A communion of communities: The mission and growth of a local church as reflected in the publications of the Lumko Institute

Abstract:

In 1970 a Pastoral Department was formed in the Lumko Institute to produce leadership training programmes geared towards the renewal of the Church in accordance with the vision of the Second Vatican Council. After a historical survey of the origin and development of Lumko this study examines the ecclesiology underpinning the Lumko approach of producing a local Church which is a communion of Small Christian Communities. The central role accorded to the Bible in the Gospel Sharing programmes of Lumko is emphasised. In the concluding chapter certain weaknesses in the Lumko approach were identified. While the Institute teaches that the laity fulfill their baptismal commitment by taking on full responsibility for the parish, this is contradicted by Canon Law which gives total responsibility to the priest. Meanwhile the limited number of clergy available is denying the majority of Roman Catholic communities the pastoral oversight legislated for. The Lumko emphasis on renewal, through a Church founded on the Word of God, plus many local questionable quasi-sacramental practices, puts pressure on Church leadership to see to it that each assembly of Christians enjoys a regular celebration of the Eucharist along with a proclamation of the Word. The insistence that a Small Christian Community is a local Church is theologically questionable. The equivalent description of a Basic Ecclesial Community in Brazil, which is cited in the publications, refers to a much wider gathering of the faithful than envisaged by Lumko. A comprehensive understanding of the priest as the one who holds pastoral oversight is also lacking. The books which present social ministry are in general outdated and lack relevant information. This is partly because their emphasis is on an inward-looking parish re-structuring, whereas God calls a people together to transform them and through them to transform the world. Most of the publications are sexist in nature and this is reflected in the overwhelming choice of males as authors. The issue of inculturation is faced in only a few of the books. However, none of these criticisms takes from the fact that the Lumko Institute has played a major role in spreading the vision of a living local Church, now verbalised in the Roman Catholic Bishops’ national pastoral plan.

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Missiological Institute in the 1950s, believed in the vision that founding such an institute would mean reading the signs of the times. The Mission and Ministry of the East Asian Pastoral Institute for the local churches in Asia and Oceania. The EAPI is a typical international, interregional pastoral institute.