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RELIGIOUS MARKETING

Theoretical
articles

Keywords

*Religious marketing,
Church marketing,
Faith,
Religion*

JEL Classification

M39

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to establish the conceptual delimitation of the term religious marketing. The term religious marketing has caused controversy. There are two currents: that of the theologians, on one hand and that of the marketers, on the other hand. The representatives of each current have their own view regarding the implementation of marketing into the religious sphere. The article concludes with the necessity to adapt the churches' activities and the ways they must be presented to the society's actual characteristics. This can be achieved by using appropriate marketing tools and methods; however, the particularities of religion must be taken into account in order not to alter its religious values.

Introduction

The term religious marketing has caused and is still causing controversy. There are two currents of thought: the theologians, on the one hand, and the marketers, on the other hand. The representatives of each current have their own view regarding the implementation of marketing into the religious sphere.

Religious marketing, which comes under the field of service marketing, namely non-profit marketing, appeared long after product marketing. We are entitled to believe that the earliness of the term is one of the reasons why light has not been turned upon this concept.

Some strongly state that in the field of service marketing, particularly non-profit service marketing, people first practised marketing and afterwards became aware of it and took it into consideration for theory.

The term marketing was first mentioned in the ecclesiastic sphere by Jay Benson Hamilton, in his paper *Empty Churches and How to Fill Them* (Hamilton, 1879). Ever since 1879, he presented the problems within churches and ways to counter them through marketing judgment.

A long time passed from the simple stage of becoming aware to that of explaining the characteristics, limits and rules. The gap was not enough to build a common front so as both currents of thought to become aware of the benefits; however, most of the rules, limits and conditions for the proper conduct of a religious marketing process have been identified. A common thinking will be possible only when each will take into consideration the point of view of the other current.

After the first paper related to the use of marketing thinking within churches, the interest for religious or ecclesiastic marketing began to grow. Strâmbu-Dima notices an increased use of the term marketing in the religious sphere, to the detriment of the terms promotion and advertising in the latter part of the twentieth century (Strâmbu-Dima, 2008). However, Strâmbu-Dima outlines an important aspect, namely that the use of certain marketing techniques, instruments or methods is not equivalent to practising marketing; in this respect, he quotes Strout (1991), who says that practising marketing involves the development of a “formal, systemic and scientifically grounded activity” (Strâmbu-Dima, 2008, p.65).

Strâmbu-Dima states that there are authors who argue that the implementation of marketing in religion is as old as religion itself (Strâmbu-Dima, 2008). Regarding this idea, Stevens, Loudon, Wrenn and Cole quote Barna, who stated in 1988 that “The Bible is one of the greatest marketing texts of the world” (Stevens et al., 2006, p.144). Strâmbu-Dima also shows that “the American historians argue that preachers have used marketing practices ever since the colonial times” and that “Strout (1991) presents religion as “a product that

can be put on the market”, after analysing the work of George Whitefield, a famous evangelist from 1730-1740” (Strâmbu-Dima, 2008, p.65).

Teleanu identified an important opinion for religious marketing, that of Fiorentini Giorgio, who claims that the motivation of implementing religious marketing is “does not necessarily regard entering the logic of commercializing one’s own religious belief, but manifesting one’s own abilities of expressing faith by transposing one’s own religious principles into service activities ...” (Teleanu, 2005, <http://www.rostonline.org/rost/nov2005/marketing-religios.shtml>).

The definition provided by the prestigious American Marketing Association for the term marketing in the general sense is a starting point for Angheluță, Strâmbu-Dima and Zaharia to develop the definition of church marketing. In 2007, the American Marketing Association defines marketing as *the activity, the set of institutions and processes developed for the creation, communication, distribution and exchange of offers, goods that have value for the consumers, customers, partners and the society* (American Marketing Association, 2007). According to Angheluță, Strâmbu-Dima and Zaharia, this definition reflects the authors’ concern regarding the idea that marketing should not be limited to the economic sphere, and its use should not be restricted only to the economic segment. The three authors also outline the idea that we should not underestimate the importance of using marketing in the non-profit sphere (Angheluță, Strâmbu-Dima&Zaharia, 2009).

In the Dictionary of Marketing, ecclesiastic marketing is defined by Adăscăliței as “essentially referring to the implementation of marketing in order to spread a religion, to attract new followers and to gain their loyalty and is increasingly used by different religious groups through the specific institutions – churches or meeting houses, missions, in order to get the expected response from the target market - keeping or changing religion, financial contributions, donation services or other types of exchanges”(Florescu, 2003, p. 404).

Angheluță, Strâmbu-Dima and Zaharia believe that the above definition is too commercial, as it refers to religion as a normal service, not as a social one, and the goals of the social organizations are much more complex than those of the financial organizations (Angheluță, Strâmbu-Dima&Zaharia, 2009).

In his paper, *Religious Marketing is different*, Bruce Wrenn argues that until then most of the papers regarding religious marketing came under one of the two currents: YES (pro), supported by marketers and NO (against), supported by theologians (Wrenn, 2011).

There is an extensive list of papers for each of the two currents. The YES current was mainly formed of people with economic expertise, namely

marketing, who supported their position and tried to convince people regarding the importance and utility of implementing marketing in the religious sphere. The NO current presented their fear, their reticence, segregated the two terms: marketing and religion, argued that the results can be disastrous and developed arguments for their views.

Culliton James was the one who wrote the first paper from the YES current in 1959; it is entitled "A Marketing Analysis of Religion" (Strâmbu-Dima, 2008, p.66).

An important paper from the NO current was written by Hirschman in 1983. Its title is "Aesthetics, Ideologies and the Limits of the Marketing Concept" and it presents several reasons why religion does not "fit in" with marketing.

The article on the front page of Christianity Today, entitled "Jesus is not a brand", is presented by Bruce Wrenn (Wrenn, 2011, p.45). It comes under the category of NO articles published in the religious press and warns upon the dangers associated with churches using marketing. The degree of concern is easy to identify: "Success is not an appropriate criterion for either faith or wisdom. In fact, what is happening now within the process of adapting to the cultural needs is a set of substitutions that could also have a lethal effect upon the practice of historical Christianity (Wells, 1994, p. 86)". Wrenn argues that "indeed, if a church that uses marketing is likened to *dining with the devil*, as it has been suggested (Guinness, 1993), we should wonder whether marketing is trying to cross a bridge that is too long" (Wrenn, 2011, p.46). Wenn argues that some of the controversy between the currents lies in the confusion between the elements of the object of marketing. And hence the following question arises: religion or religious institutions?

Strâmbu-Dima believes that only 35 articles that support the implementation of marketing in religion were written during 1959-1989 (Strâmbu-Dima, 2008).

More than half of the articles published within the volume *Concise Encyclopaedia of Church and Religious Organization Marketing* were from the YES for religious marketing sphere; however, Strâmbu-Dima identified an interesting phenomenon: "immediately after the wave of pro-marketing applied in the religious sphere articles, which were written by marketers, there emerged another wave of papers, articles and volumes against marketing applied in the religious sphere, which were written by religious authors" (Strâmbu-Dima, 2008, p.66).

Although in Romania the term religious marketing is not widely spread, since nor marketers nor theologians are particularly involved in the implementation of marketing in churches, at international level the process is widely spread; in the United States it is likened to a true industry. In

order to outline the scale of the process, we mention Ifan Shepherd, who quotes O'Shaughnessy, who states that "Everything from religion to government services is presented and segmented as diversified offers, where the public can choose from" (Shepherd, 2004, p.319).

In the United States of America, after year 1990, there appeared various courses, books and specialized marketing organizations that help churches build appropriate marketing strategies, from setting the goals, the target group and the necessary resources to implementing the marketing process. The main objective taken into consideration is the increasing number of members.

1. Subject analysis

Religious Marketing is a part of service marketing. Service marketing numbers several fields, including non-profit marketing. Religious marketing is included in this category.

How is non-profit marketing different from classic marketing?

There are a number of differences that clearly separate classic marketing from non-profit marketing; they are classified according to three criteria: the economic criterion, the legal criterion and the social criterion. The differences related to the economic criterion refer to the specific characteristics of non-profit marketing: in this case, we do not refer to material goods or financial services; the focus is laid on ideas, missions, causes and faith. The legal criterion refers to the legal status of the organization and its obligations; in our case, the organization has a particular public or private status. The social character was mentioned last, but not least, whereas perhaps it is the most important aspect: the aim is to satisfy the general interest, contrary to classic marketing, which is focused only on the particular interests.

Another particular element regarding non-profit marketing is precisely the way of measuring and calculating the results of the implementation of the marketing process. The pursued results usually regard the increase in the number of members, the retention and loyalty of the existing members, improving the organization's image, collecting funds for various causes, raising aid within various programs, changing the attitudes towards different aspects, changing certain behavioural characteristics, raising the awareness regarding certain global, national, regional, local, problems, etc.

Non-profit organizations are divided into three categories, depending on the field of activity:

- Philanthropic,
- Professional,
- Political.

The aim of the first category is represented by charity acts and all the charitable actions from different sectors: health, education, culture, social

work, church, etc. The professional organizations include leagues, clubs, foundations, associations, unions etc., and the political organizations include parties, lobbyist organizations, etc.

According to Adriana Zait the marketing process within non-profit organizations (religious organizations in our case) includes 5 steps:

1. The main step is identifying the goals,
2. Placing the organization on the market,
3. 7P Marketing Mix
4. Designing the marketing plan, implementing the marketing plan,
5. Developing the message to be communicated; (Zait, 2004, p.230)

In order to outline several differences between classic marketing and non-profit marketing, I will present the following parallel performed by Adriana Zait regarding Service Marketing:

Table 1 Parallel regarding Service Marketing

Reflection elements	Non-profit marketing	Classic marketing
To whom it applies	Ideas, organizations, persons, places, and indirectly goods and services	Goods, products and services, except ideas
Goals	Complex, multiple, usually financially unquantifiable (social attitudes, behaviours, etc.)	Financial (turnover, profit)
Components	Beneficiaries and benefactors (two targets)	Clients (buyers) (one single target)
Nature of the exchange	Mainly informational, moral, educational, etc.	Mainly financial
Market segmentation	Affected segments, unreal from the economic point of view	Profitable segments from the economic point of view
Benefits	Most often uncorrelated with the payments made by customers	Correlated with the payments made by customers

Source: Zait, A. *Marketingul serviciilor*, Editura Sedcom Libris , 2004, p.233

Strâmbu presents the most common criticism regarding the implementation of religious marketing and provides answers (Strâmbu-Dima, 2008):

1. Marketing wastes the money offered to God by the member parishioners

2. The marketing activity acts as an intrusion into the life of the individuals
3. Marketing is manipulating
4. Marketing militates against the spirit of leadership
5. Marketing desacralizes religion
6. In Romania, people are still interested in the religious message
7. Larger churches have a greater need for communication
8. In marketing the Win-Lose principle is practised
9. Customer orientation

Conclusions

In the current conditions, in which society is in a continuous change worldwide, but not necessarily in a good way, there are a series of particularities that must be taken into account when we establish our future steps. It is of vital importance to keep up with the modern society or more correctly, the post-modern one, and, if we don't know its characteristics, the results will definitely be disastrous. The world doesn't wait for us, and the contemporary phenomena conquer our lives. The Church must realise that there have appeared fundamental changes and it has the duty to try to acknowledge, discover and find a solution to them.

Stefan Iloaie, in his book "Christian morality and post-modern ethics", page 14, sees the process of globalization as being "characterized by the universality of economic, social, cultural, social values, religious mutations and the speed of the Exchange between value-non-value" (Iloaie, 2009, p.14).

The Church must quickly adapt to these changes and to try to counteract the negative effects that will surely come out. In the process of globalization, there are a lot of negative effects, affecting religion too and in what follows, I will mention only some of them: the relativity of faith, the disappearance of the feeling of belonging to an authentic religious tradition, syncretism, the relativity of spiritual values, individualisation, the increasingly less knowledge of reality and the interest in it, the ignoring of man's spiritual problems, the issue of integrating Christians in urban life, the ignoring of our conscience and its disappearance.

Bruno Cescon underlines the fact that "Many realities globalize, but not for the values that worth living for, such as solidarity, human rights, the ethical dimensions of existence and all that centres the human being". (Cescon, 2003, p. 71).

In this process of globalization, man suffers from a disease that is inherent to the society we are living in: loneliness. Man is alone because he is cornered from every angle, he focuses on the near future and necessity, he hasn't developed a defence system against the economic and technical manipulations; therefore, due to the lack of religious values, he

falls prey to his instincts, hedonism, aggressiveness and entertainment.

The social values are the ones that are the most affected by the changes of post-modernity, and especially, the moral ones because religious axiology vanish and there appear important changes in expressing faith and man's daily life. These social changes and community actions are opposed to those of previous generations.

The tendencies of disbelief in religion, faith, religious institutions and generally speaking, old values are more and more visible and they even worsen, leading to their complete denial. They are replaced by other elements that are promoted by the process of globalization and ideological pluralism. Consequently, there appeared the axiological relativism, the old values being eliminated, while the new ones appeared too fast in order for them to be analysed, to be fully understood and realized and to be trusted.

If we consider faith, values are of utter importance and all these changes create a state of mystery around them, but the Church must act as quickly as possible and to use means that are adapted to the society we are living in; the industry of marketing can be very useful from this point of view. The mass-media presents only non-values and the people consume what they are being offered. We are easily manipulated, but we don't create ourselves a defence system, a battlefield. The Church has the duty to save as much as it can be saved. It must try to learn to be one step ahead the worldwide changes, if it is possible.

Francis Fukuiama's ideas are depicted by Stefan Iloaie: "The instability of values means an identity crisis for the postmodern world which can be traced at the level of individuals and at the freedom they have and to which they don't want to give up. Individual freedom develops one's ability, but also one's stubbornness, to put himself in the center of the world and to consider that everything that surrounds him is, selfishly, his. Giving up one's freedom means defeat in postmodern is thinking".

Placing man in the center of the world is contrary to Christian laws. God's place is no longer where it should be. In this context, everything changes.

Some personal insights

Marketing can act in different directions in religion. Using religious marketing is a way to counteract some of the negative effects of progress with its own weapons. But it must be adapted to nowadays society and its characteristics; if not, some of them previously presented, the Church, faith have no chance of winning this war. We are too easily manipulated and all the information around us is not helpful. After a period of restrictions, we got into too much freedom. Not a real one, one misunderstood, one that limits and ties us up into a

chain in which every ring means selfishness, hedonism, nihilism, relativism...

The production is unrestricted, but the needs have also become unlimited. The expectations know no limit and so we have the tendency to bury ourselves in today, lonely and sad.

Our only chance is to identify moral values to respect and grow on a fertile soil. But we need help and the Church is entitled to offer it to us. I would emphasize that it must be offered through modern methods because we are bombed by information, colours, images and the Church has to use marketing as a tool adapted to our needs and characteristics.

From this point of view, the theologians and marketers must work together. A marketer without solid religious knowledge will never be able to carry into effect an efficient marketing process, whilst a theologian without knowledge in marketing will share the same fate too.

All that will be done from now on must respect the dogmas and the Holy Tradition.

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