

Antal Balog

Marketing in Church: A Contemporary Concept of New Evangelism

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The book *Marketing in Church: A Contemporary Concept of New Evangelism* is a doctoral thesis which provides overview and summary of the author's considerations on how to appropriately apply the concept of non-profit and social marketing in churches and church-like organizations. The author's basic thesis is based on the assumption that marketing, as a group of activities planned and applied by individuals and organizations in order to achieve selected goals through development, placement and the exchange of specific values with others (P. Kotler) is actually compliant with the basic church mission and can be applied in churches and church-like organizations without revoking or limiting their specific characteristics.

The author of this thesis is Dr. Antal Balog, assistant professor at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek and at the College of Business and Management "Baltazar Adam Krčelić" in Zaprešić, who holds a doctoral degree in Applied Theology (Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, U.S.A.) and Economy (Faculty for Economics J.J. Strossmayer University in Osijek). The thesis was published in 2012 by the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek and "Logos", Daruvar, and printed by "Grafika", Osijek.

The content of this thesis fills 496 pages including appendices, and is divided into 13 chapters and 81 sub-chapters. An overview of the thematic units implies basic characteristics of the author's approach: seeking an interconnection between theology and marketing. The titles of the chapters guide the reader through pages of the Bible and reflect prophetic thoughts, while the subtitles lead directly to contemporary dilemmas: neo-capitalism and its influence on the market, society, and church; and marketing as a tool of the liberal ideology of consumerism at the service of evangelism.

The author tries to find an answer to the basic question as to whether or not something doubtful, something which represents one of the main tools of globalization ideology, could be used without doubt within the system of values prioritized by churches without damaging their uniqueness. The author applies different methodological approaches: theoretical-analytical, biblical-exegetical, but also practical research. Balog lists 496 references covering the majority of leading authors, sociologists, economists and marketing specialists, such as Bežovan, Barna, Considine, Cooke, Črpić, Giddens, Meler, Rocco, Sellers, Weber, Wren, Wymer, Zrinščak, Žugaj, etc., as well as historians, ethicists, experts on religion, mission, and theology in general, such as Baloban, Dogan, Jambrek, Ivančić, Jukić, Koprek, Rebić, Sider, Smith, Stevens, Šagi, Yoder, etc., as well as 84

web references. The author undertook field research and used case study methodology in analyzing the practical experience of social marketing applied in the Evangelical Pentecostal Church in the Republic of Croatia, covering 2.238 units as a base for defining his statistically referent specimen.

In the very first chapter of the work, under the title “Not by Might, Not by Power, but with Spirit,” Balog indicates his way of thinking – the book’s guiding principle: every social organization (including the church) is aware of the presence and dynamics of social, economic and other dis-harmonies of the modern world, and is aware of its own specific role in their reduction and removal. Every social organization (but the church first!) is called to use different means in fulfilling its mission (10). That is the background reason the author emphasizes and supports the following four theses: social marketing can be successfully applied by Christian communities and harmonized with their mission and call to evangelize; with the use of social marketing, Christian communities become more efficient in fulfilling their mission; the application of social marketing methodology contributes to the spread of the Gospel message to different social groups; and finally, avoiding the use of social marketing could be lethal for religious communities if they would like to remain actively engaged and relevant in modern society.

In the second and third chapters of the work (“Seeking the Word” and “The Days Come...”), the author analyzes not only the basic mission, position and role of the church today, but he also interfaces marketing with the church, and explores the position of marketing in the church. Balog recognizes the possibilities of connecting marketing with church activity not only within a target group to make the Gospel message more efficiently issued, but primarily to improve the visibility of church institutions and change their public (mainly negative) image (56-57).

The fourth chapter, “Prayer Focused on Work” as well as the fifth, “Prophecy and Tell” more deeply display the social marketing and civil society concept, as well as the concept of the church within civil society from its specific perspective, which gets further emphasized in the sixth chapter, “Come to the Light.” This is where the author’s argument culminates: the implementation of marketing principles will not result only in improving the general mission of the church, but also in improving all kinds of different Christian activities from social to humanitarian engagements, education, science, culture and art, all the way to publishing, media and politics, even economic development (123).

This leads to the seventh, eighth and ninth chapters (“Walking Paths Straight”, “I Observe All Your Deeds and Consider What You Have Done,” and “Flexible Wisdom”) where Balog analyzes market dynamics and develops marketing strategies as a basis for the creation of social marketing strategies for Christian communities. His recommendation can be found on page 233: an application of a *mix* of four marketing elements (product, price, distribution, and promotion) as a package

(whole) or selectively could become an efficient means of promoting the church mission and goals, but the possibility of compromising the Gospel message with inappropriate content and methods should be strongly considered (266).

Therefore, in the last chapters of the book, Balog discusses different marketing techniques, methods, and possibilities and how to use them correctly. Attitudes presented in “Word and Gift”, “Grains of Dust on a Beam Scale,” “Discovering Man’s Thought” and “Word like Fire” will affect the reader by opening a new way of thinking for him/her and encouraging serious considerations about church and society as being closely interlinked. The compatibility between marketing and the mission of the church needs to be used (strongly taking into account the specific values of the church community) for many reasons: globalization affects church organizations – hence applying social marketing principles will become more an issue of community organizational survival than an issue of organizational choice (392). Also, applying marketing principles and adjusting the system of church management could initiate a broadening of existing services and create a more positive public image of the church in society. Coverage of target groups would increase, Christian values would be promoted more effectively, church concepts would be postulated as contemporary and relevant (393-4). Finally, communication on all levels would be improved inside churches, between them and between churches and society since the active participation of different stakeholders and a culture of open dialogue about common values would be promoted. Manipulative, unethical and inappropriate activities or methods seriously damaging the Gospel message and the doctrine of the apostolic church would be more efficiently identified and removed (389).

The scientific work *Marketing in Church: A Contemporary Concept of New Evangelism* is relevant within mission theology and non-profit marketing for churches, church-like organizations and individuals, theology experts, church elders, and faithful laity ready to take a new step in applying marketing models in surroundings which have been, until recently, out of the focus of marketing activities, but also for marketing specialists and higher degree students of theology. The author successfully connects theory and praxis, analyses of biblical and scientific sources by using a multidisciplinary approach (sociology – sociology of religion – economy – marketing – ethics – theology), and uses results and the methodology of practically applied research in confirming his basic thesis: there are needs, but also opportunities for the successful application of marketing activities in church organizations, and strategically defined and applied methods of marketing could result in positive improvements for the church and its mission.

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Translated from Croatian by Dalia Matijević