

ECCLESIAL CYBERNETICS: COMMUNICATION IN THE CHURCH

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CHRISTIANS TODAY live in a period of transition. The twentieth century is a middle era leading to a radically different mode of human existence. Vatican II spoke of a "new age in human history."¹ Other observers are more specific. Kenneth Boulding refers to post-civilization,² John Courtney Murray to postmodernity,³ Bishop Robinson even to post-Christianity.⁴ From a different point of view, Harvey Cox speaks of the technopolitan age,⁵ and Norbert Wiener of the cybernetic age or the Second Industrial Revolution.⁶ There can be no doubt that, in this last third of the twentieth century, we are witnessing radical transformations of human activity in every dimension. The Church cannot and should not isolate itself in this changing world. It faces unexpected and pressing challenges, but it can draw upon vast creative potential.

This article will consider one critical aspect of the Church in transition: the communication problem. The Church can continue to develop only if it adapts, and this adaptability is rooted in a realistic communication theory. Speaking axiomatically, the more communication there is between all levels in the Church and between the Church and its total environment, the more effective will be the Church's corporate witness to the Word. The article will comprise two sections. In the first we will analyze a communication model for any complex social organization. In the second we will apply this model, *mutatis mutandis*, to the Church. The over-all aim, therefore, is to comprehend

¹ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, no. 54 (*The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J., and Joseph Gallagher [New York, 1966] p. 260; hereafter referred to as *Documents*).

² Kenneth E. Boulding, *The Meaning of the Twentieth Century: The Great Transition* (New York, 1964) p. 2.

³ John Courtney Murray, *The Problem of God* (New Haven, 1964) p. 101.

⁴ John A. T. Robinson, *The New Reformation* (Philadelphia, 1965) p. 35.

⁵ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (rev. ed.; New York, 1966) p. 5.

⁶ Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (New York, 1950) p. 185.

the basic principles and factors which must be operative in every in-depth analysis of the Church and the communication problem, or, in a phrase, of ecclesial cybernetics.

A COMMUNICATION MODEL

The term "cybernetics" was coined by Norbert Wiener, who derived it from the Greek word *kybernetēs*, "steersman."⁷ The science of cybernetics is the study of the control and the regulation of goal-oriented behavior. For Wiener, the main purpose of cybernetics is "to develop a language and techniques that will enable us to attack the problem of control and communication. . . ."⁸ It is his thesis that "society can only be understood through a study of the messages and the communications facilities which belong to it. . . ."⁹ The science of cybernetics has found wide application in electronics, neurology, engineering, and telecommunications. Recently social scientists have begun to extend the range of cybernetics to complex social organizations, to political communities, and to economic systems.¹⁰ A cybernetic analysis of the Church is possible and is an urgent necessity. Before we can discuss this, we must first present the underlying elements of a cybernetically-oriented communication theory.

Open Systems

Cybernetics deals with the regulation and control of open systems—systems that are receptive to environmental influences and capable of adapting to them. Political systems, churches, business corporations, armies, and other large social organizations are all open systems. They are not isolated from their environment; in fact, their very

⁷ Id., *Cybernetics: or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Cambridge, Mass., 1948).

⁸ *The Human Use of Human Beings*, p. 25.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Cf. Kenneth E. Boulding, *The Image* (Ann Arbor, 1956); Karl W. Deutsch, *The Nerves of Government* (New York, 1963); Morton A. Kaplan, *System and Process in International Politics* (New York, 1957); *Contemporary Political Analysis*, ed. James C. Charlesworth (New York, 1967); and *Communication and Culture*, ed. Alfred G. Smith (New York, 1966). We are especially indebted to the work of David Easton, Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago. In the first section of this article we have found most useful his *A Framework for Political Analysis* (New Jersey, 1965) and *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (New York, 1965).

existence depends on their ability to cope with environmental stress and to profit from the more constructive elements in their milieu. "An open system," observes Cadwallader, "whether social or biological, in a changing environment either changes or perishes. In such a case, the only avenue to survival is change."¹¹

Systems that are able to resolve to their advantage the tension between stability and change by adapting to the environment are called ultrastable systems. This capacity to persist, this ultrastability, is the very opposite of rigidity. Evolutionary biology gives us the earliest examples of this adaptability, but the rise and fall of great states is perhaps a more dramatic testing ground. There are many other examples of ultrastability. A good one is the business corporation which through wise diversification has survived in the treacherous economic world of supply and demand. History, of course, writes the epitaph of the numberless animals, governments, businesses, and societies that failed to survive because they failed to adapt.

Communication Network

Ultrastable systems are considered to be learning and innovating systems; they learn from past experiences and present demands and thus are able to overcome the forces of displacement. It is through the communication of information that ultrastable systems can meet stressful situations and react positively to them. The immensely complex variety of information which flows from the parameters of social behavior must be communicated to the system. Such communication, however, must contend with the tendency to entropy which is defined by Boulding as "the principle of diminishing potential."¹² It is nature's decline to disorder and chaos. In any system, confusion tends to increase at the expense of order. Entropy is the enemy of communication. In this light, communication is sometimes conceived of as a game between the forces of confusion and the activities of the speaker and listener. It is necessary, therefore, to have a viable communication model which is antientropic and which is a guarantee to the system of purposeful behavior based on the information received. We shall now discuss the major components of such a model.

¹¹ Mervyn L. Cadwallader, "The Cybernetic Analysis of Change in Complex Social Organizations," in *Communication and Culture* (n. 10 above) p. 397.

¹² Boulding, *The Meaning of the Twentieth Century*, p. 138.

Total Environment. This concept includes the parametric systems of culture and the economic, social, and political structures on the national and international level. The necessity of situating the communication network in its existential context is obvious. Faced with a communications explosion, a shrinking world, and the interdependence of the world community, isolation is unthinkable. Every social organization inevitably receives information units from the total environment. The problem is to communicate these influences to the decision-makers and for them to use this information to the greatest advantage.

Authorities. The officially constituted authorities or decision-makers in a social system have the responsibility of making reasonable and effective policy judgments implemented by sanctions in order best to serve the community in its concrete situation. Guided by the fundamental and enduring principle of human dignity—as much freedom as possible, as much law as necessary—the authorities are obliged to allocate values in accordance with the needs of their constituents and the exigencies of the common good.

Output. The authoritatively binding decisions and actions which flow from society to the environment are called “outputs,” and they determine the subsequent behavior of the society. The nature of authority and the use and application of authoritative power mold the quality of the outputs. Outputs do not exist in a vacuum, but are dependent on an indispensable informational factor called “input.”

Input. The raw material of authoritative decision (output) is the input, which consists of the effects received from other systems in the environment. The two main inputs, which are indicators of the conditions that shape authoritative decision, are demands and support. A demand is defined by Easton as “an expression of opinion that an authoritative allocation with regard to a particular subject matter should or should not be made by those responsible for doing so.”¹⁸ Demands are the major informational inputs. They are directed to those in authority and are of great variety. They may express discontent, grievance, impatience, a request for recognition or for a particular action, or aspirations for power. Demands cause a disturbance which the system feels; they require a response (action or inaction).

¹⁸ Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*, p. 38.

Thus is set up a stimulus-response-outcome pattern. Authorities must convert demands into outputs.

Support, the second main input category, refers to those attitudes which help sustain a particular system. Patriotism, sense of community, political or party loyalty are all classed as supports. They may be positive or negative, but as Easton says, "No system could endure for very long if it did not seek to build up a reservoir of support."¹⁴ Outputs influence the kind of supportive attitudes that will develop. These attitudes in turn result in specific demands for action.

Feedback Loop. Between output and input and between the system and its environment there is a continuous, interlinking flow which is called the feedback loop. It consists of the authoritative decisions (outputs) which are communicated to the members of the society. Their reaction in the form of demands and support (inputs) is in turn communicated to the authorities, who take decisive action in the form of further outputs. Then the whole process begins again. This reciprocal flow of information and response between the system and the environment enables the system to persist in spite of changing conditions. The feedback of information and the ability of a system to respond permits authorities to take corrective action if required. Without this feedback, the authorities would not be in a position to act with full responsibility.

Information feedback, the ability to determine future action on the basis of past performance, has been called "the dominant and most fertile intellectual innovation of our own age."¹⁵ Feedback has become a highly nuanced concept which permits a learning and innovating system to cope with the downhill tendency of entropy and to maximize potential by intelligent adaptation based on actual success and failure in realizing goals. Information feedback provides that necessary stimulus to make a system purposive. It enables a system to become self-transforming and to arrive at a sophisticated state of social maturity. It opens up imaginative ways of dealing with new problems as well as creative techniques for long-term planning. By learning the supportive attitudes of the members of their communities and the extent of

¹⁴ Easton, *A Framework for Political Analysis*, p. 125.

¹⁵ Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*, p. 367.

the satisfaction or frustration of their demands, authorities are enabled to make wiser and more effective decisions.

The success of information feedback depends primarily on the number and quality of the communication channels directing the flow of the information to those in authority. For example, in a political society, elected representatives, votes, opinion polls, pressure groups, lobbyists, petitions, and demonstrations are some of the mechanisms that convey information to the major decision-makers. Currently, electronic equipment is becoming more and more necessary in tabulating, classifying, analyzing, and storing this information to insure its optimal value.

COMMUNICATION AND THE CHURCH

Our task now is to discover how the Church can most effectively use the communications model we have just described. That the Church must constantly re-evaluate her communications system is as clear as the fact of change in the world. But before entering the arena of ecclesial cybernetics, we must make a few preliminary observations dictated by the nature of the realities involved. The communications model we have discussed envisages a human society, but the Church is much more than that. Although both the Church and the state are complex social organizations with discernible structures, there are essential differences. In applying social concepts to the Church, there is always the danger that these differences may be overlooked. The resulting application would be univocal and inaccurate. The Church and civil society cannot meet as equals, *par cum pari*. Although sharing much in common, they are two essentially different realities. Practically speaking, this means that in applying the communication the predication must be intrinsically analogous.

Ecclesiological Guidelines

First of all, any discussion of the Church's communication structure must take into consideration the unique nature of the Church. It is multidimensional, with paradoxes, conflicts, and tensions, but it is one. It is divine and human, invisible and visible, pneumatic and institutional. Although here we are concentrating on its human,

visible, and institutional aspects, we are not prescind from its spiritual side. The history of ecclesiology shows the errors and the confusion that have arisen from the overemphasis of one aspect of the Church at the expense of others. Avery Dulles wisely cautions us "to avoid such imbalances" and "to keep our eyes open to the full dimensions of the Church, with all its surprising variety of aspects."¹⁶ In this article, although we focus to some extent on the organizational Church, we are also fully cognizant of the Church as the sacramental presence of Christ in the world, as the entire people of God moving as a pilgrim on the way to final glory. In a word, we view the Church as a mystery filled with the hidden presence of the divine.¹⁷ Every consideration of the authority of the Church, its structural components, and its communications system must be seen in this divine light.

A second critical difference between the Church and human social systems is the *donné*. God has disclosed Himself to man through Christ. This revelation is a communication, a salvific happening,¹⁸ made to the Church, which thereby possesses the saving Word through the indwelling of the Spirit. The constitution of the Church is something given. Therefore, the validity of any ecclesiological conclusions about the nature of the Church is determined primarily by its fidelity to the kerygma. Unlike human societies with their man-made constitutions, the Church is founded on the communication of God to man.

A third factor which distinguishes the Church from purely human societies is the Church's indefectibility. This faith-affirmation means that the Church will remain in existence and will never be destroyed by the forces of evil and error. Christ promised to remain with the Church until the end of the world (Mt 28:18-20) and He referred to its rocklike stability (Mt 7:24-25; Mk 16:18). The indefectibility of the Church is forged from that intimate union of Christ and the Church.¹⁹

¹⁶ Avery Dulles, S.J., *The Dimensions of the Church* (Westminster, Md., 1967) p. 20.

¹⁷ Cf. chap. 1 of the *Constitution on the Church* and Pope Paul's opening allocution at the Second Session (Sept. 29, 1963) of Vatican II.

¹⁸ In Rahner's words, revelation is "a saving Happening, and only then and in relation to this a communication of 'truths'" (*Theological Investigations* 1 [Baltimore, 1961] p. 48).

¹⁹ St. Augustine refers to the Church's indefectibility in the following way: "The Church will falter when her foundation falters. But how shall Christ falter? . . . As long as Christ does not falter, neither shall the Church falter . . ." (*Enarr. in ps. 103*, 2, 5 [*Corpus Christianorum*, ser. lat. 40, 1493-94]).

The quality of ultrastability does not render the Church totally immune from nature's entropic threat. It does not mean that the Church has arrived at a terminal state of perfection. Ultrastability refers to the Church's endurance to the end of time. The Church, however, as an incarnational society, is a perfectible reality, subject to the entropic forces of displacement and confusion. It is in this sense that Vatican II speaks of the Church and her continual need for renewal. The Constitution on the Church, in contrasting Christ and the Church, says: "While Christ, 'holy, innocent, undefiled' (Heb 7:26), knew nothing of sin (2 Cor 5:21), the Church, embracing sinners in her bosom, is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified. . . ." ²⁰ The same theme is found in the Decree on Ecumenism. ²¹ The theological axiom, *ecclesia semper reformanda*, is thus officially sanctioned.

Cybernetic Application

With both the pneumatic and institutional dimensions of the Church in mind, we will now attempt to apply the cybernetic principles described above. This is far from being a tour de force, because the Church is an apt subject for cybernetic analysis. The Church is an open system which evidences an extraordinary degree of ultrastability. This quality is inherent in the Church's indefectibility and is best expressed in the Church's ability to adapt to violently fluctuating change. The adaptability of the Church has made it possible for it to persist for nearly two millennia in spite of bitter and prolonged persecution, changing cultural, political, social, and economic patterns, and inner dissensions of major proportions. The Church has been able to cope with devastating stress and still survive. This adaptability has perhaps been slow, disorderly, and at times carried out under weak leadership, yet the fact remains that the Church has endured. Traditional theology refers to this as a "social miracle." Vatican I saw the Church's "unshaken stability" as part of that "great and perpetual motive of credibility" which is proof of the Church's divine mission. ²² History gives eloquent testimony to the ultrastability of the Church,

²⁰ Constitution on the Church, no. 8 (*Documents*, p. 24).

²¹ Decree on Ecumenism, no. 6 (*Documents*, p. 350): "Christ summons the Church, as she goes her pilgrim way, to that continual reformation of which she always has need, insofar as she is an institution of men here on earth."

²² Vatican I (Denzinger-Schönmetzer 3013).

which is rooted, from a cybernetic point of view, in her creative ability to cope with stressful situations. Our next task is to examine in detail the communication model of ecclesial authority.

Total Environment. If, as John McKenzie insists, "the Church must change to survive,"²³ then this change will be in response to the total environment. The Church can never isolate itself from parametric influences. According to Pope Paul, "the Church is not separated from the world, but lives in it."²⁴ The environment is considered not as evil, but as a source of constructive values. Estrangement from the world, an insular *fuga mundi* mentality, leads to anachronism and to a pathetic kind of self-estrangement. Of course, the Church cannot lose her identity in the world. She must always walk that narrow road between isolationism and secularism. But as Bishop Robinson has observed (and in doing so has given us the central tenet of secularization theology), "the house of God is not the Church but the world."²⁵

Authorities and Output. Flexible and inventive leaders are necessary if the Church is to have a beneficial communication network. A monolithic, authoritarian, and pyramidal concept of authority is a denial of communication. A more credible approach to authority is that which views it as service, *diakonia*.²⁶ Church authority is unique in that it is antiauthoritarian, an operation of the Spirit, and a function of love. It is exercised within and not over the Church.²⁷ Ecclesial authority so conceived creates a favorable atmosphere which encourages communication on all levels. The principles of collegiality and subsidiarity, the decentralization of authority, the national episcopal conferences, the synod of Bishops, and the internationalization and reform of the Roman Curia have struck a telling blow to Church bureaucratization.

The outputs that flow from an authority that sees itself as *diakonia* take the form of reasonable, goal-oriented decisions. They are not imposed from above, but develop out of the community's concern.

²³ *National Catholic Reporter*, Book Supplement, Dec. 6, 1967, p. 4.

²⁴ Paul VI, *Ecclesiam suam*, no. 42; English translation: *Paths of the Church* (N.C.W.C.) p. 19.

²⁵ Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

²⁶ An extensive treatment of this idea is found in Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York, 1968), pp. 388 ff. Cf. also Patrick Granfield, "Diakonia and Salvation History: Piet Fransen Interviewed," *Clergy Review* 51 (1966) 332-49.

²⁷ Cf. John L. McKenzie, *Authority in the Church* (New York, 1966).

Decisions of this kind are expression of a communal love and are the only kind suitable to the *koinonia*, that community of love and worship. Such love-oriented decisions perform an anti-entropic function in the community. As Boulding remarks, in a cybernetic paraphrasing of St. Paul's words on charity, "love, in the sense of the Greek *agape*, emerges as the most anti-entropic of all human relationships."²⁸

Input and Feedback Loop. We come now to the heart of ecclesial cybernetics: the communication of the reactions of the members of the Church to those in authority. When the decision-maker is open and sensitive to the feedback, both positive and negative, of the members, then he operates as a genuine learning and dialogic authority. When the Church is receptive of the creative contributions of its members, then it is able to truly renew and reform itself. It renews itself by developing new attitudes, new pastoral structures, and new doctrinal clarifications. It reforms itself by restoring itself to the original vigor of the gospel, which in time has been deformed by sin and weakness.

In applying the feedback loop to the Church, it is necessary to keep in mind certain theological factors. The main problem we must first discuss is the role of the faithful in the Church. What position do the faithful have in relation to authority? How is the faithful's reaction to output directed to those in authority and what is the theological justification for their action?

Theological Observations

The *pleroma* of the Church, its totality and fulness in truth, must always be related to specific ministries in the Church.²⁹ According to this concept, the Church is not equated with the hierarchy, nor is the magisterium restricted to the papal magisterium and episcopal magisterium. The laity, in the words of Pius XII, "is the Church."³⁰ Every member of the church, through his baptism into the priesthood of Christ, participates in some degree in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly activities of the whole Church. Authority, then, becomes a

²⁸ Boulding, *The Meaning of the Twentieth Century*, p. 146.

²⁹ This is a favorite theme in Orthodox ecclesiology. For some illuminating observations on this problem, see Nikos Nissiotis, "The Main Ecclesiological Problem of the Second Vatican Council," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 2 (1965) 31-62.

³⁰ Pius XII, *AAS* 38 (1946) 141.

shared authority and the magisterium of the faithful becomes a valid witness, though not the only one, to divine truth.³¹

How does this affect the traditional distinction of the *ecclesia docens* and the *ecclesia discens*? In a pleromatic vision of the Church this distinction is considered inadequate and misleading. It is often wrongly interpreted to mean that there are two separate parts of the Church: one (the hierarchy) whose only duty it is to teach, and the other (the faithful) whose sole duty it is to obey. The former are seen to have an active role and the latter a passive one. In reality, there is an intimate and reciprocal interaction between the teaching Church and the learning Church. Members of the hierarchy, in fact, also belong to the learning Church. It is more correct to say that the teaching Church and the learning Church are united in learning. Congar says that bishops, as private persons, belong to the faithful. They are obliged, as all the faithful, to live according to the deposit of faith. By living it they safeguard it.³²

The college of bishops under the leadership of the pope is, by divine right, the official teacher of the revealed truth that the whole Church has received.³³ The teaching of the Church reflects the belief of the entire Church. Vatican I taught that the pope possesses that infallibility "with which the divine Redeemer willed His Church to be endowed."³⁴ The hierarchy, therefore, teaches that which the whole Church believes. Rahner insists that "the believing Church can and must be consulted by the magisterium."³⁵ The judgment of the magisterium must be based on tradition, which can only be determined by referring to the Church's faith.

³¹ This extension of the term "magisterium" is suggested by Daniel Maguire in "Morality and the Magisterium," *Cross Currents* 18 (1968) 62.

³² Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church* (Westminster, Md., 1957) 280. See also the Modernist error condemned in *Lamentabili* (Denzinger-Schönmetzner 3406).

³³ The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity makes this very clear when it states: "Christ conferred on the apostles and their successors the duty of teaching, sanctifying, and ruling in His name and power." The Decree goes on to say: "But the laity, too, share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ . . ." (no. 2; *documents*, p. 491).

³⁴ Vatican I (Denzinger-Schönmetzner 3074).

³⁵ K. Rahner and H. Vorgrimler, *Theological Dictionary* (New York, 1965) p. 269. This same notion is found in Newman, who, in discussing the *consensus fidelium*, refers to the "pastorum et fidelium conspiratio" (John Henry Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*, ed. John Coulson [New York, 1961] p. 104). Cf. also Samuel D. Femiano, *Infallibility of the Laity* (New York, 1967).

Any discussion of the laity's function in the teaching Church leads to an examination of the *sensus fidelium* and the *consensus fidelium*. The *sensus fidelium* (or *sensus fidei*) is not to be understood as a faculty of private judgment exercised vis-à-vis the hierarchical magisterium. Nor is it an act conditioning the validity of hierarchical action, as some Anglican and Slavophil theologians taught.³⁶ The *sensus fidelium* (the *sensus fidei* corporately present in the community of believers) is that sensitivity to the reality of God's revelation and the ability to discern what is consonant with or inimical to the *donné révélé*.³⁷ Vatican II refers to the *sensus fidei* as an "understanding of the faith,"³⁸ and "a supernatural discernment in matters of faith."³⁹ It gives the believer an active role in bearing witness to, in sharing in, and in penetrating more deeply into, the revealed message.

The *consensus fidelium* is "what the faithful in unanimous agreement at a given time believed as revealed truth."⁴⁰ It also means a statistical fact or result.⁴¹ If it is universal and pertains to the area of faith and morals, the *consensus fidelium* is infallible. We read in Vatican II: "The body of the faithful as a whole, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief."⁴² In some circles any connection of the faithful with infallibility is still looked upon with suspicion. The source of this uneasiness is the definition of infallibility in Vatican I, which taught that ex-cathedra definitions are irreformable "ex sese, non autem ex consensu ecclesiae."⁴³ The word *consensus* has had an interesting history. During the conciliar debates at Vatican I it was frequently used in the traditional and patristic sense of "agreement."

³⁶ Cf. Congar, *op. cit.*, pp. 265-66; C. Dillenschneider, *Le sens de la foi et le progrès dogmatique du mystère marial* (Rome, 1954) pp. 266-70.

³⁷ Dillenschneider defines the *sensus fidei* as "the intuitive sense of the believer, the fruit of the vigor of his faith and of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, through which he is endowed with a faculty in discerning, within the communion of the Church, what is implicit in the revealed truth objectively proposed to him by the magisterium" (*op. cit.*, p. 327; English translation from Charles Davis, *Theology for Today* [New York, 1962] p. 220).

³⁸ Constitution on the Church, no. 35 (*Documents*, p. 61).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 12 (*Documents*, p. 29).

⁴⁰ H. Bacht, *LTk* 3 (2nd ed.) 43-44.

⁴¹ M. Seckler, *LTk* 4 (2nd ed.) 945-46.

⁴² Constitution on the Church, no. 12 (*Documents*, p. 20).

⁴³ Vatican I (Denzinger-Schönmetzer 1074). Cf. George Dejaive, S.J., "Ex sese, non autem ex consensu ecclesiae," *Eastern Churches Quarterly* 14 (1962) 360-78.

The teaching of the Church is in "agreement" with the belief of the whole Church. In the definition, however, *consensus* took on a very specific meaning. There it meant a juridical consent or approval. The reason for this change in meaning was, as Butler explained, the result of a concerted effort of the majority, who were bent on killing the Gallican "ex consensu ecclesiae."⁴⁴ The Council, therefore, taught that there can be no absolute, strict, juridical necessity, no *sine qua non* condition which would require the pope to have the approval (*consensus*) of the bishops before he can define. It was a rejection of conciliarism, which held that the decrees of the pope may be reformed by a general council.⁴⁵

Even in the official documents of Vatican I, however, the more traditional concept of *consensus* as "agreement" is found. The Council explains how the Church determines the true meaning of the deposit of faith by "calling together ecumenical councils, or by sounding out the mind of the Church throughout the whole world."⁴⁶ In answer to the objection that infallibility separated the pope from the Church, Bishop Gasser explained that this was not the case. Addressing the Fathers, he said that the pope is bound to take all appropriate means to ascertain the truth: to seek the advice of bishops, cardinals, theologians, etc. He went on to say that "the agreement of the present preaching of the whole magisterium of the Church united with its head is the rule of faith even for definitions of the pope."⁴⁷ Then, to convince his hearers of the pope's connection with the Church, he said: "Whatever the universal Church by its present preaching receives and venerates as revealed is certainly true and Catholic."⁴⁸

The participation of the faithful in the decision-making of the Church cannot be divorced from an ecumenical perspective. Limitation of space allows us to refer only briefly to the important question of ecumenical feedback. Vatican II officially acknowledged other churches and ecclesial communities; it recognized an "ecclesial reality" in non-Catholic separated Christian groups. In a genuine theological sense,

⁴⁴ Cuthbert Butler, *The Vatican Council—1860-1870* (Westminster, Md., 1962) p. 398.

⁴⁵ Cf. the Gallican articles in Denzinger-Schönmetzner 2281-85.

⁴⁶ Vatican I (Denzinger-Schönmetzner 3069).

⁴⁷ Butler, *op. cit.*, pp. 390-91.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 391.

these groups manifest and share in the ecclesial saving activity of Christ.⁴⁹ If this is true, then we can look to our fellow Christians for insights into the life-giving truth of Christ. Ecumenical dialogue is a movement of the Spirit and presents us with a magnificent opportunity to learn.⁵⁰ The doctrinal formulations of our fellow Christians and their living of the Christian message demands our most attentive consideration. The ecumenical magisterium should not be neglected.

Practical Implementation

Earlier we talked of input as that raw material from which authoritative decisions (outputs) are shaped. At that time we said that the two main inputs, which act as indicators of the attitudes of the members of the society, are support and demand. These elements, which are part of the feedback loop, are also found in the Church. The demands and supportive attitudes of the faithful are able to be communicated to the authorities through various communication channels. The greater the number and variety of channels, the greater the possibility that the information will reach the authorities and that action will be taken. This is in accord with the cybernetic principle: "the capacity for innovation cannot exceed the capacity for variety or available variety of information."⁵¹ What, then, are some of the more effective channels through which the faithful express their reaction to decisions and help determine future decisions?

First, there are the various conferences, congresses, and committees in which the faithful have an important voice. In the Roman Curia there is the Council for the Laity, which was established in 1967. In this country there is a vast number of lay organizations, theological societies, parish councils, priests' senates, religious orders, and secular institutes. The most recent national organization to make an appearance is the National Committee of Catholic Concerns, which met for

⁴⁹ Cf. Constitution on the Church, no. 15, and Decree on Ecumenism, chap. 3. On the whole problem of "ecclesial reality," see Robert E. Hunt, "The Separated Christian Churches and Communities in the Mystery of Salvation," *The Catholic Theological Society of America: Proceedings of the Twenty-First Annual Convention* [1966] (Yonkers, N.Y., 1967) pp. 21-32; James O. McGovern, *The Church in the Churches* (Washington, D.C., 1968).

⁵⁰ Cf. Philip D. Morris, *Ecumenical Dialogue* (Washington, D.C., 1968) pp. 136 ff.

⁵¹ Cadwallader, *art. cit.*, p. 400.

the first time in April of this year. This group intends to set up a national affiliation of many church-related organizations. In their "consensus report" they stated that "the institutional Church must undergo a 'democratization' process, so that when we think of the Church, we do not think only of bishops." It went on to say that "we must learn to enter into communication on all levels and among all groups . . . in a climate of mutual trust, openness, and Christian love."⁵²

A second channel is publicity. This includes the press, radio, television, and cinema. In America, books and magazines have played a major role in the *aggiornamento*. There is little doubt, for example, that the *National Catholic Reporter*, with its clear editorial policy, has been influential in catalyzing public opinion and even of directly determining hierarchical action. The secular press also deserves mention. Daily newspapers and national magazines (e.g., *Time* and *Newsweek*) with their regular religious features, reach millions of people and help form opinion. In fact, the wide coverage of religious news by the secular press has been a major contributing factor to the decline of Catholic periodicals.

A third channel is protest. In its increasing use of protest, the Church in America mirrors the secular scene. Protests may take the form of demonstrations, picketing, or even signed petitions, as in the recent case of the religious of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, where over 25,000 persons signed a petition asking Pope Paul to allow the nuns to continue their experimentation program. The Holy See, bishops, religious superiors, and pastors are becoming more and more familiar with this effective form of information feedback.

A fourth kind of communication channel, which may soon become a reality in the Church, is election. In the apostolic Church, election was widely used.⁵³ During the past year in the United States priests' senates in several vacant sees have petitioned Rome for some voice in the selection of the bishop. Hans Küng has advocated that the local parish, through the parish council, should be able to select their pastor. "It is absolutist," he argues, "to impose a priest on a parish."⁵⁴

⁵² *National Catholic Reporter*, May 8, 1968, p. 6.

⁵³ McKenzie, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

⁵⁴ Reported in the *New York Times*, February 15, 1968. On the question of elections, see Joseph O'Donoghue, *Elections in the Church* (Baltimore, 1967).

A fifth channel is the use of the modern electronic computer. Impartial, unbelievably rapid, and with an unfailing memory, the computer is able to correlate facts and attitudes that have been previously gathered by questionnaire. Recently the Redemptorist Fathers have opened a data-processing service which provides a "71-facet view of each practicing Catholic." Pastors first distribute questionnaires to their parishioners. The answers are fed into a computer which delivers a 180-page report on the religious attitudes of the members of the parish.

The use of electronic equipment opens up new possibilities for the *consensus fidelium*. It is now possible to find out what the teachings and practices of the Church mean in the lives of the faithful. Ecumenists might find computers a valuable asset in determining those things that are commonly held as well as indicating divergent views. Theologians too might use the computer to their advantage. The information explosion has not bypassed theology and today it is most difficult to find out what is the *consensus theologorum*. At least one theologian has called for a comprehensive listing of theological writing,⁵⁵ and another has suggested the use of data-processing equipment.⁵⁶

The five channels that we have listed above are by no means the only way the faithful can express their concern. The devotions of the faithful and their liturgical practices have always been a highly respected guide to what doctrines are held. The *lex orandi lex credendi* will always be a sound indicator. The channels we have described are not of equal value or effectiveness. Of themselves, the channels are not infallible indications of the opinion of the faithful. A minority group of extremists, for example, with considerable financial resources might be most articulate in suggesting completely untenable proposals. Together with the increase of communication channels, there must also be developed viable methods of interpretation. Subtle but

⁵⁵ John F. X. Sweeney, S.J., "Recent Developments in Dogmatic Theology," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 17 (1956) 368-413.

⁵⁶ George K. Malone, "Theological Consensus: The Present Dilemma," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 154 (1966) 256. The legal profession has seriously studied the various uses of the computer. Many stimulating insights are found in M. E. Caldwell, "Legislative Record Keeping in a Computer-Journal," *Harvard Journal of Legislation* 5 (1967), and Charles S. Rhyne, "The Computer Will Speed a Law-Full World," *American Bar Association Journal* 53 (1967).

sure norms are badly needed to determine the value of feedback. It is imperative for ecclesial cybernetics that the total Church be considered. The final norm of judging the worth of feedback will always be: Does it contribute to the building up of the Body of Christ which is the Church?

CONCLUSION

Ecclesial cybernetics is the science of communication in the Church. It is a sacred and secular up-dating of a traditional problem area. In this article we have sought to discover the operative principles, both theological and cybernetic, which are reciprocally involved in this specialized area of communication. Ecclesial cybernetics is related both to traditional ecclesiology and to modern communication theory. In it, both faith and reason work together toward a fuller implementation of its prophetic and pastoral office. Three points should be mentioned.

First, ecclesial cybernetics strengthens Church unity. It enables us to assimilate intelligently the growing feedback from the faithful, avoiding the danger that Pope Paul warned against, the forming of "two parallel hierarchies, as it were two organizations side by side,"⁵⁷ but realizing the goal of the Decree on the Laity, "diversity of service but unity of purpose."⁵⁸

Second, ecclesial cybernetics can provide valuable insights into the most profound theological problem that we face today: doctrinal development. Assessment of trends, accurate information concerning the belief and practice of the entire Church, and an effective teaching authority are significant factors in doctrinal development which for their perfection require a sound communication system. The Church thereby becomes more sensitive to the growing edge of truth.

Finally, ecclesial cybernetics helps make this growing unity of faith and of the faithful more effective in restoring all things in Christ. It enables a pilgrim Church in a changing world to buttress its wisdom with information, its eternal truths with concrete facts, for the more fruitful fulfilling of its apostolic mission despite the complexities of pastoral and ecumenical work.

⁵⁷ Paul VI, Address to the Third World Congress of the Lay Apostolate, October 15, 1967: *American Ecclesiastical Review* 158 (1968) 273.

⁵⁸ Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, no. 2 (*Documents*, p. 491).