

## **THE THEOCOM - THE INTERACTION BETWEEN COMMUNICATION AND THEOLOGY**

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### **I. The Beginnings**

When one speaks of communications,<sup>1</sup> it is important to highlight that most people like the media and the press button technologies, but when it comes to the very core of communication, not many seem to understand its depth. I believe that, although communication is at the very basis of human society, if it has nothing to do with theology, the church may not take to it seriously. Hence the study of the relationship between theology and communication seemed a must.

The beginnings of the interaction between theology and communication started as an academic subject in the communication studies program of the Pontifical Gregorian University sometime in the early 1980s as part of its interdisciplinary studies in communications.

It was the realization that communications is closely linked to every aspect theology, that encouraged pioneers like Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini (the then Rector of the Gregorian University), Bishop Peter Henrici (emeritus Dean of philosophy at the Gregorian), Fr. Pedro

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<sup>1</sup>Communication and Communications vary. The former refers to the process while the latter with an 's' in the end refers to the process, technologies, media etc.

Arrupe (the then Superior General of the Society of Jesus) and Fr. Robert White, an eminent Jesuit scholar of communications in the Church and in the secular world, to found the Interdisciplinary Centre for Social Communications (CICS) at the Gregorian University in Rome way back in 1981.

The concept was new and it gave an extra dimension to the formation to communications at the Gregorian. It was to encourage this kind of thinking that the Social Communications and Theology Project (SCTP) or theocom conferences, briefly, was started at CICS in 1981. The first conference on theology and communications was organized at Cavaletti, on the outskirts of Rome. The subsequent conferences addressed the importance of associating theological studies with communication studies, focussing especially on developing a communicative theology in the context of popular culture and popular religion. The project continues to look at areas like communicative elements in theology, theology of communications, communication theology, communicative theology, Bible and communication, ecclesiology and communication, culture and communication, contextual theology, popular culture, moral theology and media interpretations of Christian values. The project hopes that more contextualized theological studies which look at today's mediated realities can help professional theologians and theology students make their studies contribute to the goal of the Reign of God in this world.

### **The SCTP Conference Themes**

The major themes of these conferences approach the relationship between theology and communication in diverse ways. The first, *Communication Inside, Communication Outside - from the Centre to Periphery*, takes up the twin themes of ecclesiology and evangelization: communication *ad intra* or within the Church and communication *ad extra* or outside the Church. In today's contexts, communication media and technologies heavily influence both of these movements. One could debate (and we should) whether these media serve the dual mission effectively or whether interpersonal communication would better serve the basic functions of organizational communication and evangelization.

The second recurrent theme, *Theology and Communications*, describes the central issues of these conferences. It also introduces the work of theologians who have incorporated the fruits of communication research into their work and those communication scholars who examine theology or the religious uses of communication media. Sadly, much

wishful thinking characterizes the work on both sides of theology and communications divide. The Cavaletti approach attempts to minimize these difficulties through academic dialogue and partnership.

*Communication in Formation*, another favourite theme and one of the initial motivations for the Cavaletti conferences,<sup>2</sup> focussed on: How

<sup>2</sup>**A list of various Cavaletti conferences and their themes:** From 1983 to 1997, there have been eight Cavaletti conferences, as well as two Cavaletti-like conferences in the United States each focused on aspects of the theology and communication conversation:

1983 Cavaletti I: *Theology and communication: general approaches.*

1984 Cavaletti II: *Fundamental theology and communication.* How might communication study and research inform the basic grounding of theology? What kinds of basic questions for theology could communication address?

1985 Cavaletti III: *Philosophy and Communication.* Objectives: to examine various approaches to communication philosophy (philosophy of language, explorations of meaning) as a foundation for seminary courses attuned to the role of communication.

1988 Cavaletti IV: *Moral theology and communication.* Does the world of the media have an impact on moral theology? How might moral theologians take advantage of media products or of the work of communication scholars.

1989 Cavaletti V: *Ecclesiology and communication.* What might communication study teach us about the organizational structure of the Church? More specifically, participants were to “focus on current developments in ecclesiology and the significance of new conceptions and new cultural patterns of communication for ecclesiology and for the life of the Church” (Granfield, 1994, p. v)

1991 Cavaletti VI: *Foundations for a Theology of Communication.* Objectives for the conference: (1) work toward a systematic synthesis regarding the theology of communication using Nos. 1-18 of *Communio et Progressio* as a point of departure; (2) prepare a book presenting some of the major themes of a theology of communication and a commentary on that theology; (3) exchange ideas on teaching communication and theology.

1993 Cavaletti VII: *The New Image of Religious Film.* How does film contribute to religious meaning? What historical trends appear in the use of religious themes in the cinema? Can theology contribute to film criticism? This conference brought together members of the International Catholic Organization for the Cinema (OCIC) and theologians.

1997 Castel Gondolfo VIII: *Media, religion, and popular culture.* How does popular culture express religious images, themes, and sensibilities? [Meanwhile the Jesuits had sold Villa Cavaletti, and so the conference was held at another retreat centre located across the lake from Castel Gondolfo.]

2007 Ariccia IX: *Rethinking theology and ministry in the light of today's developments in communications.* A summary conference which considered most of the major issues.

**Other Locations** (Participants inspired by the Cavaletti conferences organized conferences in other parts of the world):

1988a Marquette University Conference: *Moral theology and communications.* This follow-up conference addressed the similar themes, bringing together additional scholars.

should the Church prepare future ministers in terms of communication in the contemporary world? What roles should rhetoric, interpersonal communication, and media studies play in the formation of clergy and other ministers? The Vatican II and the Pontifical Council for Social Communications demanded serious study of the issue, as have the Vatican Congregation for Seminaries and the National Conferences of bishops. The Cavaletti approach points to preparing materials – books on fundamental theology, ecclesiology, moral theology, for example, – which can enrich existing seminary courses without adding extra courses to an already crowded schedule of requirements.

Courses on ecclesiology could include elements of organizational communication, models of the Church could include different communication models, as these could lead to a better understanding of the Church in the modern age. A course in Christology could study the images of Christ in art, music and media to understand how these have changed according to the theological interpretations of the person of Christ. A course in Liturgy needs to include church architecture, role of music, etc. and courses in Sacraments could look at the communicative aspects in each of the sacraments. Courses that deal with current aspects such as, why it is crucial to establish the link between theology and communications for the very survival of the Church, theological and philosophical context for communication, methodology of communicating theology, theology in the public square, interreligious dialogue from a communication perspective, theology as expressed in the arts, finding God in the audio visual, digital and cyber world, etc. are very relevant to the times. Participants were of accord on the importance of doing a *Contextual Theology* rather than an abstract, universalized version that ignored culture.<sup>3</sup> The cultural context in which one theologizes is a point of intersection between theology and communication since the latter expresses as well as creates cultures. The main point of intersection of

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1988b Santa Clara University Conference: *Communication in the U.S. Church*. This conference approached the communication, theology, and culture questions from the perspective of the Church in the United States. The conference originated as a way to reproduce the fruits of the Cavalletti conferences in other locations.

2003 Ruhalya Theological College, Ujjain, India: *National Conference on theology and communication*.

2005 St. Peter's Pontifical Seminary Bangalore, India: *National Conference on Mission and Communication*.

<sup>3</sup>At the recent 2010 conference at Santiago de Chile, it was argued that contextual theologies like liberation theology, Minjung theology, dalit theology, feminist theology etc are attempts at communicating theology in particular contexts.

communication with theology comes in the area of pastoral theology. Cinema and media literacy courses have long been used in training people for ministry. Hence the conferences highlight the need for a communication sensitivity and competency that includes critical self-reflection, an imaginative appreciation of culture, an appreciation of cultural richness in diverse groups, and an ability to integrate one's own story into the larger context.

Communication experts can learn from theology and apply a type of theological reflection about the communication phenomena. Some professors have already developed methods of using theological models to organize the program of communication studies. There is a great need to analyze the theoretical implications and cultural consequences of the new forms of communication and the new digital media.

A broad historical perspective is important since previous stages of communication (orality and literacy) do not disappear, but coincide with and overlap the new modes of communication.<sup>4</sup>

## Some Concepts Developed at CICS

### A. Theology of Communication

Instead of saying that theology uses axioms of communication like narrative, coherence, rhetoric, theories, etc. to communicate, it is more important to ask the question whether in the very concept of communication there are elements of theology. Just like we can speak of a theology of education, health care or environmental studies, we are trying to bring a God dimension into communication. It is not really an attempt to merely baptize communications and make it a subject acceptable to superiors and provincials, but clearly, one can notice, theological notions in the very concept of communication.

The purpose of communication is creating unity and communion. This is the reason why Jesus became man (incarnation) and sent the

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<sup>4</sup>More info on these conferences may be had from [www.theocom.net](http://www.theocom.net). Several books were published based on these conferences. Some of these books from the previous conferences are: 1988a Marquette University Conference: Rossi, P. & Soukup, P. A., ed., *Mass Media and the Moral Imagination*. Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1994; 1988b Santa Clara University Conference: Soukup, P. A., ed., *Media, Culture, and Catholicism*. Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1996; 1989 Cavaletti: V. Granfield, P., ed., *The Church and Communication*. Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1994; 1993 Cavaletti VII: May, J. R., ed., *New Image of Religious Film*. Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1997; 2004 Ujjain, India: Jose Palakeel, *Towards a Communication Theology*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation; 2007 Ujjain, India: Jose Palakeel, ed., *The Bible and the Technologies of the Word*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation.

Holy Spirit to remain with us, "that they may be one" (Jn 17:8-26). So, communication needs to promote understanding and unity. Ecclesialogically, the church exists to create unity among people as per the vision of Jesus Christ. Late Cardinal Avery Dulles argued that the Church is a communion created by communication.<sup>5</sup> Another purpose of communication is to create relationships of love. Again this is why Jesus came down to us. The Church exists for this alone. Relationships of love is the central element of communication. A third purpose of communication is empowering people, making the people feel important through participation in planning and execution of every activity. It urges that we delegate power, and thus make the people stronger. And Jesus came to us for this, the Church exists for this, "that they may have life, and life in its fullness." (Jn 10:10). Along with this, a fourth purpose of communication is being in solidarity with the people, supporting them to grow up. Jesus and the Church are present with us for this purpose. Hence, the real purpose of communication is to build communities of love. Obviously, the reality on which the Church is founded is the mystery of communication.

It may even be argued, theology is the communication of communication. For, the essence of our faith is the divine communication of God, the Father through his Son to us. When we theologize we try to communicate to ourselves and to others this everlasting, abiding love of God for us in a way we can comprehend.

Finally, listening, sharing, creating opinions together which are the central elements of communication promote respect for the other and presupposes an egalitarian society very much in line with Jesus' idea of the "Reign of God". In fact, the Church exists to create this reign of God. If the Church does not do that, she may not exist as well. The Church exists to construct communion among people through communications.

Theologians may show less interest in this area of theology of communication, the communicators would rather try inventing this more and more. Hence courses like *communications for community*, *interpersonal communications*, *communications and theology*, *communications and mission*, *biblical communication*, etc. at CICS try to promote these thoughts. Eventually, CICS hopes that communication must thus urge us to transform this world to God's world, challenging unjust structures with a prophetic stand and promoting Christian values.

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<sup>5</sup>A. Dulles, "The Church is Communications," *Catholic Mind*, 69 (1971).

## B. Communicative Elements in Theology

Let us examine some of the clear communicative elements in theology

- **The Trinity** is an example of perfect communication between the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.
- The **revelation** is the communication of God to humans through many centuries via the prophets.
- **Incarnation** is God's attempt to communicate profoundly with humans via his Son, and thus Jesus takes on the status of the receiver, that is, a human being.
- **Jesus Christ** is the perfect communicator (CP No. 11) in whom the medium and the message became one, since he did what he said.
- **The Eucharist** is the continuous and everlasting communication of Jesus with us humans in sacramental form, which reminds humans the why of his incarnation, death and resurrection.
- **Other Sacraments** are the sacred signs and symbols, through which God's presence with humans is communicated to us.
- **The liturgy** is the use of culture bound rites and symbols, to communicate the presence of God with us through celebrations.

**C. Theological Reflection or theologizing**, to some, began to be talked about from the early 1970s. This is an attempt at trying to find the meaning of everyday events in the light of faith, that is, interpreting Scripture and doctrines in the light of human experiences and explaining human experiences in the light of Scripture and Tradition (Faith). Its primary presupposition is that God is ever active and present in history and is always involved in the various events of the day. Hence history can be seen as events shaped through God's intervention (Word event). Theologizing thus is the continuous dialogue and the interaction between the gospel or the Christian message and the realities of today. The gospel or the Christian faith puts questions to the actual situation and, on the other hand, the present realities put questions of faith so that faith itself may be re-interpreted. The content of Christian faith needs continuous interpretation and reinterpretation so that it may become understandable and relevant for the people of today. Such interpretation is needed both to distinguish between the core of the message and its historical cultural expressions, and also to safeguard the authentic faith against its historic distortions. Good theologizing is making sense of our experiences in the light of faith, and making sense of faith in the light of everyday experiences. Hence depending on one's present experiences, the interpretation of

God talk or faith talk can vary and hence we cannot talk of *the* theology of communication, but only of *a* theology of communication.

#### **D. Communicative Theology**

**Communicative theology** is the study of theology from the perspective of communicating it. Often theology is studied as abstract concepts. Here we talk of theology being made practical and as experienced by ordinary people. Media language demands that abstract subjects like theology and philosophy be made concrete, image-based, sensorial and experiential. For example, when one adapts teaching methods like group discussion, debates, role plays or employs other audio visual aids or uses vocabularies that are sensible to modern people to explain theological concepts, it is communicative theology. This can be said to be a kind of inculturation of theology.

Purely oral, linear, and textual ways of learning theology needs to give way to images, narratives and even fiction based understanding of theology. Some like liberation theologians are demanding that theology be taught from the ground up, based on realities, and that links be established with theological truths and ground realities. The culture addressed and referred to in most theological education has tended to be an elite culture, represented mostly by print media, one which is considered by most theologians as more appropriate for the elevated task of theological thought. The problem is that while such cultures may give elevated and esoteric expression to theological truth, elite culture does not adequately express the lived situation of the majority of people.

If that remains the theological basis on which ministers are trained, then the foundations laid in theological education will be increasingly inadequate for understanding theologically a large part of the world in which Catholic ministry is being exercised. This is why the popular culture created by media cannot simply be ignored by theologians. As Peter Horsfield comments, for many people today, the mass media are playing a major role in meeting their need for integrative ritual, self-transcendence, social integration and shared belief. It needs to be said that many theologians fail to realize the power of the media. The multi-dimensional audio visual culture of the electronic media affects values and meanings, attitudes and behaviours, thinking and life styles today. The concept of mass media as integrated power and meaning-generating systems which are actively creating a mythological and personalized learning milieu to serve particular, social and economic interests is foreign to most theological educators. Seeing the mass media as shaping a new and distinctive



cultural environment rather than simply as tools of communication may require a significant conceptual leap for many theological thinkers and educators today. When one makes that leap, however, a number of profound implications for the task of theological education and ministerial formation may be identified.

E. **Communication theology** is understanding, reinterpreting or re-expressing the categories of communication into the very process of theologising; something like St Thomas using Aristotle, or Rahner referring to transcendental philosophy. It is more a methodological approach to redefine theology. It is theology seen fully from a communication angle. Theologians with more of a classical framework will have no interest in this, although unconsciously they are borrowing from communication sciences.

## II. Why Communications must be Part of Theological Formation?

Today the challenge is not to learn theology, but *to do* theology, or to become conscious of one's faith. In the first level, it may be to recognize the hand of God in every day events in and around us. At the second level, even while one studies great theologians, it is important to find out the relevance of their thought today and to make theology students not authoritarian leaders, but enablers, having the capacity to empower and delegate powers to others. Communication can play a major role to enable theology to do these.

1. While explaining the constitutive meaning of communication we saw that it is not just passing on of information, but is a process of creating meanings by the interaction between the sender, the receiver and the contexts. Hence, it is only natural that theology be interpreted in every situation as per the people and the context in which they are. Local theologies thus emerge among peoples as these alone can help them make sense of their faith life. It is through intense interaction among people and their contexts that they realize the meaning of faith, God, Church, sacraments, etc. In other words, more than the content of theology, how to study it must be given more importance as receivers and contexts have important roles to play.

While the information giving approach to communication loads students with the content of theology as is done traditionally, the constitutive concept of communication focuses on the relational aspect of theological education. It asks questions like, what does theologizing do to participants as people, how are their identities shaped in every theological interaction, and what kind of power or control is being exercised in theologizing. These questions help to

shape and maintain their personality, their self concept, their social affiliations and the quality of their social bonds.

Here, more than learning new theologies (traditional) or doing theologies (contextual) the students are learning to be what they are called to become, a loving community, where each one is responsible for the other, especially the marginalized and the less intelligent who have been kept out of theology. The new theological education suggested by the constitutive approach to communication empowers people to construct themselves and their destiny, vis-à-vis in relationship with one another, where they are legitimated and validated. In this concept, invariably, teachers and students learn from each other as each has different contexts and faith experiences to share.

2. Each seminary prepares students for a particular people, living in a particular culture. The task of the trained seminarian is first of all to clarify and articulate the faith of the community to themselves. The seminarians also need to understand the culture to which they are sent, and understand how faith is formed and developed in that culture, so that they can continue to communicate a vibrant faith to form a living community. Naturally, in a culture that is constantly mediated, a formed seminarian will have to juggle with the vagaries of media, so that his communication with his people is more accurate. Christian faith being incarnational, communication provides the courage to interact with others and the world. Since community building is the biblical measure for all effective Christian communications, communication studies might just be what the Catholic Church needs most in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

3. Following Jesus' prayer at the Last Supper, "My prayer is not that you take them out of this world, but that you protect them from the evil one" (Jn 17:15), H. Richard Niebuhr argues in *The purpose of the Church and its mission*, that the purpose of the Church is to "increase among people the love of God and neighbour."<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the main purpose of the Church is neither the dissemination of the Biblical truth and the increase of devotion to the scriptures, nor the increase of numbers in the Church, or gaining more and more followers for Jesus. (Jesus said, "I came not to bear witness to myself, but to the one who sent me" [Jn. 5:31]).

The real goal is the increase of the love of God and neighbour among people, and hence the Church must be fully involved all over the world, where God acts and where the neighbours are, that is,

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<sup>6</sup>Richard H. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951, 31.

everywhere. Christians, as Niebuhr argues, “are not those who are being saved *out* of the world, but those who know that world is being saved.” Very clearly, we know that our contemporary world and our neighbours are thoroughly mediated and as a result, media continuously shape their values. Can then theology students avoid learning about media impact, and ignore this mediated world?

4. In our theological teachings can we make efforts to answer the daily problems of living the faith, posed by the people rather than just enumerate abstract theories? Both Jesus and Paul seem to have followed a similar method. Jesus continuously listened to people’s queries and allowed them to theologize using images, parables, miracles, his own life style, and not just theological, abstract pronouncements. In the same way, Paul started with the faith and moral problems of his people and looked at their lives to show them how they lacked God’s spirit in their lives.

5. Communication studies can help to defuse the fear seminarians have of the secular mass media and their evil effects. They would gradually be prepared to make the best use of these and avoid their misuse.

### **III. The Challenges**

In theology faculties where the professors get their doctorates by manipulating words and continue to teach in seminaries by writing words, teaching words, and analyzing words, an approach that focuses on the moving images that challenge the whole print culture is sure to cause alarm. Even though this new culture of the mediated world belittles the very foundations of traditional rational thought, the very survival of the Church depends much on accepting these new orientations.

Once the professors see the value of communications training, seminaries need to include it as an interdisciplinary subject. Anyone teaching Bible can easily see how communication studies help to explain better the importance of parables, of story-telling, and of understanding the cultural context in the interpretation of any text. Communication theory can raise questions about homiletics, the necessity of understanding the audience in communication, the importance of novelty, feedback, repetition and the meaning and nature of community.

Media studies can raise the issues of ethics in media. Mission studies can never be complete without cross cultural communications and general education can enrich itself with ideas from different

communication models. Areas of intercultural communication, communication theory and practice, theology and communication, cultural analysis, theological critique of media, the power of story-telling, story-telling as religious communication, ethical issues in the mass media and the relationship of communication to art and worship are subjects that sharpen communication skills, along with the other purely theological and biblical subjects.

#### **IV. Contextual Theologies are Attempts at Communicating Theology**

Today contextual theology is a term used for all kinds of theologies that are emerging from various kinds of contexts. Globalization, modernization, pluralism, multi-religiosity, inter-culturalism, extreme poverty, corruption and mediated realities are some of these contexts.

Contextual theology means making faith relevant to one's life situations, relating the Christian faith to the living experiences of the people, where the problems of the people are reflected. 'What does my faith say to these problems?' becomes the concern of real active theology.

In other words there is constant dialogue with the theology or God talk and the current problems of the people. This means that in each place a different kind of understanding of God may emerge. We can take the Christian God in general to be a kind, compassionate and loving God. But this same God can be interpreted differently in different contexts.

For example in a situation of injustices where the rich Catholics oppressed and ignored the poorer and allowed the rift between the poor and the rich grow wider, the Church interpreted Jesus as a liberator, one who alleviates the poor people's pains and seeks justice. Similarly also Minjung theology (Korea), African theology, Black theology, feminist theology, *Dalit* theology, etc. developed as per the contexts. A contextualized, people's theology is a way of understanding the God of the Christian faith in the context of the everyday experiences of ordinary people who worship him. This theology challenges one to live one's faith more fully and in a more shared way. In fact, the word contextualization was originally meant to be "wrestling with God's word in such a way as to discern the particularity of this historic moment." And for us now it means wrestling with God's word in such a way that the power of the incarnation which is the divine form of contextualization, can enable us to follow his steps. From this point of view every theology is contextual. In fact, the so-called classical theology adopted very much European presuppositions and styles and was sensitive enough to

include as many contexts as possible, but in the process tended to be too abstract and general. Obviously it loses its punch and meaning in a different context.

Thus contextual theology is an attempt at dialoguing or communicating with the people at large in the light of their faith. While the so-called classical approach is more scientific and does theology in terms of propositions and rationality, and the approach itself is rational, critical, analytical, and deductive, the contextual theology of the people seeks to complement this style by offering the language of images, especially suited in the context of cultures that are largely oral and non-literary. The image language often used by Jesus is a lively process of seeing life with new eyes, and allowing people to express their faith more profoundly with the demands of the kingdom. In the words of Elsa Tamez, a Costa Rican theologian, “the fact that the people are doing theology means that they are thinking about God from their own perspective and in their own lives, and this means they have made their faith a living faith.”<sup>7</sup>

Social activists in the church would argue that true theology is the attempt on the part of the Church to explain and interpret the meaning of the gospel for its own life and to answer questions raised by the Christian faith, using the thought, values and categories of truth which are authentic to that place and time. In other words, theology is a reflection on our faith in the context of our living experience. Faith itself is a response to God speaking to us and calling us. If God has spoken also to our ancestors, in whatever limited ways, our response to God cannot ignore this.

Contextual theology, more or less is the dynamic reflection carried out by the particular church upon its own life in the light of the Word of God and the historic Christian truth. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church continually challenges, incorporates and transforms elements of the cultural milieu, bringing these under the lordship of Christ, as the members of the body of Christ interpret the Word, using their own thoughts and employing their own cultural gifts, and thus they are better able to understand the gospel as incarnation. This type of contextualization opens the way to evangelization without paternalizing, dominating, or setting up foreign independent churches.<sup>8</sup> Contextualization really leads us to the centre of what God

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<sup>7</sup>As quoted in S. Amirtham & J.S. Pobee, *Theology by the People: Reflections on Doing Theology in Community*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986.

<sup>8</sup>Ideas on contextual theology are drawn from the following: K. Koyama, *Waterbuffalo theology*, New York: Orbis books, 1974; G. Gutierrez, *A Theology of*

did in Christ, that is, the humanization of the Son of God, the coming of God into the living context of us humans.

### **Conclusion**

Only when the Church is thus contextualized and local leaders take up responsibilities with adequate theological depth, can real mission consciousness and missionary activity can take shape. Actually mission consciousness comes from the consciousness of the message of Jesus that God loves us. In communication parlance, artists and poets communicate because they have an urge to communicate an important message. This is true also of missionaries. They can feel they cannot but communicate, that they have to share the good news with one and all, if only they have deep experience of the living God in their lives.

The apathy of modern men and women to Church going and sacraments is a crucial question that deserves serious consideration from pastors. This is a major challenge to the Church, an invitation to connect the gospel with modern cultural expressions. The ritual sacramental practices of the Church as done today have not been communicating much to these people for long and they prefer to keep off. Another crucial aspect is that they have not been sufficiently catechized (not a bright picture in Europe and N. America now). As a result, the so called Christians neither understand nor appreciate the richness of the sacramental life. Hence they leave churches empty.

Sufficient or fruitful efforts have not been made to develop a theology that connects with the daily lives of contemporary humans. What is the Church doing to give them a sense of belonging to “the community of believers”? Can the church simply remain aloof from them, or sideline them? There is a gulf of communication between the church and such people. This is where communications have to come in. In the process, the type of media to be used for an entry into their lives is immaterial. It will depend on them not the Church. Whether the Church uses traditional or new media, the end product has to be effective communication and consequently mutual understanding. Non-participation of the Church in the lives of her people has dented her image already.

The truncated people continue to practice their faith in their own way. Some change courts joining other Christian groups which apparently are more people oriented and communicative. It is

overdue that the Church developed a more relevant theology, that is, a contextualized theology that can meet the needs of the people living in this changing world. The world is constantly undergoing changes. In this process the impact of media sponsored globalization, secularism and consumerism, are major players. Post-modernism that advocates pluralism and relativism needs a theology that takes into consideration the roots of change and progress. What does the God of history tell us about these developments today? How do we respond to that God? These must be the essence of our faith search.

Attempts at relating theology and communication are primarily to make theology communicate to us and touch our lives. Will our theologians wake up to these issues? Or will they continue to be complacently burying themselves in the age old abstract theologies and incomprehensible, outdated rituals. This would lead to irreparable causalities that would be self destructive to everyone.

### **Addendum**

#### ***Cavaletti Beginnings: A Personal Account: Franz-Josef Eilers, svd***

The very early seed for the later “Cavaletti Conferences” was laid already some 40 years ago. In the end of 60s the Swiss Fr. Stefan Bamberger was responsible for Social Communication in the General Curia of the Jesuits in Rome. This time I had after my academic studies in Communication and Missiology a similar responsibility in our own SVD Generalate. Stefan and I soon became friends and cooperated in many ways. He told me those days about the mandate given to him by the then Jesuit Superior General Fr. Pedro Aruppe to develop serious research in the field of Church and Social Communication. It was the conviction of Fr. Aruppe that any responsible communication of the Church should be based on serious research which he felt was unfortunately missing. Thus Fr. Aruppe asked his Communication Secretary to develop ideas and possibly a program on Church and Communication Research.

To place this into the proper historical perspective: All happened already some three years before the publication of the Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio* (1971) which made a similar request. I myself had started already in 1968 with some friends *Communicatio Socialis*, an academic quarterly with similar concerns for German-speaking countries which still exists till today. The proposals of Fr. Aruppe were discussed in more detail in his presence at a conference of communication experts which Fr. Bamberger organized on his behalf in 1973 at Cavaletti. This actually preceded all other

later Cavaletti communication gatherings. At this conference the following decisions were reached:

1. The Jesuit Order, with its intellectual tradition, should commit itself to an initiative in communication research;
2. That it should begin with a relatively small central staff consisting of a specialist in fund raising to find financial resources for research and a research director to define the research priorities, facilitate research, and in some cases give specific orientation in such things as research design;
3. That this centre should have an international perspective with an associated network of researchers-scholars in various parts of the world.

It was further decided that this project was to begin with an initial organizational-experimental phase of three years and a thorough evaluation at the end of this period. These guidelines were further refined in an international meeting of communication experts in Milwaukee in 1975. After consultation, the initial staff was appointed in 1976 and the decision was made by the governing council of the Jesuits to begin the international centre in London. (CSCC Progress Report 1979).

Originally the Centre was called "The Research Facilitator Unit for Social Communication." The Unit was under the direction of Fr. Stefan Bamberger, SJ and published in 1978 a paper on "Catholic Communication Research, Topics and Rationale," written by W.E. Biernatzki, SJ who was at that time still at Sogang University in Seoul, Korea but also already related to the London Unit which he later joined.

At the Cavaletti Conference of 1973 I asked during the discussion in the presence of Fr. Aruppe why the Gregorian University in Rome would not go into Communication Research and teaching. This question was noted but never answered at that time. Only when some seven years later the Gregorian centre finally took shape I was reminded by some Jesuits of my question way back in 1973 in Cavaletti and told: That time we were not yet ready at the Greg.

The early name of the London centre indicated the aim of the Unit to 'facilitate' research which continued also when the final name "Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture" was chosen in 1979. Because the founders and pioneers of the later established Gregorian University Interdisciplinary Unit saw also the need for proper communication research, there was right from the beginning a



close cooperation with the London Centre. Therefore the Cavaletti Conferences were right from their beginning planned as joint ventures of the Greg and London.

Together with Fr. (later Bishop) Agnellus Andrew, OFM, the former Unda World president and later Vice president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communication, I was part of the advisory board in London as well as part of the group which planned the later “Interdisciplinary Centre for Social Communication” at the Gregorian University under the leadership of the that time Rector and later Archbishop and Cardinal Carlo Martini. The Gregorian Centre started classes in the second semester of the School year 1980/81 as the Jescom Newsletter No. 2 from January/February 1981 reports: “The first level of a planned 3-level course in social communication is being given this semester at the Pontifical Gregorian University. This marks the first time that social communication has been offered as a separate course within the university’s curriculum.” It is said that 34 students from 18 different countries were enrolled in a course on “Introduction to the Problems of Social Communication.” “The second level,” the news continues, “to be given next year will focus on the interdisciplinary relationships between social communication and the existing specialities being studied at the university. A final ‘specialized’ level will concentrate on pooling together the best talents at the university – professor, students and guests from elsewhere – to explore through deeper research and group discussions the catholic doctrine and praxis of social communications and its instruments.”

The “final specialized level” in this news item refers already to the vision of the Cavaletti Seminars with the first one taking place from October 13 to 20, 1981 on the “Integration of Communications in Pastoral Studies.”

Beside Carlo Martini as being the rector of the university the main initiator of the Gregorian studies, it was Fr. (later Bishop) Peter Henrici, SJ, at some time also being dean of Philosophy at the Greg, who pushed the new vision and initiative for communication studies. He had contacts with a Swiss foundation which was willing to also financially support the communications initiative at the Greg.

As a follow up of a meeting in Rome July 1979 Fr. Agnellus Andrew was asked to prepare some documents for this foundation. In a letter on August 20, 1979 he wrote to Fr. Martini: “You will have had the two documents that I prepared after my visit to you in July. So far I have had no reply from Zurich, but I have had an opportunity of

some discussion with Fr. Eilers. Fr. Eilers and I would like to visit you again in Rome when your colleagues will have returned – you may remember that I have not yet had a chance of meeting Fr. Henrici or Fr. Carroll, although I had some conversation with Fr. Tucci. Both Dr. Eilers and I are very anxious to be of the greatest possible assistance to you at this important stage...”

In the discussions for the new section in the Greg it was quite clear that the study program should be mainly academic whereas practical training in different communication activities would be delegated to “practica” or other already existing training centres for the different media which should not be duplicated by the new Gregorian initiative. The different study programmes offered at the Greg from 1981 onwards were grouped into four dimensions: 1. The introductory courses and those with 2. semiotic-cultural, 3. socio-cultural and 4. philosophical-theological approaches. On the basis of these proposals also the idea of special scientific gatherings was developed which led to the Cavaletti conferences. They tried to bring together Theology and Communication scholars to share and discuss areas which were considered as especially important for an integration of Theology (and Philosophy) and Communication.

Once again: Right from the beginning the Cavaletti Seminars were a joint venture of the Gregorian with the London Research Centre. From this came the later proposal (1985) of the advisory group for the Gregorian program to transfer Fr. Robert White from the London Centre where he was research director since 1978 to the Interdisciplinary Communication Unit in Rome. Fr. Henrici had started the program successfully but was at the same time still involved in the faculty of Philosophy.

Before the specialized conferences started with Fundamental Theology as the first area of consideration in 1983 there was already an international seminar on “integration of communications in pastoral studies” from October 13 to 20, 1981 in Cavaletti which produced an extensive paper with recommendations on “General principles and guidelines for action.”

In the annual progress report of Fr. Robert White for the London Centre from 1985 the objectives of the Cavaletti seminars are described as follows:

1. To develop theologies which are more relevant in new cultural contexts and a new world of mass media;

2. Develop a body of thought which relates theology to the general communication education of students preparing for pastoral ministry and provides a basis for the integration of communication in theological studies;

3. Provide basis for a theology of communication which will guide communication policy in the church. Right from the beginning of the Cavaletti initiatives it was proposed that the proceedings and consideration of the meetings should be published as books, which has been done only partially. Based on the experiences of the some 20 years and present needs it might be helpful:

- To follow up more extensively initial steps like Carlo Martini's biblical considerations on Social Communication in his pastoral programs for the archdiocese of Milan;

- To further develop attempts for a Communication Theology instead of a theology of Communication. Such a Communication Theology considers the whole of theology under the perspective of communication thus making communication a 'theological principle';

- To develop deeper the communication dimension of pastoral ministries like liturgy, catechesis, and similar apostolates or even homiletics;

- To develop a systematic and thorough Communication Spirituality for communicators personally and their work;

- To study and dig deeper into the theological and practical communication considerations and experiences of the Fathers of the Church like St. Augustine, Gregory the Great and translate them into our modern communication needs and dispositions.