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**SOCIAL COMMUNICATION AND
THEOLOGY – COMMUNICATION
THEOLOGY**

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This presentation has two major parts. At first we look at documents and approaches to theology in a more general way which is followed by a more detailed overview on the proposed field of Communication Theology.

1. The Concept of "Social Communication"

Any theological consideration of Communication should consider first the concept of *Social Communication* as introduced by the Vatican II Decree *Inter Mirifica (IM)*. In a presentation at the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for Social Communication 2003 on the occasion of 40 years of *Inter Mirifica* the late Cardinal Andrea M. Deskur, one of the key figures of *IM* and later also *Communio et Progressio*, recalled the origin of this expression: The first draft of a proposed Council document on Communication always talked about the *Mass Media* and was internally heavily criticized with the argument that the first concern of the Church in Communication would not be technology

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but the human person. Therefore the expression Mass Media should be completely avoided. It was Fr. Enrico Baragli, SJ, another key figure in the preparation of communication documents, who then proposed to use instead the expression of Social Communication. This was accepted and later incorporated in a footnote of the final draft of the document submitted to the Council for discussion.¹ It was accepted and became the Church expression also of all further documents on communication, though it was never extensively explained. Pope John Paul II, however, in his World Communication Day message (1992) indirectly referred to the field in listing the different stages of human communication starting from speech, hearing and sight before going to other 'media'.

"Social Communication" must be considered as the communication of and in human society. Academically speaking it is according to Giorgio Braga concerned about "the study as communicative processes within society and thus places communication at the centre of the life of society."² This calls also for a deeper theological consideration which goes far beyond 'media' which are only *one* means of communicating. Social Communication includes *all* ways and means of human communication beginning with non-verbal and interpersonal communication, including all traditional means of communication of cultures like storytelling, theatre, dance, etc. up to modern technical means and to 'social media' or/and 'social networks' which after some 50 years still seem to prove the vision and inspiration of the *social* Communication of *Inter Mirifica* ...

2. Communication documents and Theology

2.1. *Inter Mirifica*

a. The decree *Inter Mirifica* (IM) was one of the first two documents of the Second Vatican Council together with the document on Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* published on December 4, 1963). This means that the text does not include and can not in any way reflect the theological considerations of the Council which followed in the years to come.

b. The existing decree is only a summary and adaptation of a much longer document with some 114 paragraphs, originally proposed to

¹Franz-Josef Eilers, *Communicating between Cultures. Introduction to Intercultural Communication*, 4th Edition, Manila: Logos/Divine Word, 2012, 136 f.

²Giorgio Braga, *La Comunicazione Sociale*, 2nd ed. Torino, 1974, 17.

the Council. In the discussion of the longer text it was proposed to trim the original longer text "to the essentials of doctrine and general pastoral directives without losing the essential parts." Thus the council document of only 24 paragraphs is more an outline and directory than a deeper reflection and treatment of social communication. This is also reflected in the official title of "Means/Instruments" of Social Communication. This way the document continues to relate communication to instrumentality ("Media") rather than to do justice to the full meaning of the proposed new title of *Social Communication* as the communication of and in human society with proper theological considerations.

c. Unlike other Council documents which were drafted and reflected by leading theologians of the time (e.g. the involvement of Karl Rahner),³ it seems that IM was elaborated by communications specialists ("Media") only without a greater inter-disciplinary involvement of leading theologians, which only later came into the field like Bernard Lonergan, Avery Dulles, Carlo Martini, Bernhard Haering, Klaus Hemmerle, Gisbert Greshake and others.

d. Only the later Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio* (1971) which was demanded by the Council in IM (no. 23) has a section with theological considerations (nos. 6 to 16) which is based on the role of communication in Society ("Social Communication") though still influenced by the 'media' in society. Here the Trinitarian foundation of communication is addressed, redemption is seen as a communicative happening in Jesus Christ who is presented as the "Perfect Communicator" or as the German text says: the "Master of Communication" and the Eucharist is seen as "the most perfect, most intimate form of communication between God and people possible in this life." Communication now is defined as "giving of self in love" (11) which should be also the basis for any theological consideration and social relations of the Church in this world.

2.2. Pope John Paul II

Pope John Paul II criticized already as auxiliary bishop of Krakow in a written intervention the original proposal for *Inter Mirifica* for missing the relation to culture and Communication. Later as a pope he developed especially this concern also in creating a Pontifical

³Herbert Vorgrimler, "Karl Rahner: Zeugnisse seines Lebens und Denkens," Kevelaer: Topos, 2011, 137ff. 197-252.

Council for Culture. In his Encyclical letter on Mission, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990, 37c) he created a kind of paradigm shift in the approach to Communication when he states under the 'cultural sectors':

The first *Areopagus* of the modern age is the world of communication, which is unifying humanity and turning it into what is known as a 'global village'. The means of social communication have become so important to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behaviour as individuals, families and within society at large...

Here he talks about a "new culture" which is created by modern communications and he admits that "this is a complex issue, since the 'new culture' originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that *there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology.*" While IM and many other church documents in the past basically underline (1) the *right* of the Church to use media and to take care of (2) the *proper moral use* of these means is here a totally new shift to culture which has as well important implications on theology, especially practical theology.

Even with the last document of his life, the Apostolic Letter *Rapid Development* (January 24, 2005) John Paul II has not created a new communication theology as some authors pretend even without referring to the *Redemptoris Missio* text.⁴ Some theological approaches existed already earlier with the other Popes from Leo XIII, to Paul VI.⁵ But beyond the paradigm shift of *Redemptoris Missio* John Paul II brought in a totally new dimension with his living communicative personality, a life starting as a poet, actor and developing in the whole manner of his life up to his public dying... a new personal culture based on a deep spirituality: He *is* in his whole personality social communication!

3. *Communication approaches of Theology*

There are at least three different approaches to theology and communication: 1. A Theology of Communication, 2. A communicative Theology and 3. A Communication Theology.

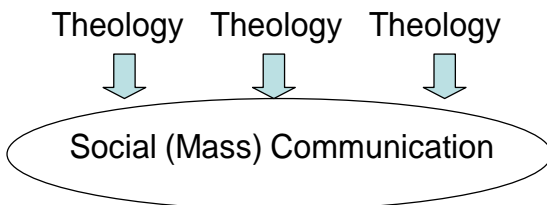
⁴Christine A. Muggeridge & Marie Gannon, *John Paul II: Development of a Theology of Communication*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2008.

⁵Franz-Josef Eilers, *Communicating Church: Social Communication Documents*, Manila: Logos/Divine Word, 2011, 58 ff.

3.1. *Theology of Communication*

Over many years in the past there have been again and again attempts to develop a *Theology of Communication* which sometimes looked somehow like an initiative to 'baptize' the (Mass) Media and Mass communication to bring them into the flock of Christian faith. Such a theology of Communication tries to consider the fact of social communication as a theological imperative: God has given us these Media for the apostolate and therefore we have to use them like Jesus used all means available at his time for the communication of the message. When *Inter Mirifica* of Vatican II (1963) affirms the right of the Church to use these media it goes in this direction. One approach within this direction is also the emphasis of the use of media for the different ministries of the Church. Here the words of Pope Paul VI from *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (45) are frequently quoted where he says that, "the Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect." But it might also be good to note that this quotation and section from *Evangelii Nuntiandi* on Mass Media is only number five in a listing of eight "means of Evangelization" (No. 40-48) which start with the "witness of life". This approach is already somehow changed in the follow up Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio* (1971) which was demanded by *Inter Mirifica* (23). This instruction actually starts after a longer theological consideration not with the Church use of media but rather with the role of social communication in human society to be followed by the contributions of the Church to the field.

Graphically this attempt can be illustrated in the following way:



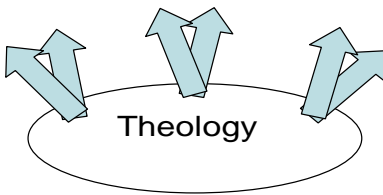
3.2 *Communicative Theology*

Another approach to Theology and communication aims at a *Communicative Theology*. It is the attempt to present and teach Theology in such a way that it can be understood more easily even by

simple people. Words and expressions are used which are understandable also to the common and modern people because theologians use the language and concepts of the people of today to explain and transmit God's redemption. People in Public Relations and Advertising have a similar approach which listens to the needs and expectations of people of today and formulate their messages accordingly. Such a communicative Theology tries to give answers to questions and deep desires of modern people. It uses, for example, their longing for "wellness" to show God's goodness to be reflected and incorporated into our lives. This approach carries an important pastoral and evangelizing dimension which is reflected in a special orientation towards the recipients. Here also Public Relations and Advertising can come in.

Graphically, this attempt can be illustrated in the following way:

Communicative Expressions



There are, however, also further recent developments under the heading of *Communicative Theology* which develop a special emphasis:

a) There are attempts in Austria and Germany (Innsbruck, Tuebingen) which extend the understanding of "Communicative Theology" as a theology which "reflects the communicative praxis of the communion of the faithful." It sees theology as a communicative action of the faithful in a living community. Its final ground is God's revelation as reflected in the communication ability of human beings: the God given '*communio*' is reflected in a respective '*Communicatio*'.⁶ This approach applies the 'theme centred interaction' of psychologist Ruth C. Cohn for theological purposes. The University of Innsbruck has developed a five semester special MA/Licentiate theology program in this field.

⁶Matthias Scharer and Hilberath Bernd Jochen, *Kommunikative Theologie. Eine Grundlegung*, 2nd Edition. Mainz: Gruenewald 2003, 24 ff.

b) Related to this is a third approach to “Communicative Theology” inspired by Juergen Habermas’ “Theory of Communicative Action” which studies and reflects the communicative expressions of society and religion and is thus related in a special way to Fundamental Theology. Religion is seen and studied as part of the ‘communicative action’ of society. Religious communities are communicative communities which act in responsibility before God. On these grounds Edmund Arens has developed a ‘Communicative Theology of Religion’ where he considers Religion as “communicative praxis”.⁷ and lists as forms of this ‘communicative action’: 1. Storytelling and memory,⁸ 2. celebration and proclamation, 3. testimony and proclamation⁹ and 4. ‘diakonia’ as compassion, solidarity and justice.¹⁰ He also underlines the strong relationship to culture and emphasizes the intercultural dimension of this approach.

In the above understandings of “communicative Theology” it seems that communication becomes somehow like an adjective to Theology which is viewed in a ‘communicative’ way. With a deeper understanding, however, and a further development this can also lead to a third approach and perspective which might be called *Communication Theology*.

3.3. *Communication Theology*

Soon after Vatican II, especially in the late 1990s a new and deeper approach to Communication and Theology slowly evolved, which brings Communication into the centre of Theology. Here Communication is not any more something to be baptized or to be made understandable or to be seen as part of the ‘communicative action’ of society but becomes a *theological principle* in itself which has special repercussions on pastoral Theology. In this new approach, it is not Theology which tries to ‘baptize’ communication but rather the whole of Theology is considered under the perspective of communication. Thus Communication becomes a *theological principle* in itself. It is like a key which opens to a new understanding of Theology in the perspective of Communication which is especially important for pastoral and evangelizing Communication because

⁷Edmund Arens, *Gottesverstaendigung. Eine kommunikative Religionstheologie*, Freiburg: Herder, 2007, 210 ff.

⁸Edmund Arens, *Gottesverstaendigung*, 220 ff.

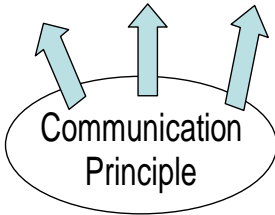
⁹Edmund Arens, *Gottesverstaendigung*, 230 ff.

¹⁰Edmund Arens, *Gottesverstaendigung*, 234 ff.

God is taken serious as a *communicating* God and all His expressions are considered as communication.

This new approach can be illustrated in the following way:

Theology Theology Theology



Our academic Program on Pastoral and Evangelizing Communication at the 400 years old Royal and Pontifical University of Santo Tomas in Manila is based on such a Communication Theology.

1.1. 'Communication' as Theological Concept

It is the German theologian Gisbert Greshake who, probably for the first time in theology, shows in a convincing way that the mere word 'communication' is, right from its origin, a theological expression. He writes in the beginning of his presentation on the origin of the idea of communication:¹¹ "My thesis which I want to unfold and prove in the following presentation is that 'communication' is from its origin a decisive theological idea which grounds in Christian revelation and has as its theme the centre of the Christian understanding of God and the world." He shows that such a Christian theological concept of communication was prepared already in Greek philosophy and was finally realized in the Trinitarian and Christological dimension of the concept.

The God of the Christians is not a lonely Nomad, not compact allmightyness, not a monarchic super father who lives somehow and somewhere – to speak with Schiller – 'above the stars'. The one and unique God is rather a realizing community, communion and communication in himself and in his relation to humankind... This faith in the Triune God is based on the experience that God has communicated himself totally and without reservation to humans, he

¹¹Gisbert Greshake, "Der Ursprung der Kommunikationsidee," in *Communicatio Socialis*, Vol. 34, Mainz, 2002, 5-26.

communicated not something of himself but literally himself the way to be human.¹²

Greshake, who published an extensive study on the Holy Trinity (4th Ed. 2001), shows then how in the history of Christian theology already, beginning with the Council of Nicea, God is seen as a 'relational unity' who is in himself communication. This understanding of God's reality as relational and as being in himself communication of the early Church is continued in the Middle Ages. In quoting Richard of St. Victor, Bonaventure and others, Greshake shows how also Thomas Aquinas clearly teaches that God as a person *is* relationship and communication. The Trinity is here "the one divine substance as a communications happening of persons who receive, own and execute their proper oneness within the network of communication."¹³

From here it becomes clear that humans who are created in God's image and likeness are constituted as persons in a similar way and are thus, also related to each other. Greshake quotes Richard of St. Victor in saying: "The completion of a person demands the community with other persons."¹⁴ Such a relationship between humans is further reflected in the whole of creation. All creation is a "connected communicative unity oriented towards a process of greater, mutual information and communication."¹⁵ It is from this that "the Church since the Acts of the Apostles understands herself as 'koinonia', as *communio* and *communicatio* (Cf. Acts 2:42), as life in community, exchange and mutual participation."¹⁶

In view of modern communication theories and developments Greshake summarizes his findings and convictions in this way:

God himself is communication. He communicates himself to the world and enables her to be herself communicative so that creation in her communication becomes similar to Him and reaches closest communion with Him. In this view, it is essentially the concern of Theology to realize universal communication.¹⁷

¹²Gisbert Greshake, "Der Ursprung der Kommunikationsidee," 11 f.

¹³Gisbert Greshake, "Der Ursprung der Kommunikationsidee."

¹⁴Gisbert Greshake, "Der Ursprung der Kommunikationsidee," 16.

¹⁵Gisbert Greshake, "Der Ursprung der Kommunikationsidee," 17.

¹⁶Gisbert Greshake, "Der Ursprung der Kommunikationsidee," 18.

¹⁷Gisbert Greshake, "Der Ursprung der Kommunikationsidee," 24.

From all this, we can conclude that already the word and concept 'communication' is right from its beginnings a theological concept which does not need to be baptized in any way but rather is already in itself loaded with and in fact originates from Christian faith and Theology. A Communication Theology takes this fact and tries to unfold further within the different theological fields the communicative dimension of God's Revelation and the realization of his inner Trinitarian communication into this world. Thus, 'communication' becomes a theological principle which guides and directs the way we see, study and live our Christian Faith in a time where communication is central to human society. Communication becomes thus, a basic principle and essential dimension of any theology.

Willi Lambert shows in an extensive study of Ignatius of Loyola as communicator who presents and lives "communicative competence" in his writings and actions and how this is an essential part of spirituality.¹⁸

1.2. The Biblical Message

Carlo M. Martini developed such an approach to communication in his pastoral plan for the archdiocese of Milan 1990. He sees any human communication originating in the mystery of the Holy Trinity from where creation and existence comes, "from the Trinitarian communion of love and the uninterrupted dialogue originating from his love."¹⁹ In creating human beings in his image and likeness (Gen 1:26; Ws 2:23) God gave them also the capacity and need to establish communicative relations with each other. The dialogue, which God freely established with his beloved creature, is the basis for reciprocity and dialogue also between humans and "all pages of scripture deepen the event, the crisis and the reconstruction of this dialogue." God's gifts and special expressions of this dialogue are the covenant on Sinai and Pentecost. According to Martini, the gospel of Pentecost is the "gospel of Communication" because God is communion and communication: "He communicates himself to us and thus, enables us to enter into communication with each other and

¹⁸Willi Lambert, *Die Kunst der Kommunikation: Entdeckungen mit Ignatius von Loyola*, 3rd edition, Herder, 2008.

¹⁹Carlo Martini, *Effata, Apriti, Lettera per il Programma Pastorale 'Communicare'*, Milano: Centro Ambrsoiano, 1990. English translation, *Communicating Christ to the World*, Kansas: Sheed and Ward, 1994 (Philippine Edition: Claretians, 1997), 35.

also remove everything which hinders our Communication."²⁰ Like the musical theme in a symphony is repeated in many ways, Martini says, this theme and fact of the communicating God is expressed in many motives, images and symbols in scripture, like for example in Pentecost overcoming the confusion of Babel. The Holy Spirit of Pentecost in his "extraordinary communicative capacity" re-opens the communication channels closed since Babel, re-establishes the easy and authentic report between people in the name of Jesus Christ and thus, the Church emerges as "sign and instrument of communication with God and the human family."²¹

Biblical scholar Lucien Legrand, MEP (Bangalore) in a paper on 'Missionary Communication: A Biblical Perspective' gives an overview on the communication of scripture.²² He asserts that "the entire Bible is language and communication. The biblical God is a God who speaks. He calls and blesses the patriarchs. His word sends Moses on his liberative mission. The 'Ten Words' are given to Israel as a 'light on its way' (Ps 119:105). Again, God speaks through the prophets. His word is echoed in Wisdom. Finally, in a splendid worldwide insight, as a Prologue to the whole Bible, Gen 1 presents the universe as a projection of God's Word into cosmic reality...To the perceiving eye, the universe is a maze of symbols, a polymorphic message proclaiming the glory of God (Ps 19:2-5)...Coming to the New Testament, it is basically made of news, the 'Good News'. Jesus is eminently evangelizer, bearer of the Good News (Mk 1:14). He applies to himself the prophecy of Is 61:1-2: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me..." (Lk 4:18-19). He makes known his message through word and deed, through his way of life and his options, through sacrifice and death. He identifies totally with his revelation. He does not only proclaim the Word; he *is* the Word. (Jn 1:14). His departing words will be the Great Commission, the mandate given to the disciples to communicate to the whole world... Thus, 'communication' constitutes the golden trend that runs through the whole Bible. In God and in Christ, we find the deep nature of Communication. It is no mere technique of diffusion, marketing skill. It stems from the divine identity of a God who speaks, of a Messiah who is 'Word'. It is the

²⁰Carlo Martini, *Effata*, 36.

²¹Carlo Martini, *Effata*, 19.

²²Lucien Legrand, "Missionary Communication: A Biblical Perspective," in Sebastian Periannan, ed., *Missionary Communication*, Bangalore, 2012, 3-10.

continuation of the self-communication of a God who, through Creation and Incarnation, wants to share his deepest identity. It is the on-going echo, resounding in the world of the voice of the One who is the Amen, the faithful and true witness to the God of truth (Rev 3:14; cf. Is 65:16)."

1.3. The Role of the Holy Spirit

Karl Rahner's concept of God's self-communication as theological perspective is reflected in the Vatican II document on revelation *Dei Verbum*, where the Council fathers stated, that "by Divine Revelation God wished to manifest and *communicate* both himself and the eternal decrees of His will concerning the salvation of mankind..." (No. 6, cf. 4). Pope John Paul II has taken up this line of thinking in his encyclical letter on the Holy Spirit, *Dominum et Vivificantem* (1988), where he in fact develops the basics of a theology of God's self-communication. More than 10 times he uses and illustrates this expression. According to him, the inner self-communication of the Triune God becomes also a self-communication to mankind: "God, who is infinite spirit, comes close to the visible world. The Triune God communicates himself to Man in the Holy Spirit from the beginning through his 'image and likeness'. Under the action of the same spirit, man and through him the created world, which has been redeemed by Christ, draw near to their ultimate destinies in God" (No. 64).

God communicates himself in the order of creation and grace and "the mystery of incarnation constitutes the climax of this giving, this divine self-communication... The 'fullness of time' is matched by a particular fullness of the self-communication of the Triune God in the Holy Spirit. 'By the power of the Holy Spirit' the mystery of the 'hypostatic union' is brought about, that is, the union of the divine nature and human nature, of the divinity and the humanity in the one Person of the Word-Son. When at the moment of the Annunciation, Mary utters her 'fiat': "Be it done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38) she conceives in a virginal way a man, the Son of Man, who is the Son of God. By means of this 'humanization' of the Word-Son the self-communication of God reaches its definite fullness in the history of creation and salvation. This fullness acquires a special wealth and expressiveness in the text of John's gospel: 'The Word became flesh' (Jn 1:14).

This incarnational self-communication in Jesus Christ leads finally through the paschal mystery to a new dimension of God's self-communication. The paschal events "are the time of the new beginning of the self-communication of the Triune God to humanity in the Holy Spirit through the work of Christ the redeemer. This new beginning is the redemption of the world: 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son'" (Jn 3:16) (No. 23; cf. 13, 14).

With the coming of the Holy Spirit, the self-communication of God which is "accomplished in Christ and witnessed by the preaching of the apostles, continues to be manifested in the Church through the mission of the invisible Counselor, the Spirit of Truth..." (no. 7). The church has "proclaimed since the earliest centuries her faith in the Holy Spirit as the giver of life, the one in whom the inscrutable God communicates himself to human beings, constituting in them the source of eternal life" (no. 1). The Holy Spirit is seen as the ongoing expression of God's self-communication into all peoples and times. He is not only the agent of Mission and Evangelization as is said in Pope John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) and Pope Paul IV's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), but must be seen generally as the agent and fulfilment of God's self-communication to the church and mankind. It is the Holy Spirit, who is the personal expression of self-giving, of this being love (No. 10). Here lies the Trinitarian foundation for any communication as 'giving of self in love', as defined in the Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio* (no. 11). Our 'giving of self in love' as human in communication is based on God's self-communication as his own giving of self. The Holy Spirit is the ongoing expression and agent of this to all peoples and times. Pope John Paul II sees the Holy Spirit in this way as the "direct principle and in a certain sense the subject of God's self-communication in the order of grace" (No. 50).

1.4. Communication Theology: Basic Elements

Bernard Lonergan saw in his *Method in Theology* communication as an essential dimension for all theology.²³ It was Avery Dulles, however, who in *The Craft of Theology: from Symbol to System* (1992) applied Rahner's concept of God's self-communication to the whole of Theology.²⁴ He concludes "that theology is at every point concerned

²³Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, New York: Herder, 1971.

²⁴Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System*, New York, 1992.

with the realities of communication."²⁵ He unfolds this further in reference to fundamental theology, the fields of systematic theology like Christology, Creation, Ecclesiology, Eschatology, sacraments, and practical theology including missiology and pastoral theology. Concluding with the Trinitarian view, he calls Christianity "preeminently a religion of communication, for God in his inmost essence is a mystery of self-communication. The entire work of creation, redemption and sanctification is a prolongation of the inner procession within the Trinity..."

Communication theology can be considered in four steps or dimensions, the inner Trinitarian communication, Revelation and Incarnation which lead to the Church as the continuation of these three into the here and now of every people: "Church is Communication."²⁶ These considerations can be summarized in the following way.

Holy Trinity

In the Trinitarian perspective, God is seen as a God communicating in himself. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are communicating with each other in their inner Trinitarian movements. Bernhard Haering has aptly described this inner communication in the following way:

Jesus, the Word incarnate, reveals the divine life as communication, sharing. He prays, 'All that is mine is thine, and what is thine is mine' (Jn 17:10). His sharing of himself and of all the truth arises from the total sharing between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit *is* sharing, communication. 'When he comes who is the Spirit of Truth, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but will tell only what he hears...' (Jn 16:13-15).

Communication is constitutive in the mystery of God. Each of the three Divine Persons possess all that is good, all that is true, all that is beautiful, but in the modality of communion and communication. Creation, redemption, and communication arise from this mystery and have as their final purpose to draw us, by this very communication, into communion with God. Creating us in his image and likeness, God makes us sharers of his creative and liberating communication in communion, through communion, and in view of communion.²⁷

²⁵Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System*, New York, 1992, 22.

²⁶Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System*, New York, 1992.

²⁷Bernhard Haering, *Free and faithful in Christ. Moral Theology for Priests and Laity*, Vol. II, London/Middlegreen: St Paul's, 1973, 155.

Why are we as human beings able to communicate? It is because this Trinitarian communicating God has created us in 'His image and likeness.' Because God is a communicating God, we are also able to communicate.

Revelation

The Trinitarian God, however, stays not in himself but reveals himself and communicates with his creatures, to make them his partners. He reveals himself through creation and grace. The whole Old Testament can be considered as a report on God's communication with Israel, his people. In this, he uses all means and ways of verbal and non-verbal communication available in human culture.

It is fascinating to see how he masters the different ways of communicating from anger to enticing love, through earthquakes and silence, through storms and protection from enemies and natural calamities. He speaks directly to prophets and kings, 'face to face' with Moses, to groups of people and individuals. He calls Moses into his special service from the burning bush, which he probably approached more out of curiosity. God uses the need and sense for news of human beings to establish relationships and pass on his messages and concerns.

It is stories about God's communication with Israel which we read in the First Testament: "He blesses, liberates, saves, leads on dangerous ways, gives life saving advises (through Moses); he wants to live in the midst of his people but also confronts them in their sinfulness; he concludes a covenant with his people and lets them experience his forgiveness which enables ever again a new beginning... His promises are contained in a book, the Bible, which is the 'book of the covenant' (cf. Ex 24:7) in which God has bound himself as the God of truth and mercy with Israel."²⁸ God communicates thus in many ways verbally and non-verbally and finally his communication is presented, preserved and sealed in a book, a means of communication which is the proof of God's communicative action.

Incarnation

The high point of God's communication, however, is the Incarnation of his Son: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the

²⁸Erich Zenger, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*. 7th edition. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

prophets at many times and in various ways. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe. The son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being..." (Heb 1:1-3).

And how does this WORD communicate? It is quite revealing to study the communication ways and methods of Jesus Christ:

➤ He speaks already through the *circumstances of his life*. The becoming flesh in the Holy Spirit, the birth in a manger, the hidden years in Nazareth, the 40 days in the desert, his suffering on Calvary and death on the cross, his resurrection. All these are expressions of his mission and commitment to the sending of his Father and the redemption of people.

➤ The *places where he preaches* are manifold and almost everywhere: He is the *itinerant* preacher, who speaks in synagogues and private homes, in marketplaces and streets, on the sea and on the mountains... Wherever he goes, it is always in the service of his mission.

And how does he further communicate with the people of his time and place?

➤ All of his communication grounds in the *sharing with the Father* in prayer, especially at night.

➤ His *speaking to people* begins with their daily experiences and concerns, which he brings into the will of the Father. He never talks about himself but rather of the One who sent him. For this, he uses stories from daily life like the work of the fishermen, the sower, the experience of the widow searching for the lost penny, the one baking...

➤ He speaks to big crowds as *his audience* but also small groups like his disciples and he reaches out to individuals in deep personal relations like with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, Lazarus and others.

➤ His proclamation is *embedded in the scriptures* of the Old Testament but uses also parables, stories from daily life and even daily 'news' like the death of those killed at the tower of Siloah.

➤ His proclamation is not just simple entertainment. *He asks questions* – Hans Wijngaards counted alone in John's Gospel 164 of

them. He demands decision-making. "If your eye causes you..." "Do you also want to go?" He even puts people into crisis to force them to make a decision.

➤ All of Jesus' *healing* is not finally meant just for the healing of the body but rather – as Carlo Martini says – to *re-establish* the communication line with God the Father. Before the blindness of the eyes is removed, the sins are forgiven. "Your sins are forgiven..." is more important than bodily health.

➤ Finally, Jesus' communication is not just passing on of information and message. It is more a deep personal commitment to the Father and his message, which *demand the whole person*. Jesus communicates with his whole being up to the death on the cross. He goes far beyond just 'talking' which finally leads him into the silence on the cross in the total commitment of his life. "Jesus did not speak about God; he reflected a deep filial intimacy. His was a powerful language because it was a language of authentic experience. Coming from the heart of a Son, Jesus' teachings were not theo-logy but theo-phany."²⁹ This also shows how his communication is not finished in this life but points to a deeper reality beyond...

➤ Jesus' final mandate to his disciples is to communicate the "Good News" to the whole world with creativity and commitment. "Here, it is interesting to note that "the Gospels report the 'apostolic mandate' of the Risen Lord in different terms. Mk 16:15 refers to sheer proclamation ('Go..proclaim the Good News') in the style so to say of a Radio or TV pronouncer. In 28:19, Mathew has in mind the more elaborate and time consuming process of 'teaching', of training disciples ('make disciples'). Luke speaks of 'witnessing' through the life witness of fervent communities (Lk 24:48; cf. Acts 2:42-47). Spontaneously, in the light of their respective life contexts, the evangelists and the communities which they represent interpret the communication mandate dynamically."³⁰

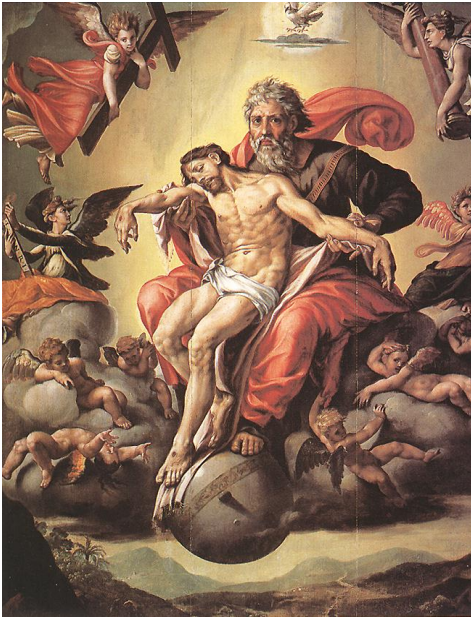
The Communicating God: Mercy Seat

All communicating ways of the Trinitarian God are artistically synthesized in the so called "*Mercy Seat*". Already the 'Ark of the Covenant' in the Old Testament was called this way which Martin

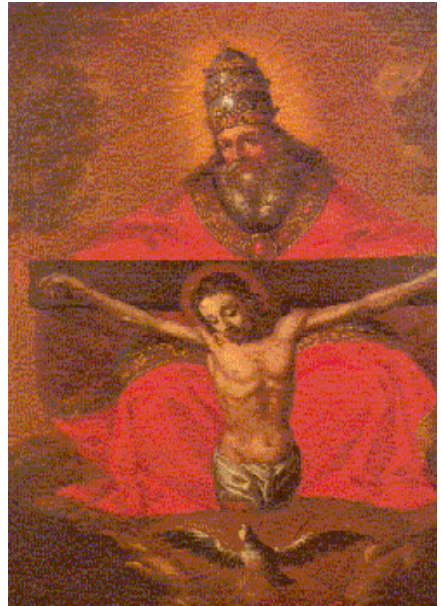
²⁹Lucien Legrand, "Missionary Communication: A Biblical Perspective."

³⁰Lucien Legrand, "Missionary Communication: A Biblical Perspective."

Luther translated into the German “Gnadenstuhl.” In the New Testament, it is God the Father presenting his (crucified) Son in the Holy Spirit to his creatures. Carlo Martini calls it a “representation of the supreme act of Divine Communication” and an “unsurpassable representation of God’s Communication” (no. 24). In the history of Christian art there are, since the middle ages, several hundreds of such illustrations.



Pieter Coecke Van Aelst (1502-1556)
Museo del Prado, Madrid



Sonntagsberg Pilgrimage Church,
Austria

Sending of the Church

From all this, the Church is called and sent to continue God’s Trinitarian communication in Revelation and Incarnation into the here and now of all times and places. It is the Lord who sends: “Go to proclaim – *communicate* - the Good News to all nations and baptize them...” (Mt 28:19).

This Church is born in the communicating act of God’s Holy Spirit on Pentecost. This same Spirit changes the fearful disciples into courageous messengers. Everybody present from all corners of the

world understood their language. Like Vatican II says in the document on Mission *Ad Gentes*:

The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary, since according to the plan of the Father it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The plan flows from the 'fountain-like love' of the Father as the principle without principle from whom the Son is generated and from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds through the Son (no. 2).

The happening of Pentecost is further an impressive example of *intercultural communication*, the communication of God's coming to people of all cultures of that time – in one language and on one occasion.³¹

The whole book of the Acts of the Apostles is a report on the continuation of the sending and ongoing communicating of God's Holy Spirit in the beginning of the Church. It is revealing how even modern marketing people discover in all this the essence of their own working principles when they talk about the "Paul-Principle."³² They refer to Paul's communication as the "most successful marketing strategy in the history of humankind." They say that the disciple not only fulfilled the four basic marketing principles of the great "P" – Product, Price, Placement, Promotion – but also the fifth one, which is the real key to success: Personality. These marketing people see apparently in Paul the greatest master of communication up till today.

³¹Franz-Josef Eilers, *Communicating between Cultures*, 173 f.

³²Franz Berger and Harald Gleisner, *Das Paulusprinzip. Die erfolgreichste Marketingstrategie der Weltgeschichte*, Muenchen: Econ, 1998.