



The use of written communication by the early Christian leaders: for maintenance and the propagation of Christianity

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Abstract

The New Testament *Ἡ Καινὴ Διαθήκη* records numerous aspects important to faith such as inter alia, the virgin birth, miracles, teachings, death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and each of these had to be maintained and propagated. The death of Christ brought great disappointment to the lives of His disciples. Disillusioned by what had taken place they went back into their previous vocations. However, when they discovered that Christ was indeed alive, they were excited. After the resurrection of Christ, He spent forty days with His disciples before He ascended into heaven. The disciples spent many days in the upper room anticipating the arrival of the Holy Spirit which gave the much needed power so that they could maintain and propagate the values and beliefs of their teaching of Christ. This study sought to identify the forms of communication used by the early Christians to maintain and propagate the gospel of Christ. This study used a desktop methodology. The theoretical framework for this paper was based on Lasselle's Communication Theory, where there is a communicator, message, medium, receiver and an effect. The early Christian leaders used verbal, small group, written, and public communication methods to propagate the faith and document their values and beliefs.

Key words: Communication forms, early Christians, maintenance, propagation, faith

Introduction and background

After the death of Christ, the early Christians, especially the disciples were total discouraged by the seemingly catastrophic happenings. Within a matter of a few days they saw their Lord being praised by the local people to being persecuted and ridiculed by the locals. To finally see Him being crucified and treated like a criminal was abhorrent and shocking. How they would eventually cope, was based on a prayerful disposition and the guidance of the Holy Spirit or *Paraclete*. This study explores the use of communication by the Christian religious leaders and the role it plays in documenting their values and beliefs. Verbal and written communication had a major impact on spreading the gospel of Christ. The early Christians wrote various gospels and epistles and an Apocalypse. The New Testament discusses the teachings and nature of Jesus, as well as various events which occurred in first-century Christianity. Christians consider the Old and New Testaments to be sacred scripture. The New Testament especially, is a basis of Christian theology and morality.

Miller (2005) has noted that scholars have tried for many years to come up with a methodical understanding of the communication process. This study looks at the different forms of communication used by the disciples of Christ and the different writings of the early Christian leaders. The New Testament generally indicates that the authors of all the books were



motivated by an ethical and honourable sense of agape and sense of responsibility towards God (Jesus Christ) and their fellow men. Paul is as a good illustration of the motivation of those who were diffusing the holy gospels in the the early church. Paul's sense of moral commitment towards his fellow man in announcing the truth of the gospel is clear for example when he makes the declaration:

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. {20} And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; {21} to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law. {22} To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. (1 Corinthians 9:19-22)

Aim of the study

The study seeks to identify the forms of communication used by the early Christians to maintain and propagate the gospel of Christ and also to confirm that the written communication played an important role in that regard. Communication is a process in which there is continuous reciprocated influence of communication participants, and this reflects the fact that people send and receive messages concurrently. Communication is unidirectional but rather than having only a sender and receiver, there is a communicator (Adler and Proctor, 2011), and an intention to maintain an idea.

Statement of the Problem

The disciples were disillusioned after the death of Christ because many were expecting Him to be the person that was going to free them of Roman rule. Reddy (2017:181) states “the Disciples of Christ and the Jews failed to understand His mission because they anticipated the coming of a political leader.” His death was a great disappointment to many who followed Him daily for three and a half years. It is believed that the authors of New Testament took long to start documenting the values and beliefs of the Church because they were expecting Christ to come back before they could die. Matthew 16:28 states “Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (see also Mark 9:1 and Luke 9:27).

The gospel of John was the only gospel not to document these words of Christ. Could it be with the passing of time and when the followers of Christ realised Christ may not come during their generation, that some writers realised that they had to document Christ's life and also make know their values and beliefs through the use of written communication. Another problem was that doctrine needed to be documented to inform and guide church leaders towards the effective running of the church. Written communication played a vital role in this regards but there were nonetheless many writings that were circulating amongst the early Christians but over time, many were rejected as not being considered to be authentic.

Literature review

The Concept of Church

The Jews were familiar with the synagogue and the temple when it came to worship but they had no idea what Christ meant when He spoke about the term ‘Church.’ Matthew 16:18 states “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” From the Greek word *kuriakos* comes the English word church.



Individuals who are baptised into the body of Christ are referred to as the church (Reddy (2017). Other references are also made towards the church, as in Hebrews (13:20), Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:32) and so forth (Reddy, 2004:96).

Early church moves from a movement to organisation

After the death of Christ, the disciples were total discouraged. Christ's empty tomb on Easter Sunday is recorded in all of the 4 gospels (Matthew 28:1-9, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-53 and John 20:21-25) which shows us the importance of the written word. The woman that noticed that the tomb was empty went and relayed the message to the disciples of Christ. This is an example of interpersonal communication used between the woman and the disciples. The only documented sources regarding the early Christian church is the Book of Acts. Therefore, this book is considered by many theologians as the cornerstone of Church History. After Christ arose from death He spent forty days with His disciples and followers. He told them to wait for the Holy Spirit, because it would be through the Holy Spirit that they would receive power (Acts 1:8). This power would include documenting the events for posterity and providing infallibility relating to the absolute correctness of the entire Bible in all aspects of doctrine, as well as inerrancy relaying the claim of the absolute correctness of the Bible in all truthful declarations as well as authoritativeness relating to the correctness of the Bible in questions of practice in morality (Meadors, 1997).

The entire Bible presents a non-contradictory and unswerving message concerning God and the redemptive history of humanity. The New Testament was written by eyewitnesses or acquaintances and contemporaries of the eyewitnesses of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It has also been revealed that the written record handed down to us has significant amounts of comprehensive information about various people, the places where they were, and times and events. Numerous reliable sources attest that the record of the New Testament is both precise and dependable. This gives supplementary integrity to the written record concerning the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The authors used numerous forms of communication to demonstrate truths. Written communication used in documenting the values and beliefs of Christianity is thus important for the faith. The leaders of the early Christian church saw the need to document their values and beliefs because though they were anticipating the return of Christ. They realised that since time was passing and Christ was not returning, they needed document the life of Christ and about their values and beliefs and all that had taken place. All the gospels, epistles and letters were written to specific individuals or group of people. Which were eventually copied and circulated amongst the early churches. Matthew, Luke, Mark, John, James, Peter, and Paul were amongst the writers of the New Testament. The authors of New Testament writings in regards to Laswell's Communication Theory highlights 2 areas, the sender and receiver. A sender and a receiver can be identified in every form of communication. For this study the most commonly used communication was verbal and written communication.

Brown, Fitzmyer and Murphy (1993:238) highlights how letters were written during ancient times which is as follows:

- Individual write by themselves.
- When word to word and syllable for syllable are dictated.
- When the sense is dictated but the formulation is left to the secretary.
- Having some else write in their name without giving them the content.

Reddy (2002:60-61) states the various forms of communication employed by the early Christians as they maintain and propagate their values and beliefs, which are as follows:

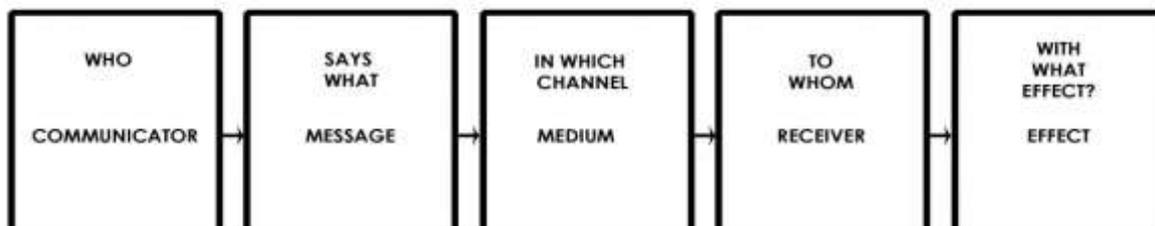
- Intrapersonal communication (Acts 10:3-5 and Acts 16:9).
- Small group communication (Acts 16:32).
- Grapevine (Acts 12:17 and Acts 11:22).
- Acts 9:2 document the first form of written communication which was written against the Christians.
- Other occasion when written communication took place (Acts 11:23 and Acts 23:25).
- Public communication (Acts 1:15, 2:6, 9:20, 17:1-4, 17:11 and 17:17).
- Organisational communication (Acts 6:5, 15:19 and 21:18-19).

The Disciples of Christ played a significant role but Epp, (1991) asserts that New Testament writers did not all write themselves but rather made use of scribes who were professionals. In Christian congregations, the writers of the books of the New Testament, such as for example in the letters, would have their letter read to audiences, who would then share it with other congregations. In addition, if interested persons wanted to have a copy, they would have their slaves (i.e., scribes) make a copy or copies of a book. So when Athenians read the letter that sent by Paul to the Colossians, they would likely request a wealthy member of the congregation to use his trained scribe to craft a copy for them (Exler, 1922). Tenny (1971:184) states “the cohesiveness of the new group was established by constant instruction in the principles of the new faith and by a common worship”. The church had a very specific doctrine that had to be imparted to the faithful. They were guided by the apostles teaching and had fellowship with one another (Acts 2:43-47). Kuiper (1982:5) states “official missionaries, such as Paul, brought the Gospel too many pagan communities. Unofficial missionaries, the early converts, were themselves enthusiastic witnesses”. During the early stages of Christianity as the Christians were living in fear and fleeing from the Pharisees, they were fervently spreading the gospel. It was during this early stage that Christianity was in what is termed a movement phase. Initially, while in the movement phase, they were referred to as The Way. Christianity became a formal organisation when the leaders met at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-21). At Antioch they were called Christians for the first time (Acts 11:26). Showing that they were establishing themselves into becoming an organisation that required effective communication and maintenance of the faith.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded Lasswell Communication Theory. This theory looks at the process of communication and how this model functions in society. The early Christian church used mainly interpersonal communication to propagate and maintain their values and beliefs. However, as they were becoming an organisation they started to document their values and beliefs.

Figure 1: Lasswell Communication Theory



Taken from Communication Theory (nd)



The model systematizes the scientific study of the process of communication and the emphasis of the model is broken down by each component of communication. It thus highlights who the communicator is, what they are saying in the message, the channel used which is the medium, to whom they are addressing the message and what its effect is.

The authors of the gospels, letters and epistles were all members of the early Christian church. What did they write in their documents? What did they seek to speak about? The channel used was either written documents or verbal communication. To whom, refers to individuals or groups of people? The effect of their verbal and written communication on their intended audience/s is very important as well. The New Testament writers were all passionate about their faith and loyal to Christ and very mature in their understanding of the faith which they wished to preserve and maintain. Gospels, letters and epistles were written to individuals and groups of people. In each of the documents a sender is identified or a sender is ascribed by the early Christian leaders/disciples. In these writings the intend message is sent through a medium known as writing communication (gospels, letters and epistles) to an individual or group of people and ultimately it brought about a certain effect of them. The ultimate goal of these writers was to maintain and propagate their new found values and beliefs which come from Christ (Warfield, 1959). The effect it had was that the early Christians grew in number. When a communicator communicates, irrespective of the medium he/she uses, it has an ultimate goal which is to have a positive effect on the receivers.

The New Testament comprises of stories, teachings, and letters that were disseminated among the first Christian churches. It has letters from apostles such as Paul and Peter which are amongst the earliest writings in the New Testament. These letters were intended to be read audibly by believers. Subsequent to the recipients hearing the message intended for them, they often learned it and shared it with neighbouring Christian groups and societies.

To illustrate the notion of the books being written to propagate and maintain faith, a few examples of New testament books are explained below.

The gospel through the eyes of Matthew, the tax collector

Schaff (1996:147) states that Matthew (gift of God) was a Jew by birth and he was the son of Alphaeus. Initially he was Levi before he was called into apostleship (Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27). At the time when he had an encounter with Christ he was a tax collector. "According to tradition he was the author of the first Gospel, a missionary to Hebrews, and suffered martyrdom, but nothing is known with certainty about his life" (Whaling 1994:330). Reddy (2002: 67) states "there is no conclusive evidence that Matthew wrote this gospel." However, traditionally the gospel of Matthew has been ascribed to Matthew Levi. Tenny (1991:150) states "as a publican he must have been literate and accustomed to taking notes as a part of his business activity." According to du Toit (1988) Matthew had a major influence on the early Christian theology. Reddy (2002:67) states "the singular way in which Matthew lays emphasis on the Old Testament as well as on customs and views that typify the Judaism of that time is one of the most striking features of this gospel." He highlights that in order for one to be a good Jew they needed to be a good Christian first (Reddy 2002:67).

Matthew's target audience was the Jewish community. This is evident by him taking Christ's genealogy back to the father of the Jews, who was Abraham. (Reddy 2002:67) states "in defence of Christ's illegitimatise and heir to kingdom of David, Matthew gives the lineage of David and highlights the role of five women in the genealogy of Jesus."

- Matthew 1:3, "Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar."
- Matthew 1:5, "Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab."
- Matthew 1:5, "Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth."



- Matthew 1:6, “David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah’s wife (Bathsheba).”
- Matthew 1:16, “and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is the Christ.”

Matthew used the gospel of Mark to write his gospel, however, he realised that he needed to present a genealogy because a king needed one (Reddy, 2002). Another serious challenge which Matthew encountered was the circumstances surrounding the birth of Christ. The first four women mentioned were remembered because of what they went through in their lives. Highlighting that though they were part of the genealogy, they defended the idea that Mary be used by God as the virgin who would bear the Messiah.

Matthew includes these women to justify Mary’s situation regarding the birth of Christ. Herod killed all the boys under the age of two because he was not the ‘true king’ and was afraid that he would lose his throne. The distinctive roles in this gospel are the Kingdom of God, the concept of righteousness and the enduring validity of the law. According to du Toit (1988:58) some scholars find the structure of Matthew parallel with the five books of Moses (Matthew 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1 and 26:1). Matthew also highlights all manner of phenomena characteristic of Judaism at the time of Jesus. To mention a few, “the restriction of Jesus’ earthly mission to Israel (Matthew 15:24 and 10:5b-6), the Pharisees’ stress on charity, prayer and fasting (Matthew 6:2-6, 16f). Through his writing Matthew tries to convince the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah (Matthew 4:14). Jesus is presented as the Son of David in chapter one. He forcefully sets forth the identity of Jesus the Messiah (Matthew 16:13-20). When he questioned His disciples saying, “Who do you say I am?” Matthew depicts Jesus as the one who fulfils the prophecies. Peter’s reply, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” received Christ’s affirmation that this statement was a divine revelation from the Father to Peter. First Christ is presented as Messiah and then he is presented as the Son of God. Though this incident is recorded in Mark 8:29, more emphasis is placed in Matthew’s gospel.

The gospel of Matthew is viewed as a teaching gospel. There are six discourses for example the ‘the Sermon on the Mount’. There are two reason why many believe this gospel was written to the Jewish people. The author states Jewish history (Matthew 1:5) and he highlights two crucial factors when he mentions the Abrahamic link (Genesis 12) and the Adamic (2 Samuel) covenants. Secondly, there are sixty references to the Messiah mentioned, of which forty are Old Testament quotations. This gospel has a dual purpose, it was written for both maintenance and propagation. The gospel of Matthew documents the teachings of Christ.

The Gospel through the eyes of Mark

The dating of this gospel is between A.D. 65 and 70, although some scholars disagree, and place it sometime between A.D.80 or A.D.90. Whaling (1992:324) states the “New Testament evangelist, more fully, ‘John, whose surname was Mark’, is traditionally the author of the second canonical Gospel.” On Barnabas and Paul first missionary journey, they were accompanied by Mark. However, he abandoned them at Perga. Later on he restored his relationship with Apostle Paul and assisted him in the ministry. This is the shortest gospel and Mark is the youngest of the gospel writers. Mark’s first historical reference is found in (Acts 12:12). There is no certainty as to who wrote the gospel of Mark. The early church tradition ascribes this gospel to a man called John Mark.

While the gospel of Matthew was written for the nation of Israel (the religious man), the gospel of Mark was specifically written for the Romans (the strong man). Jesus is projected as a man of action, always busy doing something. It is believed to be written before the gospel of Matthew. Matthew incorporated it when writing his account of the life, death and resurrection of Christ. During the first century the Roman Empire was instrumental in the advancement of Christianity. During the reign of Augustus there was a healthy development of commerce



throughout the lands of the Roman Empire. There was easy communication and commerce, and effective military and civil administration. Travel became much easier due to the improvement of the road infrastructure and it became regular and pirates at sea and brigands were in check. Missionary life remained difficult but not impossible. The gospel of Mark is stripped of verbiage and girded for actions and in totality is relatively brief. The gospel is designed for the ordinary person on the street. It was possibly written to Romans (enterprising people, people of action and the government of the day).

Mark was the writer of the gospel bearing his name but Peter is believed to actually be the one behind the gospel. Only Mark wrote about what Peter experienced during his time with Christ. Mark also accompanied the apostle Paul during some of his missions and is referred to as John Mark (Acts 12:12, 25; 15:77-41). Mark wrote create a historical record for Peter of his meetings with Christ so that eventually all people who would read it would believe and repent. They would likely then place their trust in Christ. The purpose of Mark was to make people see the sinfulness and understand the need for salvation through Christ. Mark asserts that the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

Rome is considered to be the city from which Mark wrote his Gospel and the church to whom it was initially envisioned for. Many scholars conclude that Mark's presence in "Babylon" suggests that he was in Rome along with Peter (1 Peter 5:13). Papias plainly states that "Peter mentions Mark in his first Epistle, and that he composed the gospel in Rome itself" (Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 2.15.2). The fact that Mark used Latin words also supports the notion of Roman composition (e.g. 12:14; *fragelloun* = *flagellare* 15:15). Mark states at the outset, that thus work is "the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Mark may have created the gospel to inspire the Christians in Rome to follow the true faith as many citizens would have been under the persecution propagated by the Emperor Nero. Mark fails to emphasize the sayings of Jesus as much as the other Gospels writers because he is writing a story, and not a theology (Geulich, 1992). Mark was indeed a pathfinder in a sense: "Mark is really the one that sets the stage for all the later Christian gospel writings" (White, 1998). Mark was engrossed on the Kingdom of God and the issue of discipleship and he does not hide the disappointments of some of the disciples and he also shows his own inadequacies and those of Peter. Mark tells us of Jesus' reproach of Peter (8:32-33), and also demonstrates the extent of Peter's failure and disavowal of Christ (14:27-31, 66-72).

Mark emphasizes the messianic secret to validate that the Messiah is obliged to suffer and die, which was conflicting with the expectations of the majority of Jesus' supporters. In Mark's writing, Jesus' disciples observe his miracles and listen to His knowledge. They correctly identify him as the Messiah, but when Jesus is crucified, Mark shows us that "the messianic secret of Jesus is that he is the son of man who has come to suffer and not the Messiah who is going to do great miracles" (Koester, 1998).

One can conclude from the aforesaid that this gospel was written to foreigners. The purpose of the gospel of Mark was mainly to be a simple announcement of the words and works of Jesus. It is the shortest of the gospels which would make it well-matched to the simple, forthright approach the Romans preferred. Mark makes reference to the Old Testament only once and thus shows that the gospel was written to support his Roman readership knowing that they had slight or no acquaintance with the Old Testament. This gospel does not provide a genealogy. While Matthew depicted Christ as King, Mark depicts Christ as a Servant. Mark presents Christ as the servant of Jehovah who is busy doing the will of the Father therefore there is no genealogy because a servant does not need a genealogy. This gospel has a dual purpose and it was written for both maintenance and propagation.

The letter to Titus

The author identifies himself as Paul (Titus 1:1). The theme of this letter concerns sound doctrine and good works. This letter was written around A.D. 55-56. Stamps (1990:447) states that the fourfold purpose of this letter is as follows:



- Setting in order what Paul had left unfinished in the churches of Crete, including the appointment of elders (Titus 1:5).
- Assisting the churches to grow in faith, in the knowledge of the truth and in godly living (Titus 1:1).
- To the silencing of false teachers (Titus 1:11).
- For Titus to come to Paul after he is relieved by Artemas or Tychicus (Titus 3:12).

The letter to Titus was written for what are clearly maintenance purposes.

The Letter to Philemon

The Letter to Philemon was a personal letter which the Apostle Paul wrote to Philemon. He was addressing the issue of Onesimus, who was a runaway slave. According to Roman law a runaway slave could be put to death. Here the Apostle Paul asked Philemon to Onesimus back. However not as a slave but rather as a brother in the Lord. The apostle Paul makes this request to Philemon on the basis of his love for him. Reddy (2002:88) states “the distinctive feature of Philemon is the finest human illustration of the theological concept of forgiveness permeates in this letter.” It is interesting to note that he does not attack slavery but he presents the issue of the inhuman treatment of slaves. The letter to Philemon is truly a persuasive document. The Apostle Paul is interceding for the life of a believer. One is reminded of Abraham who make such request for his nephew Lot when he speaks to God before Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed (Genesis 16:18-33). Reddy (2002:88) states “Paul takes the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus and uses that to prompt Philemon to engage in interpersonal communication to re-conceptualise the relationship between him and his slave (Philemon).”

The Epistle to the Hebrews

To date the author of the Book of Hebrews is still unknown. However, it has been attributed to the Apostle Paul. There are thirteen writings of the Apostle Paul in which he opens with a salutation which includes his name. This salutation does not however appear in the Book of Hebrews. This epistle is written between A.D. 62 - A.D. 69. The book of Hebrews asserts that Christ is the High Priest. Highlighting that He is greater when compared to the Levite priests. The readers of this epistle are regarded as believers and are also called ‘brethren’ and ‘beloved’.

Paul refers to his readers as being immature even though they have been saved for a long time (Hebrews 5:11-14). The readers experienced many serious challenges were they were persecuted and their material possessions were destroyed. The author is known to the readers (Hebrews 13:23) and the epistle was written to those who were acquainted with Judaism. The writer wanted to make the readers aware of this new faith which is found in Christ. He was trying to highlight that this new faith is better than their previous Jewish faith. The key word is ‘better’ and it appears thirteen times in this epistle. Paul was fervent about defending and nurturing the faith of believers. His desire to serve Jesus motivated Paul to write The epistle of Hebrews which he thus wrote for maintenance purposes.

The Epistle of James

The General Epistles (James; 1 and 2 Peter; 1, 2 and 3 John and Jude) were written so they could be read as general documents by all Christians. They were not written to a specific church or individual. This epistle was written between A.D. 45-50. It is believed to be the first



book to have been written. The author identified himself as the 'James the bondservant of the Lord' (James 1:1). In the New Testament there are three individuals who are mentioned having the name James. Acts 12:1-2 mentions James the son of John, the son of Zebedee. James the son of Alphaeus, of which little is known. In Acts 13:55 Luke makes mention of James the brother of Jesus (half-brother). In Galatians 2:9, the Apostle Paul identified James the brother of Jesus who was one of the pillars of the early church. James the brother of Jesus was the chairperson of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:13). The key words of this epistle are faith, works and doers. Threefold purpose of this epistle which is as follows:

- To encourage Jewish believers who were suffering various trials that was testing their faith.
- To encourage erroneous ideas about the nature of saving faith.
- To exhort and instruct the readers about the practical outwork of their faith in righteous living and good deeds.

The epistle of James was written to conserve important tenets of faith such as The Church structure had a council of which James was the chairperson and the church had a hierarchical structure.

The First Epistle of Peter

The early church fathers recognised this epistle as the work of the Apostle Peter. Peter wrote to the Christians in Asia as well as the Christians scattered abroad. The Apostle John states that the Apostle Peter was a humble fisherman by trade (John 1:40). From his profession it would be safe to deduce that he was a person of limited learning and understanding. Peter is the only apostle of whom the theme of self-limiting belief runs through, not just in the gospels but also in the book of Acts. Peter was introduced to Christ by His brother (Matthew 5:8).

The conversation that Jesus had with Peter on many occasions was to awaken within him the leadership role which Christ had planned for him. While Peter's ministry focused on ministry towards the Jews, the Apostle Paul focused his ministry on mainly the Gentiles. In the life of Peter there is a growth in understanding as well as a growth in spirituality. In Peter 1:1 the writer identifies himself as Peter the Apostle. In 1 Peter 5:1 the writer is very familiar with the suffering in the life of Jesus Christ. The first epistle of Peter was written for maintenance of faith purposes.

The Second Epistle of Peter

This epistle was written by the apostle Peter. Harrison (1971:411) states "a convenient starting point is Origen (ca. A.D. 240), since he is the first, according to known sources, to attribute the work of Peter." The epistle was written to exhort believers to diligently pursue godliness. The Apostle Peter wanted his audience to have a true knowledge of Jesus Christ. He wanted to expose the work of false teachers and prophets among the churches in Asia Minor as they were bringing into disrepute the teachings of the apostles. The second epistle of Peter was the written for maintenance purposes.

The First Epistle of John

When the vocabulary from this epistle ('life', 'light', 'commandment', 'belief' and 'abide') is compared with the Book of John, one is led to believe that the apostle John also wrote this epistle. This epistle is dated sometime between A.D. 85-95. The author wrote as a result of his awareness of the anti-Christian teachers in the assembly (church). The notions of Heresy and Gnosticism appeared thus this epistle was one of assurance in the real faith. The word



'knows' appears thirteen times showing us the certainty of the author. In the gospel, John had to create faith and life (John 20:31) and in this epistle the role was to give certainty of that faith and life (1 John 5:13). There is a classic passage on worldliness. The threefold downfall of humankind is mentioned, namely: the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. The epistle was undoubtedly also written for conservation of the faith purposes.

The Second Epistle of John

Written by the beloved John and dated between A.D. 85-95, John wanted to make the chosen lady aware about the need to be hospitable, offering greetings or even supporting travelling ministers. These ministers could be teachers, evangelists or prophets who departed from the apostle's teachings and were now propagating false teachings. His writing was a warning so as to prevent them from getting involved with false teachers. He feared she would help spread false doctrines and so this epistle was written for maintenance purposes.

The Third Epistle of John

The beloved apostle John wrote this epistle. It was addressed to a certain Gaius who was a faithful and a loyal Christian and therefore it is a personal epistle. John wanted to acknowledge Gaius' contribution towards assisting ministers of the gospel. One aim was to make known to Gaius that Diotrephes was a disobedient leader. At the same time the apostle John made his personal visit known to all and sundry. This epistle was then also written for maintenance purposes.

The Epistle of Jude

There are 7 people with the name Jude who are recorded in the New Testament. One is the brother of James and the half-brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3), to whom this epistle is ascribed. The author refers to himself as the brother of James (Jude 1:1a). It could be that the author referred to himself as the brother of James, who was the moderator of the church in Jerusalem. By making this known to his readers, it gives his writing a measure of credibility. Jude wrote to warn the church against the false teachers that were around. These false teachers taught that salvation is by grace which allowed them to sin without condemnation (Stamps 1990:560). Jude however urged his readers to defend the faith in the face of moral and doctrinal attack. There is a two-fold purpose in the epistle of Jude. Firstly, it serves to warn the Christians about the threat of false teachers and it relates to their submissive influence within the churches. Secondly, it's further purpose was to challenge the true Christians to take a stand and "contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 1:3). The epistle of Jude was written for maintenance purposes.

The Apocalypse (Revelation)

The Apocalypse which is also referred to as the book of Revelation is the last book of the New Testament. Even though the author referred to himself as John (Rev.1: 4), there is internal evidence which reveals that the author was the beloved disciple of Christ, John. Stamps (1990:570) states that the book of Revelation is an apocalypse with regard to the nature of its content, a prophecy with respect to its message and a letter in relation to its addressees. Ultimately the book of Revelation was crafted for preservation and maintenance purposes.

A summary of the forms of communication used by the early Christian leaders



After the resurrection of Christ to the time of His ascension which was forty days later, interpersonal and small group communication was commonly used between Him and His followers. However, on the day of Pentecost, we find a record of the first instance of Public communication when Peter stood to address the crowds thus confirming Peter's leadership role which Christ prophesied when Christ told him that upon him He would build His church. Those that heard Peter speak were bewildered that Peter the fisherman was speaking with such boldness and authority (Acts 2:7). Everyone that was listening to Peter speak on that day was hearing his message in their own language. Thus one's language was an important factor. Initially the epistles were written through which the writers were seeking to maintain and propagate their values and beliefs. It was only decades later that the gospels were written. Interpersonal communication was used frequently by both the early leaders as well as the Christians. Philemon is an example of one kind of a letter which is interpersonal communication because it is written from one person addressed to another, and by contrast group letters were from one person to a specific group of people (1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians). Initially Luke wrote for the benefit of a certain Theophilus, but eventually the letter was written and circulated amongst the churches, and eventually from a letter to one, it became a universal letter. It was during the writing of the letters and the epistles that the early church became an organisation (Reddy, 2004:108).

Conclusion

As a new religious organisation, the early Christians maximised the use of oral communication, small group communication and public communication during their development and propagation of the faith phase. As they were emerging from a movement phase into an organisational phase, they steadily began to document their values and beliefs, so that the believers would have an adequate understanding of what exactly, was required of them as Christians. Written communication was employed extensively through the use of gospels, letters and epistles. Each of these writings were written to a receiver with a specific purpose in mind. The first person to publish a list New Testament books exactly as we see them today was Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, in his Easter letter in AD 367. Subsequently very few people have questioned the contents of the canon, thus demonstrating the effective maintenance and propagation of Christianity. The present day church, in the era of hyper-technology, can and should make maximum use of the forms of communication available to today them to propagate the gospel of Christ to those around them.

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