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**CHURCH MARKETING – CONCEPT
AND UTILITY**

The church mission and objectives are more and more difficult to accomplish because of the secularization of the today's society. Church's use of marketing is a sensitive issue that has both supporters and critics. This article subscribes to the positive point of view that suggests that religious organizations can apply marketing in order to fulfill their mission and to obtain better results. It also claims that the use of marketing by the church and clergy does not contradict the religious core values and that church marketing should develop a theoretical framework of its own and a specific set of methods, techniques and instruments. The present paper reveals the complexity of religious marketing. It presents a holistic view of the church marketing and proposes a specific conceptual framework for it. The article demonstrates that religious organizations' marketing should be regarded as a form of social marketing and it briefly describes the church marketing process.

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Key Words:

marketing, social marketing, church marketing, church marketing process.

Introduction

Various studies¹ show, both in Romania and worldwide, that the majority of people have declared they believe in God, but the percentage of people who attend church services and other religious activities is much smaller. It is probably this reality of a formal religiosity of a great part of the church members that leads a growing number of the clergy to appeal to modern instruments: leadership, management, marketing in order to achieve the objectives of their religious organizations.

In conclusion, religious organizations face a dilemma: how could their message reach a public that is less and less preoccupied with living religion and which is caught in the chaos of the day-to-day life, having many organizations trying to win their adherence. Marketing offers a possible solution to this dilemma.

Marketing is a concept that the general public associates with the business world, with monetary exchange (buying and selling). It seems hard to accept and to understand that marketing can be used in order to support social causes, not to mention religion, a domain focused on spiritual values. Nevertheless, practice has proved that the connections

between marketing and religion can be multiple and profound, and academics have begun to deepen the study of these relationships.

Shawchuck, Kotler and Wrenn describe the reaction of most people (that don't know precisely the marketing concept and approach) when being told of the possibility of using marketing in the domain of religion: „Metaphorically, a lack of understanding as to the true nature of marketing can be linked to the individual who has seen a hammer being used only as a tool of destruction and who, upon being handed a hammer when asking for a tool to use in construction, wonders if the other person has taken leave of his senses. In the same way, if marketing has been perceived as only deceptive advertising by dishonest salespersons and as efforts to manipulate demand (tool of destruction), it will be dismissed by individuals or religious institutions when faced with problems that it might help them solve.”²

It is in the intention of this article to demonstrate that marketing can help the church solve some of its problems. In this respect, some issues need to be clarified, and in the opinion of the authors four main ideas make up the core of the present work.

The first one is that marketing can be applied to church and other religious organizations. The article presents the multiple aspects of church marketing, a marketing specialization that redefines marketing concepts, principles, methods, techniques and instruments and applies them from the perspective of a religious organization.

The second idea consists of the fact that the marketing framework has to be adapted to the peculiarities of religious organizations, in order to respect church's values and dogma.

Church marketing theoretical framework should derive from the social marketing framework which is considered to be the third major issue.

The fourth aspect is that church marketing should adapt some, but also develop more suitable methods, techniques and instruments which should take into consideration the specificity of religious organizations.

The logic argumentation of the article starts with the general presentation of the marketing concept and the marketing process, the content of the marketing activities, the involvement of marketing in the social field in order to fundament the place of church marketing as a field of marketing specialization. Further, the article presents what is church marketing, what are its implications and how the use of marketing techniques can lead to a significant increase in the social efficiency of a church.

Church marketing – a sub-specialization of the marketing theory and practice

In marketing related literature there are a lot of definitions of the term “marketing”, which are more or less different³.

In a brief attempt to define church marketing the starting point is a general definition of marketing, recently formulated (December 2007) by the most prestigious association of marketers worldwide – American Marketing Association: „Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners and society at large”⁴.

This is a broad definition, that emphasizes the pragmatic character of marketing (seen as activity, institutions, processes) and individualizes it through the marketing mix (“create, communicate, deliver and exchange value”), without limiting it in any way to the economic sphere (not only the definition mentions partners and society as a whole as the beneficiaries of the marketing activities, but it also prefers the term of “exchange” instead of “price” in order to suggest that the exchange might not always have a monetary form).

This definition reflects the care of its authors to the idea that marketing should not be limited and its use should not be restricted only to the economic and business field, and its use in nonprofit domain should not be understated.

Starting with the above definition, we consider that the following elements are characteristic to marketing:

- ❖ The use of a set of concepts, methods and instruments that will ensure the contact between the organization and the target groups. Usually, the ways the organizations address the target market are grouped in four categories that interact with each other, known under the name of marketing mix (or the 4Ps): product policy, pricing policy, distribution (placement) policy and promotional policy.

- ❖ The main purpose of an organization is to satisfy the expectations of certain target groups. If the organization has no clients, the reason of the existence of that organization disappears. In consequence, the structure and activity of the organization must be projected and executed in order to ensure the correlation between the products of the organization and the needs, desires, wants and expectations of the target group. Using the societal marketing and the social marketing vision, the organization must adapt not only to the short-term requests of the target groups, but also to their long term needs and the needs of the society in general.

❖ Marketing contributes decisively to building the image of an organization and its products. Through marketing, the organization differentiates and positions itself in comparison to its competition. It also, creates and launches brands in the market, brands that occupy a specific place in the minds of the consumers. From this perspective, marketing provides the image communication function of the organization.

❖ It is compulsory that the entire marketing activity be a systematic one, programmed and aimed at accomplishing precise objectives. To a company, the main objective is to maximize its profits. For social organizations, the aims might be more diverse, like solving social problems, fundraising and efficient fund allocation.

Starting from the definition of social marketing proposed by Zaharia – “that marketing practiced by the social organizations, which aim at fulfilling social objectives”⁵ – church marketing could be considered the marketing applied by church and other religious organizations in order to accomplish their objectives.

In the “Marketing Dictionary”, Adăscăliței writes about “ecclesiastic marketing”, that “refers, in essence, to the application of marketing in order to spread a religion, to attract proselytes and to obtain their loyalty and that is increasingly used by different religious groups, through specific institutions – churches or praying buildings, missions, in order to get the wanted answer from a target market – keeping or changing religion, financial contributions, donating services of other types of exchange.”⁶

We consider this definition of church marketing being too commercial, referring to religion as a normal service, not as a social one. As it was mentioned earlier, the objectives of social organizations are much more complex than those of business organizations. The objective of a religious organization cannot be “attracting proselytes and ensuring their loyalty by promoting the religious message”. The first part is just the mean through which the objective can be accomplished (the real objective is the second part of the above statement).

Another view, of Christian origin, is offered by Prehn, which states that religious marketing is a serving measure that consists of a sum of activities (every action and process that tells the story) involved in moving the Salvation good (produced by God through the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ) in order to help the one who intends to become consumer (a lost human being) to accept this Salvation.⁷ The limits of this approach lies in two aspects. The first one regards the fact that religious marketing is analyzed only from a Christian perspective. The second aspect is related to the fact that it refers only to the “spiritual” exchange. In reality, church marketing can be used by any Church or religious organization, and the pursued goals can be less grandiose (for example, fundraising).

In the opinion of Stevens et al., church marketing means analysis, planning and management of the voluntary exchange between a religious organization and its constituents, with the aim of satisfying the needs of

both parties. Religious marketing focuses on analyzing the needs of its constituents, on developing marketing programs to satisfy those needs, on offering them at the right place and time, on effective and efficient communication with the constituents and on attracting the necessary resources in order to support the activities of the organization. The authors describe the “constituents” of a religious organization as being members, employees, participants, supporters and all the other persons affected by the organization. This definition is considered to be too inward oriented. Religious marketing can be used also in missionary missions, or proselytism, the action being oriented to some groups outside the respective church.

Horne and McAuley conceptualize church marketing and state that it refers to “understanding, creating, communicating and delivering consumer related values”⁸ coming from the part of a religious organization. This is a modern definition, which underlines the creating value role of marketing, but it is too general.

Shawchuck et al. answer the question “What is Marketing applied by religious organizations?” - “marketing is a process by which concrete decisions are taken (regarding what religious organizations can or cannot take in order to fulfill their mission). Marketing is not selling, advertising or promotion – though it may include all of them. Marketing is the analysis, planning, implementing and control of carefully formulated programs, in order to determine voluntary exchange with specific target groups, in order to accomplish the missionary objectives of the organization. In other words, marketing may help a religious organization to fulfill its goals, by interacting with different groups. More, marketing is a process destined to build the response capacity of a religious organization towards the numerous groups whose needs must be satisfied in order to achieve success in its efforts.”⁹ This is probably one of the most complex definitions of the concept of religious marketing. The inspiration for this definition lies down in Philip Kotler’s traditional point of view for marketing, in general.

For the better understanding of the concept of religious marketing, we consider that it is necessary to point the place of religious marketing inside the marketing specializations. We will set the boundaries between the concept of religious marketing societal marketing, social marketing and services marketing, emphasizing the relations between these concepts.

Marketing can be used both by companies and social organizations to solve social problems. Without deepening the terminology dispute¹⁰, we follow the point of view that societal marketing is the marketing practiced by companies (that besides their own objectives also follow long term welfare and prosperity of the entire society)¹¹, while social marketing is the marketing practiced by social organizations for solving social problems¹².

In addition, the societal marketing approach is a part of the holistic marketing approach and is one of the most important trends in the marketing theory and practice in the last four decades.¹³

Social marketing represents a development of marketing outside the economic field, more precisely an adaptation and application of the marketing concepts, techniques and instruments by nonprofit, social organizations. This new specialization of marketing has also appeared four decades ago.

In its evolution, marketing has received specific characteristics, by adapting the particularities of the different domains where it was applied. Today there are several marketing specializations:

- Business to consumer marketing (practiced by companies that produce goods and services for the individuals);
- Business to business marketing (practiced by companies that produce goods and services destined for other companies);
- Agri-marketing (practiced by companies from the agriculture and food industry);
- Services marketing (practiced by companies that offer services);
- Social marketing (practiced by nonprofit social organizations that deal with solving social problems);
- Political marketing (practiced by political parties and candidates for electoral purposes – “electoral marketing”, practiced by public institutions to ensure a dialogue with the citizens – “public institutions’ marketing”, practiced in order to promote the image of a country abroad – “international political marketing”).

In the fields that were very dynamic in the last decades, marketing specialization deepened and sub-specializations appeared. These domains are related to the service sector and to the nonprofit sector. As a result, some sub-specializations of marketing developed, as tourism marketing, financial marketing, educational marketing, health marketing, cultural marketing, religious marketing, etc. The inclusion of some of them either into services marketing, or into social marketing, still raises scientific controversy.

If in the case of profit oriented domains like tourism or banking there is no doubt that they are included in the services marketing. When activities with a clear social component (education, sport, culture, religion, etc.) are discussed, their inclusion in the social marketing or services marketing still poses problems and it is still debated on.

There are several specialists, especially Americans, which consider them to belong to services marketing. The main argument is the intangibility of the “products” offered by the social organizations, which leads to the conclusion that we deal with services. Another argument,

rather implicit, is that in the United States organizations like museums, universities, hospitals and churches, have a more commercial orientation than those in Europe.

Our opinion is that the marketing activity of social organizations should be included in social marketing. The main reasons for this opinion are presented below:

- ❖ All these sub-specializations of marketing (educational marketing, cultural marketing, health marketing, church marketing) have their own object of activity and contain activities that are not met within services marketing (e.g. fundraising is a problem that is dealt with only by those organizations that don't aim to cover the expenses with the sums paid by their beneficiaries). Services companies like tourism companies, banks don't need to collect funds, because they cover their expenses and make profit out of selling their services.

- ❖ Social organizations cannot aim, from moral reasons, to adapt their whole activity to the requests of the target groups. A university, a hospital or a church are somehow reticent in the satisfaction of all requests from the part of a client, as the service supplier is on a superior position than the beneficiaries of these services. It is supposed that the teacher knows better than his students what they have to learn, that the doctor knows better than the patient which is the most appropriate treatment, and the priest knows better than parishioners which is the path to Salvation. The same, when talking about culture, a writer, sculptor, painter, musician or film director proposes his own artistic vision towards a subject, and they invite the public to accept it. This does not happen in the case of services marketing.

- ❖ The product offered by the social organization is different from the one offered by a service company. Even if it has an immaterial character, in most cases it is not about delivering services, but about promoting certain ideas and modeling the behavior of their target groups. Teachers, doctors, priests and culture people cannot be considered merely service delivery people. They also try to solve some social problems, to promote social ideas and to modify behaviors.

Focusing on church marketing, we identified several directions where it can be applied by the religious organizations:

- ❖ Adapting the product offered by the church to the requests of the parishioners – the product cannot be modified in its essence and its fundamental components must not change. The religious organizations have certain values, dogma that cannot be changed, unlike in the business world, where it is possible to reformulate the product according to the needs and desires of the targeted customers. To a certain extent, it is still possible to innovate within a religious organization, without compromising the core values and the fundamental activities, because this would destroy the very validity of the church. So, the theory that

marketing directs the activity of the organization towards the consumer does not involve the adjustment of theology to the demands of the market¹⁴, but adapting the way of communicating the doctrine, the mission and its programs.

❖ Fulfilling the objectives of the church – the church could use marketing techniques to improve the image of the church, to fundraise, to increase the attendance and the loyalty etc. If a church is perceived as being too old-fashioned or insufficient involved in solving social problems, using marketing may contribute to changing these perceptions. Also, a marketing view on the elements of the microenvironment would lead to a proper segmentation of the target groups, of the donors and of the volunteers, which could optimize the activities of the church. Regarding fundraising activities, using different approaches, specific to each category of donors (individuals, companies, the state) might prove to be very useful. Also, some churches use techniques very close to those used by the sales force, in order to attract and maintain their parishioners.

❖ Selling some religious products (icons, books, candles etc.) and services (baptizing, wedding, funeral etc). Still, these are only ways of supporting the mission and the message of the religious organization, in order to promote the fundamental idea of the church.

❖ Modification of certain behaviors of the target groups, in the spirit of the social marketing. Adopting some behaviors (e.g. attending the church weekly, fasting, etc.) or preventing other types of behavior (homosexuality, premarital sex, and abortion) may also be the subject of religious marketing campaigns.

Abreu says that “on the one hand the main religious product concerns social behavior and on the other hand a religious organization is simultaneously engaged in satisfying a person’s needs and in improving a society’s well being on both a short and long term basis”¹⁵.

In fact, marketing is very little known and practiced by the Romanian churches and it can be easily observed a certain reticence, if not an aversion of the clergy towards the simple use of the “term” marketing to describe some activities of the church. There are several reasons for this attitude:

❖ At its beginnings, marketing was considered just a help for sales, and some excesses appeared (deceiving advertising, pushing irrational consumption, etc). Even if these views of marketing have been left behind for more than half a century now, marketing may still have a bad image because of it.

❖ Marketing theory claims that marketing is more useful to very dynamic domains and to very dynamic countries – and usually we can’t describe religion as being very dynamic.

❖ Marketing is associated with commercial operations and with the apology of the material values. Church focuses and puts accent on the

spiritual values, that are considered being more important than the material values. This results in a reticence towards marketing, which in many times receives negative connotations.

Despite these prejudices, the interest in studying the application of marketing in the case of religious organizations is not at all new. Wrenn and Mansfield claim that the first writing in which marketing thought is applied to religion is Jay Benson Hamilton's book „Empty Churches and How to Fill Them”¹⁶. Since then, the concern for religious marketing (especially religious marketing communication) has increased constantly; the number of publications on this subject is significant and is growing rapidly.

In marketing and religious literature a lot of articles support the application of marketing by church (the first one is „A Marketing Analysis of Religion”, written by James Culliton in 1959¹⁷). There are also some critical articles (e.g. „Aesthetics, Ideologies and the Limits of the Marketing Concept”, written by Hirschman in 1983¹⁸), that presents reasons why the marketing concept cannot be applied to religious organizations.

Cutler and Winans present the reasons why religious organizations are reluctant to accept marketing and he states that marketing is gradually and very slowly accepted by the church and the clergy.

The origin of the idea that churches may need to market themselves is attributed to Berger, who said that religious traditions could no longer be imposed to society in an authoritarian manner and that they need to be marketed to a customer base that is no longer constraint to “buy” them and which has many options.

Stewart claims that marketing is essential in the surviving of the church in a continuously changing social environment. Parro suggests the need to use marketing in order to promote religious marketing to its critics. In several of his books, Barna debated the way contemporary churches could adopt a market orientation without compromising their mission, faith and beliefs, and he suggests that marketing could be a helpful tool in fulfilling the mission of the church.

Kotler and Andreasen, Baimbridge and Waiman, Nelson and Zeckhauser are also supporters of the idea that marketing is a valuable, legitimate and appropriate tool for the management of a religious organization.

Pritchett and Pritchett believe that a historical approach of church marketing could prove to be useful, as it might demonstrate that the use of marketing methods and instruments by the churches had positive effects on the church in the past, without destroying the essence and the values of religion.

Sherman and Devlin suggest that marketing can be seen as a part of the evangelic mission of the church. Considine presents the benefits of market orientation for a religious organization. Abreu considers that

marketing is just a technique that cannot substitute the real mission of a church.

It is interesting to notice that immediately after the pro-marketing positive wave of articles coming from marketers, another wave emerged, a negative one, with criticism from the part of religious scholars.

To conclude, the literature shows two sides – pro and against church marketing – and many times the authors end up in extreme attitudes. The authors of this article believe that the framework of the church marketing must be the result of the cooperation between religion and marketing specialists, in order to ensure a balanced view.

Church marketing, if properly planned, designed and used, does not contradict the core values of religion and may bring important benefits to the activities of a religious organization.

The church marketing process

It is obvious that all religious organizations have a strategic thinking. Modern marketing offers the necessary instruments to a continuous and complete process, whose result is favorable to the organization that uses it. Studies show that clergy opinions towards these strategic instruments are very diverse (they vary from one country to another and from one religion to another).

On one hand, Sherman and Devlin studied the Church of England's clergy's opinions regarding strategic marketing planning and the results were not very favorable.

On the other hand, Newman and Benchener present the results of a survey of American protestant churches that indicate the following facts: 91.8% of the churches have mission statements, 70.5% have vision statements and 63.9% have official declaration on their values, philosophy and doctrines. In table 1, it is presented the measure in which the churches use marketing instruments, and the figures are surprisingly high. They declared that even though the debate whether religious organizations should embrace marketing concepts continues, the use of management and marketing practices by churches appears pretty often.

Table 1. Presence of Marketing and Planning Activities in America's Large Protestant Churches

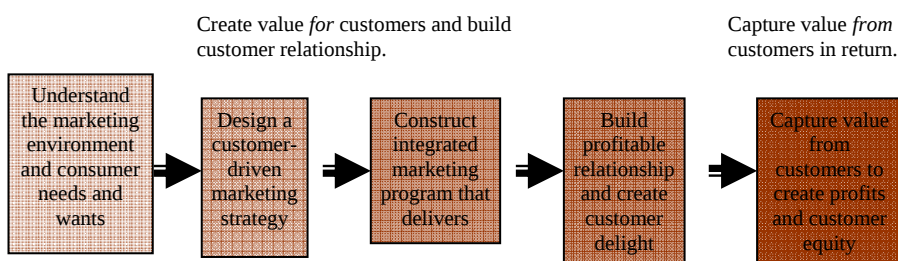
Activity	% of Churches Reporting Existence (n)
Advertising	86.9% (53)
Strategic Planning	75.4% (46)
Target Marketing	52.5% (32)
Self Audits	34.4% (21)
Marketing Planning	29.5% (18)
Market Research	21.3% (13)
Market Segmentation	13.1% (8)
Positioning	11.5% (7)

Source: C. M. Newman, P. G. Benchener, „Marketing in America's Large Protestant Churches”, *Seventh Annual IBER & TLC Conference Proceedings*, Las Vegas, Nevada, 2007, p. 5

This lack of concordance between the declarations and the actions of religious organizations may lead us to the belief that the real problem is the unfavorable image of strategic actions, as a result of the way they are used in the business world. As it was previously shown, religious marketing is included in social marketing and it has adapted its thinking and the instruments, getting closer to the needs and demands of the religious organizations. In addition, we consider that the strategic instruments may suffer a deeper adaptation to the specificity of religion.

Starting from the idea that strategic marketing thinking may bring advantages to churches and that marketing can be adapted to the particularities of religion, the authors of the present article propose to religious organizations to use the model of the marketing process constructed by Kotler and Armstrong, presented in Figure 1, because it can also be used in social marketing.

Figure 1. A simple model of the marketing process



Source: P. Kotler, G. Armstrong, “Principles of Marketing”, 12th Edition, Prentice Hall, 2007, p.5

According to this model, as a result of the first stage of marketing (creating value for customers and building relationships with them), the company will receive value from its customers in return, the process being a cyclic and continuous one.

If religious organizations want to stay relevant for contemporary individuals, they have to create value for their customers. The value offered to them is practically the difference between the total value (made up of the image of the organization, the value of the personnel, the value of the auxiliary goods and services) and the total cost (physical cost, time and energy cost, monetary cost). Offering value to the parishioners is a complex process and its complexity increases with the evolution of the human needs and expectations.

We suggest that this 5 steps model of the marketing process can be applied by the religious organizations which are willing to incorporate marketing into their activities. Also, both the theoretical framework and

the methods, techniques and instruments used in any of these five stages, need to be adapted to the specificity of the religious organizations, in order to not contradict essential religious values and beliefs.

Understanding the marketing environment and the customers' needs, wants and expectations

Stevens et al. claim that a religious organization should regularly ask themselves: *Are we doing the right things?* and *Are we doing things right?*

In order to do the right things in the right way, each organization must understand its internal environment (capabilities, resources and objectives), as well as the general conditions of the external marketing environment and also, the coordinates of its relationship with its various categories of public.

Consumers are the most important category of public with whom religious organizations are interacting. Knowing and understanding their demands, wishes and expectations is a must for the churches that wish to fulfill their objectives.

Kotler and Keller suggest that the traditional organizational vision, which considers making profits more important than satisfying customers, is obsolete. They propose a new orientation that puts consumers' needs first, as shown in Figure no. 2. Customer orientation is the basic principle of marketing, standing at its kernel. This concept is usually criticized by the clergy, because it is God, not the customer, who comes first. But the presented model only states that religious organizations should pay more attention to customer needs, not that they should neglect God's will.

In order to analyze its marketing environment, a religious organization needs to have accurate and updated data regarding the elements that make up its environment. These pieces of information are obtained through marketing research techniques – starting from statistics and other secondary data analysis and ending with direct research (either qualitative – focus groups, in depth interviews, mystery shopping, or quantitative – surveys).

In marketing literature, many results of marketing research related to religion are presented. Clinton, Williamson and Stevens say that the religious organizations should estimate the perceptions and attitudes of their parishioners and one way to do this is by using surveys. Primeaux, Boone and Maury draw attention on the fact that, being concerned with the sensitivities of the church members, they begin to question the affective dimension of the relationship with them (e.g. customer satisfaction). Other authors have underlined the utility of statistics for religious organizations. Considine and Lepak, using conjoint analysis, obtained church preference information based on the churches functional attributes, and Parker and Kent demonstrated, using ANOVA and statistical

significance tests that age may contribute to the different evaluation of the worship service.

There are many types of useful information that can be obtained through marketing research and every religious organization should have a proper management and marketing information system.

Our strong opinion is that any organization, including church, cannot survive without being aware of the world they are living in and of its customer's demands. This is why religious organizations should borrow from marketing instruments useful in monitoring their environment and believers' status (Environment analysis, SWOT analysis, etc.). Religious organizations should use marketing research, by themselves or helped by marketers, in order to discover more about themselves and their activity, about their environment, about the course of actions they should choose in order to achieve their goals and so on. This would be the first step toward increasing their relevance for today's society.

Designing a customer driven marketing strategy

Building a consumer oriented marketing strategy starts with four important strategic actions (segmenting, targeting, differentiating and positioning) and is implemented at all the levels of strategic planning.

Segmenting is the process of dividing the market in smaller segments, within which customers have similar needs and characteristics, but different from other customers included in other segments. Therefore each segment will be approached in a different manner in order to respond positively to the organization's offer.

The idea that segmenting is important for religious organizations is not new. Felton and Reed present the manner in which segmenting helps increasing the church's missionary efficiency. They use five segmenting criteria – geographical, demographical, psychographic, behavioral and expected benefits. Stevens et al. propose also five segmenting criteria, out of which, three coincide with the ones mentioned above – geographical, demographical, uses of the services, expected benefits and the family life cycle stage.

Segmenting can help clergy focus their efforts on satisfying consumers' needs, by identifying the segments of parishioners and adapting the church offer to each segment of interest for it.

Targeting consists of selecting some segments, or sometimes all segments, to communicate with them, adapting to their needs and characteristics the product/service, price, promotion etc. Joseph and Webb mention several communication methods suitable for achieving objectives corresponding to three important audience categories (segments) – keeping current members, attracting potential members and reactivating “sleeping” ones. They claim that these three tasks are fundamental for the construction and support of a healthy and blossoming church. This is a

relevant example of the way targeting helps religious organizations to reach people with their message.

Differentiating undergoes through promoting competitive advantages – strengths of the organization that can include a viable answer to the prospects' question: *Why should I choose this religious organization and not another one?* This is also important, because it offers a common identity to the parishioners of the religious organization.

Positioning is „the process through which the church's image is created”¹⁹ by the means of its' strategic efforts. For example, a church could aim to be perceived by people as a friendly, youthful organization, with a certain charisma, so its strategic efforts will be managed in such a manner.

Strategic marketing planning levels

Religious organizations wish to communicate their message to people and society, in general. This can be realized through strategic marketing planning, that consists of „the conception and maintaining of a viable correspondence relation between the organization's objectives, skills and resources”²⁰ and the opportunities caused by changes that occur in the external environment. This is practically the key to efficiency for a religious organization, efficiency referring to the achievement of objectives with as little effort as possible.

Strategic planning can be achieved at all organizational levels – **higher organizational level** (management bodies), **strategic activity unit level** (church departments - Public Relations in all churches, The Church and the Society of the Orthodox Church, The Department for Promoting the Principles of the Family Life, The Department for Promoting Religious Freedom, etc.) and the **functional marketing level** (local church, synagogue, mosque etc., where the decisions taken by the higher levels are applied, but that could occasionally have their own projects).

The higher organizational level is the highest marketing planning level and takes decisions that give the organization the general path. Kotler presents four types of planning activities²¹ that all corporate central units apply, and that are generally also used within religious organizations: defining the mission of the organization, determining the strategic activity units, resource allocation for each of them and planning new activities / dismissing older activities. Within religious organizations, the general action framework is outlined through official documents (mission statement, policy statements, official letters on certain issues etc.) and informative bulletins, or directly, at different clergy meetings.

The strategic planning process at the **strategic activity unit level** (church departments)²² consists of: shaping the unit's mission, SWOT analyses, conceiving concrete objectives, establishing the strategy,

producing the program from which all of the department's activities will result, implementing the programs, feedback and outcome control.

At the **functional level** (local church, synagogue, mosque, etc.) in addition to effectiveness and efficiency that are also monitored at the other two levels, the development of activities necessary for objective achievement is closely controlled.

Regardless of the religious organization's type of structures - traditional or participative - all these planning levels exist and are working to a certain extent. It is interesting to note that each religious organization has its own strategies, which are sometimes new for marketing. But also marketing can be a source of inspiration in building church strategy. It is better to know that marketing provides a set of concrete strategies, but it is also open for innovative new ones, adapted to the current situation.

We recommend to all churches to design a customer driven marketing strategy in order to come closer to its constituents and reach their objectives.

Constructing an integrated marketing program that delivers superior value

Integrated marketing programs include the decisions related to the four components of the marketing mix: product, price, promotion and distribution. The authors of this paper consider that understanding and consciously using the marketing mix is a must for any organization in our days. The major contribution of marketing is that it organizes the strategic thinking, dividing the organizations' activity in four areas, representing the four components of marketing mix.

In order to provide value to its customers, a religious organization has to know what to offer (its product), how to transmit it to the people in a relevant manner (by using distribution), how to present it in order to be attractive (by using promotional techniques), and also the "consumption costs" (the perceived price of its offer).

Once a religious organization has formed an opinion about these elements, it can decide regarding the activities related to marketing-mix components according to its needs, personality, mission and objectives and also paying attention to the customers. Ignoring some of these components might affect negatively the image of the church.

The Product

Opinions regarding the religious product are very diverse. Weber considered that religion offers "something" wanted by the consumers, and he called it "salvation goods"²³. Although the finality of religious experience is salvation, the religious product includes more than this.

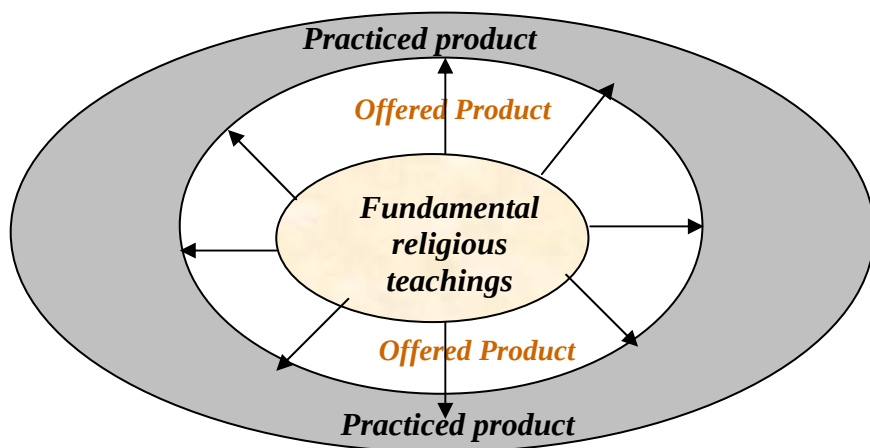
Iannaccone explains that „religious commodities are not physical goods like cars or computers that can be manufactured, packaged and sold in stores. Nor are services like haircuts or banking that we have others do for us. Rather, they fall into a third category that economists call „household commodities” – valued goods and services that families and individuals produce for their own consumption”²⁴

We consider that he confuses the economic category of self consumption with a characteristic of services – customer’s involvement in delivering the service. This characteristic of services is often met both in economic services (e.g. the tourist takes part in the activities proposed by the entertainers) and social services (the student takes part in his professional development, while a parishioner participates at his spiritual development). Therefore, we don’t agree with his opinion on religious product being a household commodity.

Martin discusses about the core product and the augmented product. The core product refers to sacred values that cannot be changed, and the augmented product is composed of those parts of the religious offer that are not considered sacred. He identified seven sacred areas: doctrine, ritual, narrative, experiential/emotional, legal/ethical, social or material. This observation is correct, but we believe that things are more complex.

In our opinion (Figure 2), the starting point of the religious product is “the fundamental religious teachings”²⁵, a nucleus of dogma, values, ideas, that characterizes and differentiates a religious cult from the all the others, and cannot be changed without seriously affecting its personality.

Figure 2. Religious Product’s components



The religious product is composed of:

- **the product offered by the organization** – goods and services offered by religious organizations that are addressed to certain public segments;
- **the practiced product** – the practical form of religion, as it is practiced by its parishioners – the manner in which religion influences personal principles, beliefs, vision about life and individual behavior.

The Price

Stevens, Loudon and Paschal studied the clergy opinions regarding five types of marketing activities: marketing research, service conceiving and design policy, pricing policy, promotional communication policy and distribution policy. The marketing activity that was regarded most favorably was distribution (suggestions were using broadcasting services, offering free transportation etc.). Price was negatively perceived, being the less attractive marketing activity for the clergy. This is probably due to the perception of people regarding the price, as being an amount of money paid for a product or service. But in social marketing the monetary component is secondary, if not omitted.

In the case of religious organizations, the price has usually an indirect, non-monetary form, being represented by (1) a certain attachment and commitment towards the values and teachings promoted by the religious organization and by (2) the willing sacrifice of parishioners' time, energy, voluntary work and money.

Shawchuck et al. talk about four categories of costs that may occur for someone wanting to receive the church's products or service: give up economic assets, give up old ideas, values, and opinions, give up old behaviors, undertake or learn new behaviors and give up time and energy.

In marketing vision is important to make a clear distinction between the target groups and donors. In order to fulfill some social objectives, the church may offer products (e.g. books, icons) and services (e.g. baptism, wedding, and funeral) at a price that does not cover production costs, using donations in order to cover the difference. The donors may be individuals (offering donations, voluntary work), companies (offering donations or sponsoring) or even the state (offering state budget allocations). But in practice, the perception is that products or services are offered at a cost covering price, and that the eventual donations represent a bonus.

Although each church is free to choose its own price strategy, in our opinion price should permit access to religious products for all targeted segments and that it should not represent a barrier for parishioners (customers).

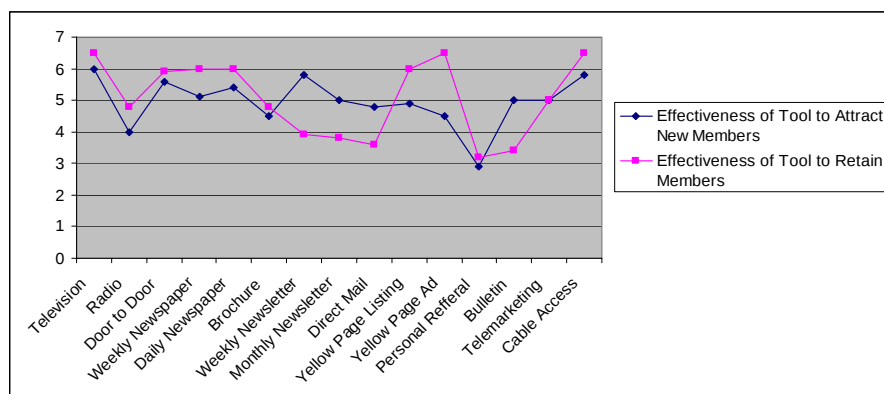
As a conclusion, the price for religious product has monetary and non-monetary components, and differs from one church to another. Every

church should be aware of its price's components and accordingly, should develop its own price strategy.

The Promotional Communication

Promotion is the most used marketing tool by religious organizations and, usually, the clergy and the general public have a positive image about using marketing communication²⁶. The clergy's perceptions regarding the efficiency of the communication tools used in religious organizations were studied by Webb et al. The results are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Effectiveness of Marketing Tools Churches Use to Attract and Retain Members



Source: M. Webb, W.B. Joseph, K. Schimmel, C. Moberg, „Church Marketing: Strategies for Retaining and attracting members”, *Journal of professional services marketing*, 1998, p. 9

There is still a serious debate whether the church should make use of all the promotional techniques (advertising, public relations, sales force, sales promotions, direct marketing, word-of-mouth marketing). We believe that each religious organization should establish what tools it will use, thinking at its moral and ethical precepts. Also, the church has to adapt its message and channels of communication, as everything else in its offer, to the targeted groups. If the religious organization will use the right methods and message to communicate with each segment of public, the promotional communication will be efficient.

The Placement (Distribution)

When discussing about distribution of the religious organizations' ideas, services and products, direct distribution is extremely important, and, in most of the cases, is the exclusive distribution method. Depending

on the things that are being promoted (religious ideas, religious services and products), the distribution methods may vary.

The clergy, the building of the church and the religious items are all important for distributing religious ideas, products and services. Stevens, Loudon and Williamson emphasize the importance of selecting a proper location for building a church, and suggest that a religious organization should pay attention to affordability, growth patterns inside the area, site accessibility, and compatibility with the surrounding buildings, relationship with the neighboring areas, parking lots, building design and facilities.

Other elements involved regarding distribution are the customization of the service (e.g. special services for individuals), time schedule (it is debatable if it must be changed in order to adapt to the requests of the customers), transportation (churches could offer free transportation services for some of the parishioners – old people or remote located persons). Another distribution decision, which the religious organizations face nowadays, is whether to broadcast their service or not, using radio, television or Internet. Also, we cannot forget the role of the parishioner in the distribution of religious ideas and of religious services.

There are many decisions to make regarding distribution – some can be done only at the beginning of life cycle of religious organization, some can be done at any time and some have to be done over and over again. The importance of distribution strategy is obvious, because it decides the way the organization's products and services come in contact with the parishioner.

Building profitable relations and obtaining customer delight

In the case of a non-profit organization this stage of the marketing process should be described as building successful and durable relations and obtaining customer cooperation and involvement. This step consists of managing three relations, which are very important to the success of the organization:

- Management of the relation with its clergy;
- Management of the relation with its parishioners;
- Management of the relation with its partners – non-profit organizations, government institutions, funding sources etc. that can support the religious organization in achieving its goals.

First, the relation with its clergy is very important, because the religious organization cannot obtain the parishioners' delight without clergy help. Therefore, application of the internal marketing concept in the relationship with the clergy is extremely important for the success of the religious organization.

Second, religious organizations have to be concerned with satisfying its parishioners and obtaining their loyalty. Studying consumer satisfaction is very important, thus churches should be concerned with measuring the level of satisfaction of the parishioners, as well as with understanding the factors that determine satisfaction/dissatisfaction and loyalty.

Religious organizations can apply relational marketing in order to create, maintain and develop a long-lasting relation with the parishioners (throughout their life). Churches concerned by this issue use parishioners data bases, create bidirectional channels of communications (the church needs both to supply parishioners with information and to receive feedback from them), create structures similar to a Public Relations Department and react quickly and efficiently to suggestions and complaints of parishioners, develop specific loyalty programs etc.

Third, the church must not forget about the organizations with which it interacts. Long-lasting relations with them can bring great benefits. Nonetheless, the construction of a good relationship with all categories of the audience is already a concern of religious organizations, while marketing could be used as a source of inspiration.

But the benefits of developing good, long term, relationships are overflowing not only over the parishioners, but also over the organization, as we will see in the next step.

Receiving value from the parishioners

If the previous steps had the purpose to create value for the parishioners, this last step consists in creating value for the organization, as a result of its effort (image improvement, obtaining necessary funds, building a long-lasting relationship, etc.). Parishioners can bring value to the religious organizations by assimilating the principles and values promoted by it, by changing behavior according to these principles and values, by participating actively in the organization's life (attendance at masses, attendance at events and projects, donations, offers of ideas of improvement, etc.), by contributing in transmitting a positive image of the religious organization, etc.

As stated above, increasing value for the organization means increased value for the parishioner and increasing value for the parishioner means increased value for the organizations. That is why it is so important to be customer oriented.

Conclusions and discussions

The use of marketing by the religious organizations is a subject still under debate. The authors of the present paper consider that, if applied properly, religious marketing does not contradict the essential religious

values and thus can be used by religious organizations. But in order not to contradict the church dogma, religious marketing framework must not simply follow the general marketing theory, it must take into consideration the specificity of religious organizations.

The authors subscribe to the point of view which states that the proper use of marketing should have positive effects on the church and on society and believe that religious marketing is a tool that can contribute to the fulfillment of the church mission and objectives and can lead to an improved church activity.

The authors claim that the view of North American writers (stating that churches should use a services marketing approach for their activity) is due to the cultural differences between North America and Europe, and between West and East, regarding the importance of spiritual versus material values. Instead, a different vision is presented, suggesting that church marketing should be regarded as a sub-specialization of marketing that is subordinated to the social marketing framework, because religious marketing can help churches and other religious organizations to accomplish their evangelical mission of promoting religious ideas and practices and because the application of marketing could help the religious institutions achieve their goals, improve their activities and obtain better results.

Also, we consider that religion is a very distinctive domain, with its own rules and sensitivities and this fact should lead to the necessity of a specific marketing framework for religious organizations. A holistic approach is needed, and all five stages of the marketing process should be taken into consideration (marketing environment analysis – understanding the marketplace and the customers, designing marketing strategies, developing integrated marketing programs for all the elements of the marketing mix, creating and developing relationships with selected customers and partners and receiving value from them). The methods, techniques and instruments used in all of these five stages can be refined in order to be suitable to a religious organization.

Another idea suggested by the article is the need for an open dialogue between marketers and religious experts (both academics and practitioners) and the necessity of an understanding of the marketing concept from the part of religious organizations, its leadership and the clergy. The result of this dialogue should be the selection by the churches of acceptable and appropriate marketing techniques, methods and tools (the authors suggest to test their acceptability by the parishioners also). Religious organizations should also decide what marketing methods and instruments should be adapted to church marketing and, when needed and if possible, new, specific marketing tools should be developed.

An important issue in church marketing is a proper definition of the religious marketing mix, which needs to be correlated with the mission, values and activity of the church. Also, the religious organizations need to

pay attention to their relationship with their various types of public, with their constituents and this imposes a relationship marketing approach. First of all, the churches should focus on the clergy and apply the internal marketing concept, because priests are extremely important in communicating the religious message, in the practice of religion and in the quest to fulfill the evangelical mission of the church.

There is a need to deepen religious marketing research and to focus on the specific Romanian context in order to offer a more accurate and complete diagnosis of the results, of the utility and of the opportunity of using church marketing and its various methods and tools.

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