Spirituality of the Christian Communicator
By
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Fr. Pedro Aruppe, the Jesuit Superior General was especially concerned about research and a deeper thinking about the role of Social Communication in World and Church. In 1973 he tasked his communication secretary Fr. Stephan Bamberger, sj with a study on Jesuit possibilities for Communication research.. Bamberger created a task force which also included non-Jesuits like the writer of this paper. Out of their considerations which mainly took place in Rome, Cavaletti but also in Milwaukee (USA) a "Research Facilitator Unit for Social Communication" was created on June 8th, 1976 and established in London. Right from the beginning there was the conviction that such a project had to be interdisciplinary. The main tasks of the new office were described in the following way:
"1. To establish contacts between researchers and the institutions which need research.
2. To formulate and draw attention to the as yet un-answered questions on which research has to be done. 3. To counsel and encourage the efforts of young research workers in the field of Communications. 4. To offer direct assistance to research projects in places where local research personnel have in-adequate resources to carry through their work."In 1979 the Unit was re-named into "The Center for the Study of Communication and Culture". Fr. Robert White was research director of this Centre when he later was called to Gregorian University.

Already during the considerations for the London Unit it was asked, why the Gregorian University of the Jesuits in Rome would not be tasked for such an initiative. But apparently the structures and mentalities of those days did not allow yet an initiative of this kind. It was finally Carlo Martini, the later Archbishop of Milan, who as the rector of the Gregorian called for an initiative of this kind., From within the university he was supported by Fr. Peter Henrici, the dean of Philosophy and later Bishop in Zuerich. He became the first director of the initiative which was again accompanied by a study group from within the University and some outside consultants who included beside others the late Bishop Agnellus Andrew, ofm then Vice president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communication. This group developed a program which was open to all faculties of the university and would not just be concerned about practical skills but rather a place of academic excellence, deeper insights and research into the operations and obligations of the Church in this field. The *Interdisciplinary Center for Social Communication* was 'born' in February 1981 and first directed by Fr. Peter Henrici who was followed by Fr. Robert White as proposed by the study group for the program.

I. Biblical Considerations of Carlo Martini

Right from his "Gregorian time" the Biblical scholar Carlo Martini sj kept his interest for social communication also as Archbishop of Milan. He developed annual pastoral plans for his archdiocese and for two years (1990/1991) the theme was social communications. He himself wrote the basic documents for these pastoral plans and his

"Ephata, Apriti" of 1990 became the 'Magna Charta' for a biblical communication spirituality (Martini 1990;1994). Here Martini repeats his conviction that communication "is not a secondary or 'luxury' theme. It is a matter of our very condition of being man and woman and being Church" (No. 3) . Any spirituality of a Christian Communicator must be grounded on scripture from where the basic considerations of the Cardinal flow. They not only consider God's ways and means of communication in revelation and incarnation but also give directions for a spiritual challenge and life of a Communicator. The Cardinal divides his considerations into three chapters with the headings: 1. Seeing, 2. Listening and contemplating, 3. Action. All of them are important elements for a spirituality of a Christian Communicator.

1. *Seeing.*
Here Martini points to the blockages of real communication through "a will to possess, to dominate, to use, to identify all things with one's self" which are all "parodies of true communication" (No.16) The spirituality of a Christian communicator calls for opening ourselves : "Jesus, who made the deaf hear and the mute speak (Mc. 7:37) comes to us as the teacher of communication if we open ourselves to follow him on the way of hope which he proposes to us."(No. 17)

2. *Listening and contemplating.*
The experience of Pentecost which Martini calls the "Gospel of Communication" "sparks an extraordinary ability to communicate"(No.19) It shows like the covenant on the Old Testament (Ex. 19,1-7) that "God wants to enter into communion with his people, wants to communicate with them in a spirit of reciprocity and mutual belonging." This communication is a "free and gratuitous initiative of the living God." It "calls for a free and grateful response of faith" (No.20) which is another important element in the spirituality of a Christian communicator. S/He has to listen and respond to God's word but is always in the danger of refusing God's gift. Martini sees as a first step for such refusal diffidence as "the fear that the other is not communicating gratuitously, but has some hidden interest or agenda." At the bottom of this is "the lack of trust in the gratuity and sincerity of the communicative act." It might begin with a doubt like Adam: 'Did God really say…?'(Gen. 3:1) which divides "from God, person from person, group from group, planting the suspicion that others want to promote themselves…"

The Spirituality of a Christian Communicator must be based on the fact that "all human relationships need to be invaded by that selflessness that comes in abundance from on high, from the mystery of the gracious love of God, from the mystery of Jesus' death for us, suffered for pure love and for no other motive, from the gift of the Holy Spirit."(No.22)

3. *Action.*
Martini sees Action for a Christian Communicator in the light of this considerations almost like an examination of conscience for the Christian Communicator. S/he has to clarify her/his fundamental dispositions and interiorize the reality of a redeemed Christian Communicator. On the basis of the considerations so far he proposes the following groups of questions which are here indicated only by the beginnings of his presentation:
1. "What signs do I find *in me* of blocks in my communicating …..?

2. What 'grade' would I give to our communication in the family…?

3. From my point of view, how would I describe the difficulties in communications between the different *social strata* with which I have direct contact, especially in my workplace….?

4.How would I rate my relationships within the Christian community…?

5. Do I sometimes experience in myself regrets that come from not knowing how to communicate or an irritation that comes from not succeeding in communication…?

6. Do I *pray* that the Lord will communicate himself to me, and heal my human relationships…?

7. Do I keep before my eyes this axiom: that we are mad to love and communicate..?" (Nos. 41-.47)

After these questions he proposes to the communicator to re-read the texts about Pentecost and the Convenant experience, to prepare for the sacrament of reconciliation and adoration before the Eucharist. He proposes to the communicator to entrust him/herself to the hl. Trinity and trust in God's time, to love and read the Bible as book of God's communication, to feel the evangelical passion of Jesus and entrust him/herself to Mary .(Nos. 48-56)

II Based on Communication Theology

The spirituality of a Christian Communicator is not just a personalized and individual spirituality or pious exercise of some virtues. Such a spirituality is rather based on a solid theology which sees the whole of theology under the perspective of communication (Dulles 1992,22; Plude 2001; Eilers 2002, 41-60; 2004, 17-29; Soukup 2002; Palakeel 2003) and her/himself as living part of such communication. Here communication becomes a 'theological principle': Trinity, revelation, incarnation and the Church are seen under the perspective of communication: The Trinitarian God, Father and Son communicate in the Holy Spirit and we are created in this 'image and likeness'. Because of this we are able to communicate. The whole of biblical theology is concerned about the ways and means of a communicating God 'speaking' in many and various ways to his people (cf. Hebr.1:1). The high point of this development is the incarnation of Jesus Christ where God communicates to us through his son as the "perfect communicator" (*Communio et Progressio 11).*

Christian Spirituality for a communicator studies and reflects *in revelation* the ways and means of God's Communication with the Israelites and take consequences out of that for her/his own communicating:

- God talks to Adam and Eve and others like Cain in interpersonal communication: Where are you? Where is your brother Abel? (Gen.3,9)
- He uses human dialogue like in Jeremiah's complaint (20:7-9): "You have seduced me and I was deceived, you overpowered me and prevailed…"
- He calls in a human way the prophets and the Kings and sends them confirmed with symbols like anointing
- He talks to Moses "face to face" in such a way that his face becomes shining and can not be looked at with 'normal' eyes (Dt 34:10)…

- He appears to the prophet Elijah on the mountain of Horeb not in the mighty wind, nor in the earthquake or the fire but in the gentle breeze of silence (1 Kings 19:11-13)
- He expresses his anger: "I will wipe out humankind whom I have created from the face of the earth…"(Gen 6:7)
- He appears in thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain and a loud trumpet blast…(Ex 19,16)

In summary: God uses all ways and means of human communication embedded in the culture of people.

In *Incarnation* Jesus Christ is the "perfect communicator" and his ways and means of communication are the example after which also a Christian Communicator has to pattern his life and actions:
- He communicates already through the circumstances of his life like his birth in the manger, the silence in his upbringing in Nazareth and the 40 days in the desert but also the death on the cross
- He communicates everywhere he goes and stays like on the roads, on the sea, on the mountain, in the houses and in the temple through word and deed…
- He communicates through storytelling and parables and always starts his stories with the life experiences of the people around him who are familiar with the sower, the fishermen, the housewife, the king and his servants but also with the widow and the mother mourning for her child.
- He applies all forms of communication in relation to people: he talks in intimate personal communication with Nicodemus, the Samaritan and the sisters of Lazarus, he shares in group communication with his apostles but also in a more closed group like the weddings guests or the participants of a meal…
- He preaches and teaches with the bigger crowds from the mountain, the seashore and the boot…
- He is not afraid to also 'offend' people if they do not follow God like the Pharisees and Scribes but also challenges his own disciples…
- He communicates in a very special and unique way through his passion and cross…

Any spirituality of a Christian Communicator must be based on the reflection, contemplation and internalization of these facts. This calls for a prayerful and contemplative life where all outside activities flow from a spiritual and inner experience.

Communication Theology also shows that it is the essence of the Church and her mission to continue the communication of the Trinity, Revelation and especially the Incarnation into the here and now of people of our time. Thus it is not only first and foremost the modern techniques and possibilities which are the concern but rather the experience and knowledge of faith which is at the beginning of any Christian communication. A convincing spiritual person like Mother Teresa of Calcutta is a better and more effective communicator where the Holy Spirit somehow shines through than one who uses the

most recent techniques only. Without an inner communion and a message grown out of prayer and faith experience a Christian communicator can not really 'transmit' the fact and application of redemption in a direct or indirect way into the life of people.

III Communication Spirituality as Openness

Communication spirituality begins with the experience and the fire of the Holy Spirit who wants to express and share His fullness with others. Any Christian communication but especially pastoral and evangelizing communication share in a special way this Spirit of Jesus Christ to those in need. Such a communicative spirituality requires basically a triple openness as essential dispositions for Christian Communication, which are 1. the openness to God, 2. to self and 3. to others.

1. The *Openness to God* and His Spirit starts with the personal experience of the Lord and His word in prayer, meditation but also experiencing him in Liturgy and Community. Such a total openness to the Spirit is the first condition for any communication spirituality as Pope John Paul II confirmed in his message for World Communication Day 1998: " Christian communicators need to be men and women of Spirit filled prayer, entering even more deeply into communication with God in order to grow in their ability to foster communication among their fellow human beings. They must be schooled in hope by the Holy Spirit, the principal agent of Evangelization."
   In such openness, communication spirituality is like missionary spirituality as outlined by Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*, his encyclical letter on Mission (1990):

   a. Communication spirituality is first and foremost expressed "by a life of *complete docility to the Spirit*. It commits us to be molded from within by the Spirit, so that we may become ever more like Christ. It is not possible to bear witness to Christ without reflecting His image, which is made alive in us by grace and the power of the Spirit. This docility then commits us to receive the gifts of fortitude and discernment , which are essential elements of missionary spirituality" (No. 87) as well as communication spirituality. The Apostles of the Lord can be an example here: "Despite their love for Him and their generous response to His call, they proved to be incapable of understanding His words and reluctant to follow him along the path of suffering and humiliation. The Spirit transformed them into courageous witnesses to Christ and enlightened heralds of His word. It was the Spirit himself who guided them along the difficult and new paths of mission." Like mission also Christian Communication today " is difficult and complex and demands courage and the light of the Spirit."

   b. Communication Spirituality lives from the "*intimate communion with Christ*. We can not understand or carry out the mission unless we refer it to Christ as the one who was sent to evangelize" which means to communicate. His incarnation and redemption are described by the apostle

Paul (Phil. 2:5-8) "as a total self-emptying which leads Christ to experience fully the human condition and accept totally the Father's plan. This is an emptying of self which is permeated by love and expresses love."(No.88). A Christian Communicator must be deeply united in communion with this self-emptying Christ to realize Communication as "giving of Self in Love" to use the words from the Pastoral Instruction on communication *Communio et Progressio* (1971,No.11; cf Eph. 5:25). The ideal Christian communicator therefore is finally like the Missionary required to "renounce himself and everything that up to this point he considered as his own, and make himself everything to everyone." As the Mission document *Ad Gentes* of the Second Vatican Council puts it (No. 24). It means that the Christian Communicator is totally available to the people with whom and for whom he communicates.

c. Communication Spirituality is further marked by *Apostolic Charity* which is the "charity of Christ who came "to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad." (Jn 11:52), of the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep, who searches them out and offers his life for them (cf. Jn 10)." The Christian Communicator is like the missionary "urged by 'zeal for souls', a zeal inspired by Christ's own charity, which takes the form of concern, tenderness, compassion, openness, availability and interest in people's problems. Jesus' love is very deep: he who 'knew what is man' (Jn 2:25) loved everyone by offering them redemption and suffered when it was rejected." The Christian Communicator is in a similar way " a person of Charity. In order to proclaim to all his brothers and sisters that they are loved by God and are capable of loving, he must show love towards all, giving his life for his neighbor." He is "the 'universal brother', bearing himself the Church's spirit, her openness to and interest in all peoples and individuals, especially the least and poorest of his brethren. As such he overcomes barriers and divisions of race, caste or ideology. He is the sign of God's love in the world – a love without exclusion or partiality."(No. 89)

d. The spirituality of a Christian Communicator is further also a *call to personal holiness.* He is a real Christian communicator only if he commits himself to this challenge and if all his communicating flows out from this commitment. "Holiness must be called the fundamental presupposition and irreplaceable condition for everyone in fulfilling the mission of salvation in the Church" (*Christifideles Laici1988,17)* This universal call to holiness is also a special calling for Christian Communicators. They must daily strive to renew themselves in the Spirit, grow deeper in appreciating the scriptures and "strive to also update their doctrinal and pastoral formation"(RM 91)

e. *Contemplata tradere*- to pass on what one has contemplated on - is the mission and motto of the order of preachers, the Dominicans. It should be the same for any Christian Communicator. In a similar expression Ignatius

of Loyola was called *Contemplative in Action* which Pope John Paul II requires for a missionary and should be also the mark for the Christian communicator. This requires according to the Pope to " find answers to problems in the light of God's word and in personal and community prayer. My contact with representatives of the non-Christian spiritual traditions , particularly those of Asia, has confirmed me in the view that the future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation. Unless the missionary is a contemplative he cannot proclaim Christ in a credible way. He is a witness to the experience of God, and must be able to say with the apostles: 'that which we have looked upon…concerning the word of life…we also proclaim to you' (1 Jn 1:1-3)." Also for the Christian communicator holds what the Pope says in ending his encyclical letter: "The characteristic of every authentic missionary life is the inner joy that comes from faith. In a world tormented and oppressed by so many problems, a world tempted by pessimism, the one who proclaims the 'Good News' must be a person who has found true hope in Christ."(91)

2. The openness of the Christian Communicator to God is also reflected in the *Openness to oneself and one's own personal needs*. Only the one who faces his own personal reality can be a genuine communication partner to God and others. People have the right to communicate with a concrete, balanced, mature and spirit-filled responsible person and not with puppets who are not real or persons who are not able themselves to face reality and who are pre-occupied themselves with their own 'hang-ups' instead of being free for objective reporting and sharing. Thus a Christian communicator must be concerned about his own spiritual life and a thorough human development. He needs to appreciate and experience the value of good spiritual direction which should also be part of his life and thus support hi/her profession. Regular spiritual sharing helps to discern and encourage a deeper spiritual growth from where communication should flow. In fact such spiritual exchanges are the deepest and most personal way of interpersonal communication which ideally goes beyond the strictly spiritual including also other experiences and challenges of personal life. This helps to further deepen the personal communication with God. A discerning and deeply grounded Christian Communicator will gratefully acknowledge and accept the value of o Christian community. It is in the openness to all this where real spirituality shines through in everything we do. A spiritual communicator will be easily recognized and thus contribute to "building communities through love,. sharing, communion, relationship and equality" (FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet 1999, Final Statement).

3. The openness to God and self leads to *Openness to others,*in listening to their stories and experiences, their needs and aspirations, in sharing of faith experiences and in creating and supporting living communities. The Christian community is an essential source for the spiritual life of a Christian Communicator. S/he can not stand on his/her own alone but needs the community for nourishment and support. Not without reason have the two words '*commu*nity'

and "*comm*unication' the same Latin root word *communis* which means common. Probing into the original meaning of these words Gisbert Greshake (2002,6f) sees two dimensions in the root of this word: it comes from the stem *mum* which means something like 'bulwark' or surrounding wall. People who are in communion, communicating "are together behind the same wall" and depend on each other. The second meaning of the same *mun* is as reflected in the Latin word *munus* a gift, service and commitment. All this indicates already from the word that a communicator is in the service of the other, sharing her/himself and things around in such a way that community – and not division – evolves. Communication spirituality therefore is not only individual but also communal spirituality. The experience of community in prayer, the Eucharist and the sacraments , bible sharing and common life experience nourishes and gives strength. It is from this that the Christian Communicator feels especially committed to the needs of others and thus can become the 'voice of the voiceless'. Such an experience of community also helps to develop creativity and new ideas for further communication developments. It helps to go beyond the actual and to develop visions for the future in the light of faith

Like the priest also the Christian Communicator is called to 'Pastoral Charity" which Pope John Paul II defines as "the virtue by which we imitate Christ in his self-giving and service. It is not just what we do, but our gift of self, which manifests Christ love for his flock. 'Pastoral Charity' determines our way of thinking and acting, our way of relating to people. It makes special demands on us." This 'pastoral charity' is a dynamic principle which "is capable of unifying the many different activities" and is an essential and permanent demand for unity between the interior life and the external activities and obligations of a modern communicator. (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo Vobis* No.24) This is especially urgent in a time where our socio-cultural context "is strongly marked by complexity, fragmentation and dispersion."

Conclusion

With the initiative of Carlo Martini to establish at the Gregorian University a special social communication section also his biblically based spirituality somehow is a birth gift included for the *Interdisciplinary Centre for Social Communications*. In the first years the program was very much related to the faculties of Missiology, Philosophy and later especially to Sociology. Maybe after 25 years it would be good to also align with the Institute of Spirituality of the university. A catholic university like the Gregorian should be especially concerned also about the spirituality of communications and the communicator in a time where consumerism. relativism and materialism seem to dominate the communication scene.

Addendum for edited version beyond Greg:

Christ experience

The spirituality of a Christian Communicator in his personal life and professional work is nourished through the Christ experience in community and personal life as essential elements.

The experience of the Christian community brings the grace of the sacraments and liturgical as well as social life. If the Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio* places the Eucharist at the center of Christian communication it must be so also in the spirituality of the communicator. "In the institution of the Eucharist Christ gave us the most perfect, most intimate form of communion between God and Man possible in this life and out of this the deepest possible unity between men.." Only from here a communication as a "giving of Self in Love."(*C+P 11*) can grow which originates and reflects in and through the Christian community. The sacraments and liturgy are celebrated in a community of which the Christian Communicator is part. It is the place from where his own spiritual life is nourished but from where he also rightly expects social and moral backing in his very often difficult task (cf. *C+P 73-78)*.

He is, however, also to share his/her talents and knowledge in the professional field of communications. In this responsibility he must be backed and grounded also by the Christian community. It is also because of this that the Church documents on Social Communication ask for the pastoral care for communicators: "Communicators have the right to expect the kind of spiritual help that meets the special needs of their important but difficult role…"*Communio et Progressio* states (No. 104) and the follow up document *Aetatis Novae (1991, No. 19)*further explains the responsibility of the Church: "to develop and offer programs of pastoral care which are especially responsive to the peculiar working conditions and moral challenge facing communication professionals…"

On the other hand Christian Communicators can also render a special service to the community they come from like e.g. advertising their communal activities but also to animate their cooperation and encourage the young to develop a special interest and a communicative attitude towards others within and outside the world of media.

Based on the faith experience in the community a spirituality of a Christian Communicator urgently also requires his personal commitment to Christ in a special *personal* relationship which is reflected in a personal prayer life. Prayer means communicating our whole life and all our concerns without any reservation and exception with Jesus Christ. Finally it should be Him who is the center of our lives and also our work as communicators must finally flow out from this personal sharing with the Lord.. What we write and communicate must have been discussed already before with the Lord in prayer. This way all activities flow out

from a center which is filled with His Spirit and this same Spirit is reflected directly or indirectly to the people around us. To maintain and develop such a life it will be helpful or even essential to have a spiritual director and companion for mutual encouragement and discernment.

Spirituality as dynamic center

In the history of communication research there have been many attempts to develop communication models. They are to clarify more the flow, dynamics and efficiency of the communication process. Many of them are especially concerned about the sender and his/her attempt to reach the recipient in an effective way. These linear communication models with Sender, Message, Receiver as the main elements have been around for a long time. Other models like the 'convergence model' of Everett Rogers and Kincaid or the ritual model of James Carey are especially concerned about the partnership in the communication process to develop a common ground of understanding and experience. Different from all these is the Christian Communication Model which was developed at the university of Santo Tomas in Manila. This model is based on St. Augustine's teachings and puts the message in the center of the communication process. For the Christian communicator the message stays central which is the Word of God or Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word of God himself. The Christian communicator is only the messenger of the WORD, he is like the ambassador who represents his country. The more s/he not only communicates but also lives and reflects in his/her life this WORD the more convincing s/he will be as a communicator. This does not depend on techniques but rather on the spirituality of the communicator. The more s/he is filled with the Spirit of the Lord, the more s/he is the person who in a convincing way transmits and reflects that message. This means in practical terms: the more the messenger reflects and meditates the word of God in Scripture, the more he listens to the promptings of the Holy Spirit the more he becomes a real *Christian* communicator. The Christian Communication Model: Message- messenger- recipients reminds us of the real center for any spirituality of a Christian Communicator. It reflects the Christian reality of revelation, incarnation and the real role of the communicator as a servant and the one who is fully in the service of the message. It is not him/her who 'calls the shots' but rather the Lord himself who is the message and his Spirit.

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