criterion – for the Church, her structures and relations. Rather than a concrete single concept, it has a theological and anthropological meaning. Pottmeyer noted that *communio* has three corresponding communications dimensions:

1. communication within the church (*communio fidelium, communio ecclesiarum*);
2. extra-ecclesial communication (Church as sacrament of the Kingdom within the unity of mankind); and
3. the self-communication of God (history of salvation).

All Church communication converges within the framework of divine self-communication, thus the Church's role as sign or witness.<sup>28</sup>

## V. Communication Forums

In speaking of the emerging models of communication we need to move toward

the concept of *participative communication forums*. Our first guide toward this path is Bernard Häring's thoughtful essay entitled "Ethics of Communication" in his volume on moral theology for priests and laity. Häring speaks in this work about mass media (TV, films, advertising), but we also see here the early traces of a sensitive awareness of communication as *interactive* and *dialogic*. He speaks of The Word as "listener;" he says the "Spirit is sharing;" (his emphasis). He notes: "A teaching Church that is not, above all, a learning, listening Church, is not on the wave-length of divine communication."<sup>29</sup>

In this work, written more than two decades ago, Häring says that a new dimension of today's communication is its "public forum" role. "The public forum in which information and opinions are exchanged is not something static... it is the sum of various 'worlds'" and he reminds us: "Vatican II considers the awareness of this changing world as fundamental for understanding our task."<sup>30</sup>

Häring moves then to a rich appreciation of pluralism.

Pluralism is not at all anarchy of ideas and a structureless society. Democracy needs mutual respect and agreement on basic values. But tolerance does not imply neutrality of thought... a legitimate pluralism is never a threat but rather an indispensable condition for catholicity in truth and truth in catholicity....

As one of the outstanding "signs of the times," pluralism invites a courageous and generous ecumenical spirit and action.<sup>31</sup>

He concludes:

... the full recognition of pluralism and methods of dialogue, the common search for truth, and reciprocal communication not only do not threaten the consistency and unity of a united Christianity but can greatly help to strengthen and deepen them.<sup>32</sup>

Häring confronts realistically the pathologies of modern communication, the dark side. He bemoans technology-for-its-own-sake, the lack of access, the manipulation.

One of the most serious threats to human integrity is the constant exposure to scenes of excessive cruelty. This abuse of mass media, which suggests that the normal solution of human conflict is violence and even cruelty, is called by Haseldon "the most monstrous obscenity of our time." Particularly dangerous to humankind is the glorification of war and "the glamorizing of the military tradition."<sup>33</sup>

In an overview of Church documents on media, Haring concludes that evangelization through mass media should involve a prudent limitation of any media that make dialogue difficult. "Churches have to develop a dialogical style that invites everyone to participate trustfully."<sup>34</sup>

## **Culture and the Public Sphere**

The concept of communication as *forum* (thereby dialogical) is a bold move in a field that has tended to focus on the model of a message moving from a source to a receiver (with much passivity). Under the influence of studies in cultural anthropology and linguistics, scholars now realize the significant interaction between communication and popular culture. We know that the common currency of any culture is deeply integrated into the communication channels existing within that culture.

Robert White, at the Gregorian University, has done a significant analysis of this, applied to developing nations. White uses a concept stressed by other scholars – “the public sphere.”

Descriptively, the public sphere refers to that aspect of social action, cultural institutions, and collective decision-making that affects all people in the society and engages the interests of all people in the national body.... a nation may be said to exist insofar as it has a core of social interaction that is truly common and public.<sup>35</sup>

White explains the need to move away from emphasis on mass media to “the way that different groups construct discourses of meaning.” The issue of a *participatory conception of the public sphere* leads communication experts to study group media instead of focusing on mass media only. We note once again the significance of *community* in public culture and participative media.

My own conviction is that we need to expand our communication horizon *beyond* group media (generally understood as audio and video “programs”) to include what I would term *interconnecting* or *interactive* or *link* communication technologies. This interaction is participatory and connects quite naturally with the theology of *communio*.

### **Interactivity: An Epistemological Turning Point**

Driving an epistemological revolution is the interactivity of new communication technologies. To date much social science research in communication has focused on either the message *content* or media *effects* – linear models. We are now facing a totally new direction in our analytical focus, moving to “communication-as-exchange,” to the *process* of interaction.

Everett Rogers, a leading communication scholar, has analyzed how innovation is diffused. His own personal story shows an early anti-technology attitude. However, through the influence of Ed Parker, a Stanford colleague, Rogers began to realize the significance of the diffusion and social impacts of new communication technologies.<sup>36</sup>

My own growing commitment to the study of interactive technologies involved a trip to Stanford to talk with Parker; this resulted in an awareness of the emerging impact of communication satellites, telephony, and computer technologies, and the integration of communications and computers. After this ‘conversion’ I moved from work in TV production to doctoral studies in telecommunications at Harvard and MIT.

Communication and computer technologies are now so integrated that it is impossible to distinguish between them in many media. I have developed a model to clarify relationships among components of information technologies. (Figure 1) This model distinguishes between *design*, *storage*, *distribution*, and *interactive* technologies.

**Figure I**  
**INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES**

*Design Technologies*

Development of Creative or Informational Concepts  
Design of Mediated Materials by Technology Professionals and Content Creators  
(Informational and/or Entertainment Materials)

**Storage Technologies**

Film  
Audio Tapes, Cassettes  
Compact Discs  
Videocassettes  
Computer Software  
Telephone Answering Systems  
Videodiscs and CD Roms

*Distribution Technologies*

Broadcast Radio (AM, FM)  
Broadcast TV (UHF, VHF)  
Cable Systems  
Microwave Technology  
Satellites  
Telephone Technology (Including Mobile Phones, Paging, Cellular)

*Interactive Technologies*

*(These modes involve Design, Storage, and Distribution technologies)*

Teleconferencing  
Teletext, Videotext  
Video Stores  
Interactive Cable Mechanisms  
Computer-Based Interactive Systems  
Off-Site Audio/Video Feeds

It has always seemed necessary to me to separate the components or roles of communication/information technologies. Some are obviously storage technologies and some involve distribution. In fact, most of our attention is focused on only a few of the components: film, audio and video tapes/cassettes (storage technologies); and broadcast radio and TV and cable (distribution technologies).

New types of technologies have emerged in each of these areas. Newer storage tools include computer software, telephone answering systems, videodiscs, and CD-ROM, for example. Newer distribution technologies include microwave improvements, satellites, optical fiber, and technologies such as paging and cellular telephony. Facsimile messages also represent an exploding use of a practical tool.

Our conceptual analysis and management of the current terrain is enriched, I think, if we pay more attention than we have in the past to both design technologies and interactive technologies. As Figure 1 indicates, the design and development of content to be stored and distributed is a technology all its own. I suppose most of us call this "writing."

And then there is *interactivity*. This category actually involves or integrates all of the other groups – design, storage, and distribution. As these technologies converge we are reminded of Shakespeare's description of a "brave new world that has such creatures in it." This would include video stores (allowing us to interact with program choice more vigorously), facsimile, conferencing, varied computer-based interactive systems, and off-site audio-video feeds, which permit the aggressive interactivity of world-wide news broadcasts. And, of course, the Internet and World Wide Web.

Technological tools challenge both individuals and institutions to reach for new ideas, for exploratory skills, for higher-order thinking. A strategic tool needed for this task is *collaboration*.

## VI. Institutionalizing Collaboration

The intellectual marketplace has become more of a challenge due to the increasing amounts of information (data) and the complexity of the technological systems for processing the data. When you add the challenge of resource-limitation, it seems as if the only way to respond to the converging pressures is through fierce competition – often resulting in polarization within, and between, institutions.

Another way to view the situation, however, is that working smarter, not harder, can often involve working *with* others. Computer technology itself provides a metaphor for this approach in *time sharing*, a procedure allowing many people to use computer technology virtually simultaneously.

Other metaphors for this situation include the destruction of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It is possible that we are approaching the end of the concept and the reality of the nation-state. Part of the defining nature of the nation-state is that it has been the source, inspirer and container of information. Now, however, media images and computer networks override geographical boundaries. Regulatory mechanisms, like parliaments of the nation-state, no longer rule exclusively. Another reality is the ethnic enclave; communication technologies homogenize, but ethnicity – a type of family link – will be increasingly significant in the coming decades.

Today global economic challenges, while making people aware of the need for competitive advantage, also seem to be the direct cause of bold new collaboratives like the European Union – emerging with certainty albeit with difficulty. Even a noted authority like Peter Drucker states that we are in need of new economic models; the old theories are feeling the weight of increasing complexities, most of them technological. It may be that the new theoretical constructs will reflect a more conjoined world.

Technologies seem to be having a decentralizing effect on the bureaucracies of modern culture – the system or "technique" that the French philosopher Jacques Ellul critiqued in his writings. Drucker sees a new kind of organization emerging – one with more horizontal operational structures. Replacing most of the mid-level management will be task-force teams that are fluid and comprised of experts from various areas

collaborating on tasks.

On the factory floor and in major corporate offices the team is already being institutionalized; *Fortune* magazine, in a cover story, noted that "the (team) phenomenon is spreading. It may (have been) *the* productivity breakthrough of the 1990s."<sup>37</sup> The challenge is to *use* technological tools that facilitate interactivity and collaboration, thus leading to greater productivity (and community).

Communication forums mean we *plug in* to tools such as computer-based messaging systems. The studies of California analyst Jacques Vallee<sup>38</sup> demonstrate that technological forums are productive. Such forums substitute for many face-to-face meetings and allow quick response when emergency changes are required.

After the Three Mile Island nuclear accident in the United States, messages were continually available on computer bulletin boards like "emergency hotline," "emergency planner information," and "operations and maintenance information," and many others.

Mundane messages are integral to our daily planning and often the message provides greater information precision and thus improves decision-making. This also keeps us connected as individuals, as community.

Our marketplace of ideas is more complex; information and machinery keep changing. The pace of change is staggering and this requires new tools; many of these enabling technologies involve the telephone and computer, often linked by satellites. More important than the technology is the *institutionalization* of collaboration in utilizing the tools in effective ways. In an Aspen Institute study, David Bollier notes:

The concept of *information sharing* is what characterizes the current situation.... That is the most noteworthy trend in the dissemination of information technologies. It's the nature of information as a resource that it's going to be shared.<sup>39</sup>

I have undertaken a series of research projects in communication and collaboration, constructing a theory and related case study analysis in the telecommunications sector. My hypothesis is that:

1. Communication/computer technologies are changing rapidly;
2. Entrepreneurial opportunities in this market sector are vast; and
3. To keep pace with the technological changes and market forces, we need new, *collaborative and dialogic* strategic planning and operational tools.

I have formulated a theoretical perspective that emphasizes the role of collaboration or cooperative efforts in meeting telecommunications needs and pressures. I call this concept Interactive Strategic Alliances (ISAs). Case studies under analysis from this theoretical perspective include: direct broadcast satellite development; teleconferencing for meetings; international negotiations for satellite use by many nations; the co-operative communication efforts among European Union nations; and other examples.

One dramatic forum has emerged in the increasing demand for liberation politically throughout the world. Viewers connected by mass media globally have watched "people power" emerge in Manila, in Poland, and on the streets of Moscow.

Behind the television coverage, however, large numbers of people on the street are nodes in a communication network, using telephones, computers, and fax machines, where messages cannot be controlled. This communication pattern empowers individuals and groups. Authority, whether legitimate or not, seems to move from "the top" to "the grass roots." Pyramid organizational and authority structures are under siege (both in Moscow and in centralized church structures in Rome); this happens, to a large degree, because people communicate easily in new and interactive ways. There are many aspects of interactive communication and collaborative structures that require more analysis and more fieldwork, both in political societies and in churches.

An interesting question concerns gender differences. Are women socialized to be more collaborative than men?<sup>40</sup> Is there a connection between the competitive nature of society and the fact that women have limited leadership roles to date within that society? We may begin to see the collaborative model employed more by males, thus enabling joint ownership, with increased societal effectiveness because of a greater commitment to this *mutuality* – by both females and males.

We need to study patterns of collaborative activity within groups and institutions and the regional economic collaboratives emerging throughout the world. We must identify the barriers to collaboration that will be troublesome in this decade when large empires will have disappeared but regional and ethnic strife will have probably continued. And much work needs to be done in preserving local voices within large collaboratives – as the current arguments over globalization demonstrate.

More information is needed on economies of scale within collaboratives. We need current analysis of the uses of power and its impact on cooperatives (the concept of power-with instead of power-over). We must ask how we can design incentives for cooperative action, but we must also learn how to communicate through adversarial positions honestly arrived at. Mary Parker Follett, an organizational specialist involved in establishing the Harvard Business School a century ago, noted: "We should never allow ourselves to be bullied by an 'either-or.' There is often the possibility of something better than either of two given alternatives."<sup>41</sup>

### *A Collaborative and Mediated Church*

It is a challenge that our struggle to clarify models of Church occurs at a time of enormous technological and communication change. It is a challenge, but it is perhaps also a grace. A sign of this grace for me is the fact that a leading theologian like Cardinal Avery Dulles began saying decades ago that "the Church *is* communication."<sup>42</sup> As more members of the Church community throughout the world use and understand the varied technologies of information-sharing and interconnecting we may well empower new communities – i.e., new forms of *communio*.

A major theme of this document has been that *interactivity* inevitably and effectively removes passivity – in communication, in society, in churches. One-way structures are crumbling. Hopefully, the participatory *communio* ecclesiology of Vatican II documents will become more evident, instead of a pyramidal structure; otherwise, the Church will have difficulty communicating credibly in a collaborative, mediated world.

Our metaphor for this communion has been the reality that, even at great cost, people have taken down a Wall in Berlin. Perhaps it is appropriate, therefore, to conclude

with reflections by two German theologians.

Cardinal Walter Kasper has written in *Theology and Church*:

To understand the church in a new way as a communion, to live it better, and to realize it more profoundly is... more than a programme for church reform. The church as a communion is a message and a promise for the people and the world of today.<sup>43</sup>

And Hermann Pottmeyer adds:

The task that must be faced... is to incorporate what is still binding in preconciliar theology into the newly acquired foundation... into a *communio* ecclesiology and a Christian anthropology that calls for commitment to human dignity.... The decisive question... is whether we are giving the Spirit of God enough freedom to lead the church along new paths.<sup>44</sup>

### Notes

1. *Lumen gentium* 13.
2. Hermann J. Pottmeyer, "The Church: Its Self-Understanding and Structures." Unpublished manuscript.
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